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Strategies used by activists in Israeli environmental struggles
Implications for the future green social worker
Ariella Cwikel and Edith Blit-Cohen

Introduction
The interdependency between humans and nature is the basis upon which humans rely for their physical existence (Dominelli, 2012). Another connection – an emotional and spiritual one – cannot be overestimated for human development, survival and well-being (Besthorn, 2003). Social work has been slow to enter the environmental field, in research, teaching and practice (Dominelli, 2011; 2013). Theorists and practitioners have called for the adoption of a new perspective for the 'person-in-environment' concept and the definition of a holistic approach to social work which utilised interdisciplinary discourses to promote practices and policies that take responsibility for the environment and those most vulnerable to changes in it (Dominelli, 2012). In this study, we identify the ways in which communities organised in local environmental struggles and examine what is, or could be, the role of green social work in such cases.

Context and description of the phenomenon
The State of Israel is a small country, with limited natural resources, a high population growth rate, and ongoing security needs. It will become increasingly crowded over time (Tal, 2006). Thus, clashes between the desire to preserve resources and habitats, uphold public health and adequate urban land-use standards, and needs for development, housing, infrastructure and waste management are expected (Shmueli, 2011).

Israel is an extreme example of pressures on the environment and many citizens face development plans that constitute an environmental threat (Tal, 2006). De-Shalit (2004) delineates the options in such cases: asking for compensation, or demanding that the hazard be relocated. Neither of these would solve the problem. The third option is to demand the cancellation of the plans. Because development involves economic interests of powerful people, such calls are usually rebuffed, leaving two choices: to give up or fight. This chapter elucidates those who choose to mobilise and fight an environmental threat to their health, income, quality of life and accessible natural habitats.
The method consisted of gathering information from 11 informants (six women, five men) by conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews. A review of documents and media stories was used to gain a broader picture of their struggles. The data was then content analysed to define main themes and categories of ideas. The findings were integrated using literature, to identify the methods of organisation and action strategies used. Conducted between the years 2013–2015, the research collected data from activists from three communities, who mobilised against environmental threats in the last decade in Israel’s geographic and/or social periphery.

Those interviewed included three from the Action Committee for Sason Valley, who fought to preserve a unique natural habitat and prevent the building of a hotel complex in the Timna Canyon in south Israel; four activists from the Action Committee for the Gazelle Valley in Jerusalem, who fought to keep an urban nature preserve open to the public; and four activists from We Want to Live Without Mines (WWLWM), who fought to prevent the establishment of a phosphate mine at the Barir Field site, near the city of Arad in the south of Israel. All respondents requested the use of their real names.

Each of these conflicts extended over more than a decade, and had countless twists and turns to its plot. Therefore, in this chapter, we will present in detail only one of the three: the Barir Field struggle, the longest and most complicated one.

**Fighting radioactive dust: Arad versus phosphate mine**

Arad is a city in the Negev region in southern Israel, home to 23,400 residents and rated 5 out of 10 in the country’s socio-economic scale. It was established in the early 1960s as a workers’ town (Roded, 2016). In 1980, a vast deposit of phosphate ore, used in the chemical, agricultural and food industries, was accidentally discovered under the city. Mining of phosphate ore contains radioactive elements, such as radon, which accumulate as dust particles, which if inhaled, increase heart and lung disease morbidity (Shorman, 2013).

Two plans for phosphate mining in the site had been submitted and rejected in the past. In 2004, Rotem-Amfert Negev Ltd., controlled by Israel’s biggest holding company, filed a plan to build a phosphate mine at Barir Field. The profit from the mine was estimated at $25 billion (Peled, 2014). The site consisted of 3,200 acres, and was planned less than 4 kilometres from Arad, 3.5 kilometres from Kseiffe and less than 1 kilometre from Al-Forah. Kseiffe and Al-Forah belong to Arab semi-nomadic ethnic groups or Bedouin. The mine would have devastating effects on these villages. However, political, economic and nationalist realities influenced their ability to participate in this struggle. They face immediate existential threats including expulsion and destruction of their homes, and a struggle for recognition, exerting pressure of limited resources remaining to resist the mine. However, its impact on the villages is integrated into their struggle narratives.

When the proposal was revealed, opposition to the mine was organised, out of concern for health, the city’s economy and image. After years of Action Committee work, those involved founded WWLWM in 2011. This has achieved partial success in harnessing the Arad municipality. Despite a former mayor becoming a board member at ICL, the city’s official position remained to oppose the mine.

The issue has been discussed repeatedly in the Social-Environmental Committee in the Knesset (legislative branch of Israel’s government), with support from environmental groups, like the Coalition for Public Health (CPH), volunteers and professionals. Rulings on the matter were repeatedly postponed, partly due to disagreements between external experts and representatives of the Ministries of Environment and Health, regarding risks inherent in the mine’s
construction to 55,000 residents of Arad Valley. Health impact assessments found the mine to be hazardous and estimated that subsequent air pollution will lead to seven deaths each year. Radioactivity measurements, taken at a nearby abandoned mine and the phosphate-rich Barir Field were found to be between 2–8 times higher than the permissible exposure rate.

In 2010, Prime Minster Benjamin Netanyahu prevented the Regional Committee from discussing the case, and demanded a second opinion, kept under a cloak of ‘national security’, with help from the military secretary (who was later appointed chairman of ICL). A Supreme Court appeal by WWLWM and CPH revealed that the Report found nothing new and secrecy was unnecessary. In 2011, the Ministry of Health Committee commissioned an American expert whose report stated that there was a health hazard associated with the mine’s construction. Consequently, the health minister opposed the plan in March 2014.

Rotem-Amfert began a high-profile public campaign to push the mine, stating that the plan’s cancellation will result in lay-offs and the plant’s closure. It recruited the Ministries of Economy, Infrastructure, Finance and the Interior, and continued to promote the plan. The National Master Plan for Mining and Quarrying (NMP 14c) Committee decided to approve a mining area twice the original size. In the next Committee meeting, while protestors demonstrated outside, the Ministries of Health and Environment referred the issue back to the National Planning Council.

In December 2015, the Council approved the ‘Policy Document for Mining and Quarrying of Industrial Minerals’, primarily declaring Arad Valley the most suitable place for phosphate mining, and decreed a trial mine. Yet, a specialist had determined that this trial is irrelevant to the question of the mine’s actual safety. In February 2016, the Arad municipality and 1,900 citizens filed a Supreme Court Appeal, claiming that permitting mining in Barir Field would threaten public health and that the Committee misinterpreted the ‘Clean Air Act’ 2008. In July 2016, the Regional Committee recommended to remove the mine from the NMP 14c. The Supreme Court discussed the Appeal in March 2017 and denied WWLWM and the City of Arad’s petition, stating that there is still a place for such objections in the planning process itself.

What and how: organising for action

Strategy is required only if your goal is making a decision-maker or public servant do something he/she does not wish to do. Otherwise, you only need a plan. A plan defines the steps required to achieve a goal; a strategy addresses power relations between players of unequal power (Bobo et al., 2001).

In all three environmental conflicts there were powerful rivals: a wealthy, determined developer; the mayor of the municipality; ministers and even the prime minister; the fiercest financial force in the country; or all of the above. Therefore, ‘unequal power’ would be a huge understatement. In taking on the challenge, communities had to have a strategy, tactics and methods of operating.

But first, you need a ‘Why’?

We asked the activists what brought them to take action. Some spoke of anger at the decision, or fear of its repercussions. The moment of realisation was usually powerful, and they used words like ‘catastrophe’, ‘a bomb hitting me’, ‘danger’, and ‘shocking’ to describe them. Eran said: ‘Why did I join?! Well, because it blew my fuse!’ That anger fuelled them, as Alinsky (1971) would say, and prevented them from sitting idly by while injustice got underway.
Some saw it as Israel did, ‘a battle for life or death, a battle on the home front’. But most of them spoke more of the social responsibility, solidarity and a never-to-be-repeated chance to take action. Tal shared that she had once missed a chance to save a site where endangered flowers bloomed: ‘I took my time, thinking what to do. By the time I got there it was ruined’. I said to myself, ‘that mustn’t happen again, I won’t let it’. Timor spoke of a role he felt obligated to fulfil, as a part of an unspoken public land trust:

If you live far away, you won’t know there is a threat here. But here I’m a kind of emissary for others, as they are to me where they live. Without me having any more claims to the piece of nature that I am fighting for than they do.

In these struggles, the power structure was that of David vs. Goliath – the environment protectors challenging capitalist powers, contractors, and multimillionaires. Most activists felt it was time citizens fought back and spoke up for nature and future generations, feeling responsibility towards both. Several activists spoke of a battle worth taking on, though prospects of succeeding are slim. But the feeling that not taking action would be worse than failing kept them going. Eran said:

We started with the realisation that it’s hopeless, but it’s the right thing to do! I said to myself, ‘F*** it! I don’t care if this thing is unstoppable, I’m going to fight it’. I need to be able to look my kids in the eyes one day, and say, ‘Daddy did what he could’.

For some, knowing they had nothing to lose was key to creating a strategy.

**Organising strategies: getting ready to rumble**

After forming an Action Committee, the activists had to learn to collaborate, communicate, assign formal roles and create a ‘core’ group. The core was the most active, a kind of inner circle; the outer circle came for mass support, such as demonstrations or email campaigns. While there were sometimes other circles, there were always at least these two.

They relied on the group’s assets: knowledge, experience, connections, skills and talent. Some of the roles were formal: ‘treasurer’, ‘spokesperson’, ‘copywriter’; others informal: ‘peacemaker’, ‘anarchist’, ‘responsible adult’. Leadership roles developed naturally and were not decided upon officially. Simultaneously, they became experts in the details: statutory planning, environmental protection law, ecology, geology and history. They learnt thoroughly the plans they were fighting against.

**Action strategies and tactics: getting things done**

Strategies and tactics are defined differently by activists compared to the definitions given in the social change literature. One reason is the elusive nature of these definitions and differences in their interpretation. Furthermore, it is hard to separate tactics from strategies, since they are defined in the context of the strategy they serve (Bobo et al., 2001).

*Social action*. An approach aimed at redistributing power, a goal it has in common with the Green Social Work Model, which uses specific, locally adapted social action to confront ‘structural inequalities including the unequal distribution of power and resources’ (Dominelli, 2012: 25). Social action targets decision-makers and engages in creating policies and institutional practices. It is oppositional and uses confrontation, direct action and negotiation, harnessing the power of
collective action for pressure, attention or disruption purposes. Social action movements, including environmental struggles, have to constantly reinvent their strategies, making them wider and more sophisticated (Rothman, 2001).

The strategies and tactics used were not always systematically planned. Rather, they were often a reaction to changing circumstances, in complex situations with multiple players. Therefore, activists were required to identify factors and forces at work, to determine which actions would bring desired results. Sarit explained:

You cannot wage a struggle that is one-dimensional, it won’t work. It must be ‘multi’ – community, media, government, court, district committee. There is something in the combination that helps the struggle . . . it must be all together, or it won’t exist.

Eran recalled a metaphor used by their hired campaigner – the struggle as a leaf rake, where each tooth is a different front and all of them are necessary for the rake to work. Therefore, different strategies were used and sometimes the same tactic was employed to achieve several strategies.

Social action tactics assume that power derives from either money or people. Those who have little money must recruit as many people as possible to amass power (Alinsky, 1971). The activists spent valuable resources recruiting support for their cause. In environmental struggles, it is important to be able to claim to speak for the public. Thus, you need to demonstrate that you actually have public support.

Recruiting tactics. Staples (2012) describes tactics for gaining public support, all implemented in the three struggles: distributing pamphlets, public assemblies, going door to door, engaging school committees, networking, emailing campaigns, information stands, newspaper articles and collaborating with local organisations. In each action, they had to adapt the message to the audience. This was challenging since the situations were complex, and one needed to be accurate, but not tedious. Sometimes they only had one chance to get it right.

‘. . . But names will never hurt me’. Another tactic used was naming, or giving names to the places they were fighting for. None had a formal name when they started out. ‘Gazelle Valley’ was named to emphasise the unique wildlife of the site. Similarly, ‘Sasgon Valley’ could not be found on any map before a developer thought of building a huge hotel there. But once the Action Committee was formed, they had to find something catchy, and named it after a mountain nearby. Soon everyone was using the new name. The developers protested, saying there is no such thing as ‘Sasgon Valley’. The activists knew that the developers’ attempts to uproot the name showed they were in trouble (Golan, 2010).

In the Arad case, it was the other way around. The mining company was the one doing the naming. There was no such place before, but now, whenever anyone mentions it, they call it Barir Field. Laksi recalled:

The name appropriates the place before it’s theirs. We shouldn’t have fallen into that trap and used the name coined by the mining company. We tried using a different one, but it’s too late, it’s etched into the collective language.

Language is a significant component in environmental struggles, where the use of phrases such as ‘wilderness’ or ‘untouched nature’ is like a battle cry (Pickerill, 2008). Indeed, the findings show the conflicts studied used accurate and calculated messages and coined names with symbolic significance, creating identity and meaning.
Partnerships and coalitions

All the activists said that coalitions were critical for success. Like-minded local or national, institutionalised or grassroots organisations joined the different struggles based on their own agendas. The organisations brought their resources, disciplines and reputations. They could gain publicity by appealing to their constituencies, and adding expertise. The activists understood credit was one of few commodities they could barter with. Making sure all the partners’ logos were on any publicity was a way to give them recognition and gain support.

At certain points, the organisations involved were leading the campaigns forward. Eran commented:

We were always behind the scenes, making sure things moved. It became a real partnership . . . they considered our opinions. Many of our comments were incorporated in legal or statutory issues, of which we are by no account professionals. But they knew we are out there, on the ground, and know all the details. I guess they kind of needed us, too, in a way.

‘Find a penny . . .’

Since all the struggles were community-based, this meant that resources were always scarce. The activists funded much of the expenses themselves: photocopies and letters, gas or travel expenses and even lawyers. They usually relied on small donations from citizens, funds or other organisations. Tova said:

I told people even small change would help. They saw they weren’t expected to contribute large sums, so they donated. I raised $300 in one day like this! Two months I kept it going. Our funds are mostly from those small donations.

Social action strategies

Once a campaign gains support, the next stage is to demand change by using social action and confrontation strategies (Homan, 2010). All the campaigns used mass petition signing, as a public show of support. One of the groups successfully pulled off an email-bombing campaign, targeting the mayor. Sarit told us with a grin: ‘Finally he called and said, ‘OK, you’ve convinced me, now please call off your guys. Tell them to stop flooding my e-mail box!’ So, naturally, we called everyone and told them to keep sending e-mails. It was working!’ Another group organised a mass public protest in the disputed valley. People showed up, but that day they learnt a humbling lesson, as Yaniv put it: ‘If you want to look big, don’t stand next to a mountain.’ No matter how big the crowd, it looked dismal in comparison’.

Target practice

In all struggles, the threat was defined as the target (i.e. fighting against the threat, not the people behind it). The communities defined their objection carefully, opposing a specific, harmful location; the mining, not the company’s workers. They wanted to protect the natural habitat, not tarnish the contractor’s name. Mickey explained: ‘We said our problem is the plan, not the contractor. What do I care who wants to build here? I want to protect this place, period. Why do I have to go after someone personally?’
This choice contradicts social action strategy models which emphasise that the target is the one with power to grant what you demand. It is always a person. The aim is to personalise the target (Homan, 2010). In light of this, this decision made by all three groups seems odd, but it is linked to the ‘ethical code’ that the different groups decided to abide by.

**Polite green action machine**

The next strategy identified was leading a positive, honest, decent, ‘clean campaign’. Though it seems out of place in a struggle, many of the activists told us how they made conscious group decisions to uphold a certain moral standard. Timor claimed:

> We can’t try to clean and fix the way things are, and at the same time be the ones ruining things, in the way we act. There has to be a correlation between the means and the end. Much of our strength depends on that.

Eran added: ‘You can always attack; you could always take off the gloves, but then try putting them back on again! You don’t slander. Because in the end, someone could do the same to you’. Another essential principle was being truthful and mindful of language. Timor explained:

> The gut reaction is always to lash back. But we really tried not to . . . even when we were harsh, we were never disrespectful . . . we also decided to never lie, ever. That was really important to us. There are moral sides to it, but also practical. Once you’re caught bull****ing, being dishonest, the one thing that you have, which is a bit of credibility, is gone.

Although these standards were not necessarily followed by their opponents, who were sometimes cynical, dishonest, and used every trick in the book. Powerful and simple (yet not always truthful) messages where used by opponents, while local activists had to strain to reach the public, with messages that encompassed the complexity of the struggle. The activists often became upset when adversaries used environmental figures and released misleading information, fabrications or just plain lies. Calling out lies and liars sometimes became necessary. In all three cases, tackling these instances during their struggles provided painful, low points, rather than victories.

In this case, we wondered as Alinsky (1971) did, whether playing clean in a dirty game is the right thing to do. Activists tried many times to alter the balance of power, including attempts to recruit local government, challenging opponents in court, using media to try and sway public opinion to their side, all carried out with caution. Homan (2010) emphasised the importance of preserving a moral code during community conflicts, as shown by the activists in this research, who chose truth over lies, to target threats rather than people, and play fair. Homan (2010) encourages activists to consider the moral implications of their actions, but also the consequences of avoiding them. He asks, whether ethical standards that dictate a ‘polite’ fight are still ethical, if they prolong wrongdoing and injustice.

**Ready? . . . Steady . . . Stall!**

Stalling, buying time and avoiding irreversible decisions was also useful. Laksi wondered:

> If we’re facing the tractors, that’s one step before losing. By stalling, I mean not getting to that point. We want to avoid statutory ruling. Stall, stall, stall. . . . Only come to the point where decisions are made, if we know for sure they will be in our favour.
Strategies used by environmental activists

Stalling bought time to organise, recruit more support or devise a plan. For this tactic, it became handy to cooperate with organisations with legal action capacities. In all three cases, taking a case to court was both the only way to get justice and a significant method of stalling, or preventing bad decisions from being made in statutory or other systems.

Mixing in the media

Print, broadcast and internet media were used in all three environmental struggles. These were usually the first tactics used, a way to tell people about the threat, gain support and place pressure on decision-makers. They used local and national (print and net-based) newspaper throughout the duration of their struggles. Prime-time television coverage was a sought-after accomplishment. This is not always a safe course of action. In one case, it backfired, when a reporter thought to be supportive aired a distorted portrayal of the conflict and the activists’ motives for participating.

Given that the media is dominated by the power elites, and the fluctuating nature of media attention, it is not surprising that the need to continually raise awareness of the struggle was addressed by all the participants. They did their best to stay in touch with reporters, gave them ‘exclusives’ and used peaks in the conflicts to receive more coverage. A few of the activists reported creating ‘image events’ (Delicath and DeLuca, 2003) or powerful visual imagery, and the messages released to the media were always well thought out. Here, too, the ethical code decreed careful use of this tactic. In all three struggles, stories, messages or images that were deemed taboo were shelved, even if everyone agreed they could have been effective.

The three struggles in question made use of the internet and digital means of communication. As time went by and internet use disseminated, the digital presence increased. Most of the correspondence and decision-making within the groups was done by email. As Sima (2011) observed, here, too, activists feared that information would find its way to their adversaries, and that e-correspondence would be subjected to wiretapping. They were worried about being exposed, compromising the struggle, and even their own safety.

Confrontational strategies

In the conflicts studied, confrontation was used when there was hope of dealing with the asymmetrical power structures (Staples, 2012). Alinsky (1971) said that our actions are not what achieve change. However, reactions to our actions are what keeps the wheel of change in motion. In one such instance, the desired effect was achieved in an unexpected way. Tova explained:

We were protesting outside the company’s offices. We were few and it was going slow. The company sent busses full of employees! They did all our work for us! An argument started, we almost got beaten up... Cars pulled over to see what was going on, it was a big show! If it wasn’t for them, it would have been a total flop!

Generally speaking, direct action, disruptive or distractive tactics were seldom used, with only a few demonstrations to speak of over all the years studied except for the email campaign mentioned in the segment on social action strategies. But why is this? Apparently, confrontation strategies have become less common as struggles have become more sophisticated, the public less tolerant to disruptive methods, and power elites more skilful in responding to them (Rothman, 2001).

Perhaps these tactics are more suitable for large organisations. Greenpeace is one example of an organisation that has adhered to confrontational, non-violent direct action strategies since
1971. But there are many examples of small groups who previously resorted to extreme measures in environmental campaigns (Delicath and DeLuca, 2003).

Another possible reason for the absence of confrontational tactics may have something to do with the participants’ ages. Yishai (2003) found that younger people take part in protest five times more than older people do. Batya commented:

In one of the beach-saving campaigns, a group of young activists protested outside the Minister of Interior’s home. He woke up to see a beach painted on his sidewalk. It was wonderful! When young people are involved, they’re creative, bold, and innovative. They grew up with protests; it comes more naturally to them.

The price paid by activists

There were many costs for the activists. We identified five themes: time, money, exposure, professional, and personal life. Considering these conflicts lasted for more than a decade each, it is impossible to calculate how many volunteer hours were spent during all those years. We believe other areas are a derivative of time costs. Money spent was another cost the activists all agreed on.

Some activists pointed out that public exposure is a high price to pay. None were looking for celebrity going into the struggle, but some agreed to be in the spotlight, while for others, it was a ‘necessary evil’. For several, whose privacy was extremely important personally, the need to be in the spotlight was almost unbearable, leaving them caught between their need for privacy and the goals of the campaign.

In terms of professional costs, this was mostly felt by those who held public positions, in the municipality, for instance, and who sometimes felt a conflict of interests between their loyalty to their workplace and their activism. Some passed up professional opportunities and others had been subjected to attempts at co-optation. All the activists told us about countless days they took time off work for campaign-related tasks or meetings.

Perhaps the most significant toll was taken on their personal life. Some found themselves in confrontation with friends who disagreed or were disappointed with friends who were indifferent to the struggle. Numerous days spent on the struggle often came at the expense of time with family. Several of them got divorced and some became chronically ill. This is not to say that their involvement was the sole reason for their strife, but some referred to activism-related stress as the culprit.

Define success. The activists were proud of many achievements: getting involved; raising awareness; receiving media coverage and telling the story, despite being in the periphery far from power centres; gathering support from people and organisations; and inspiring others. Some formal success was achieved in court or in planning committees. Sometimes, it was gained by influencing policy changes on a local or national scale, and those were high points in every struggle.

Another kind of success was achieving actual advance for the public good. In the case of Gazelle Valley, it ended in overwhelming success with the decision to grant the public their request, after a 13-year-long struggle. Michaella said she felt exuberant when the local committee declared the public would participate in planning a park, instead of a private housing project: ‘We felt there is light at the end of the tunnel. After all these years . . . it’s really happening!’ Tal recalled: ‘It was a real moment of joy. To choose what we want, and know the municipality would actually listen’. And Mickey told us: ‘That was the most special and beautiful part. Because all of a sudden, they told us, “OK, we heard your objections. Now, tell us what you do want to do with the place.”’
In the two other struggles that are still enduring, the threats still loom. But for the activists, every passing day is a small success. Batya recalled:

Every time we prevailed I was amazed. To this day, there’s no mine and no permit. That’s a HUGE accomplishment! They’re waging war against us with enormous forces. We have so little in comparison. In that respect, the struggle is a gigantic success.

Laksi, the veteran activist, who’s been at it for more than 30 years, simply said: ‘This interview is taking place in 2014. It’s been 30 years now – and there’s no mine. There’s no mine! You don’t need much more than that’.

Most activists we spoke to agreed that all the ‘nice little achievements’ are fine, but it ultimately comes down to a bottom line of whether they succeed or fail. Both Laksi and Timor – members of different groups – used the allegory of a man falling from a building to represent their stand on the matter. Timor said:

A man falls from a building. While he’s falling, someone shouts to him ‘how’s it going?’ He answers: ‘so far so good!’ . . . Another way of putting it is that falling never killed anyone; it’s hitting the ground that kills you. So . . . now we’re in the air. And it’s a philosophical question: is the fact that we haven’t hit the ground yet, a success, or not?

Here is the bottom line: The more lasting success was achieved by legal means or when political situations changed and allowed new interests to be highlighted and fresh alliances to be formed. This corresponds with the ‘multiple streams approach’ (Kingdon, 1995), that posits policy changes are created because ‘windows of opportunity’ open when three streams – problems, policy and politics align. Similarly to other local environmental conflicts (Rootes, 1999), in these cases political opportunity played a major role in attaining success. With rigid power structures, usually not easily influenced by local communities, these groups had to identify changes in policy and political balances, taking advantage of opportunities to achieve successful outcomes.

Is there a professional in the crowd?

Throughout, the activists tried to involve professionals, along with those who were coalition members. These volunteer professionals came from legal, environmental and policy backgrounds, from academia and public service, giving their expertise and credibility to the claims. They gave tailwind through public support, lobbying, writing appeals and giving expert opinions.

We asked activists what professionals skills were needed in these struggles, and what could be the potential roles of community and/or social workers. The skills could be categorised into five groups:

a) Environmental justice, law and spatial planning.
b) Resource development and management.
c) Media, campaign and strategic planning.
d) Lobby and national/municipal politics.
e) Coalitions, coordination, organisational development, mediation.

This revealed the interdisciplinary world of environmental struggles of needing a lawyer-campaigner-resource-developer-organisational-lobby. Interdisciplinarity, recruiting and coordinating different professionals are highlighted by green social work (Dominelli, 2012). A community
leader's role is to inspire by example (Staples, 2012), while green social workers mobilise, facilitate decision-making, advocate for and foster green community leadership in coproducing solutions (Dominelli, 2011).

**Useful lessons: theory and practice implications**

Green social workers constantly ask whether the interests of marginalised groups are represented in these conflicts; make a place for them at the table; and avoid their relegation to the side-lines or being foot-soldiers. They can promote policy that encourages citizen participation in planning, transparent decision-making, and independent assessments of social and environmental impacts. Green social workers can participate in public policy discourse, and push for funding to support community-led environmental struggles. Municipal or national governments targeted in conflicts are unlikely to support community struggles, but the not-for-profit sector could help fill this gap.

Finally, further research is needed to provide examples of what social workers have done, or can do as professionals in environmental conflicts. Social work education in Israel needs to include an interdisciplinary, broad knowledge-base, and methods for collaborating with other professions to respond to the growing environmental needs. Social workers further require interdisciplinary training in green social work to empower communities, negotiate with policymakers and contest policies that do not endorse a community’s best interests. The current research also indicates the need for implementing green social work strategies in Israeli social work education.

**References**


Strategies used by environmental activists


