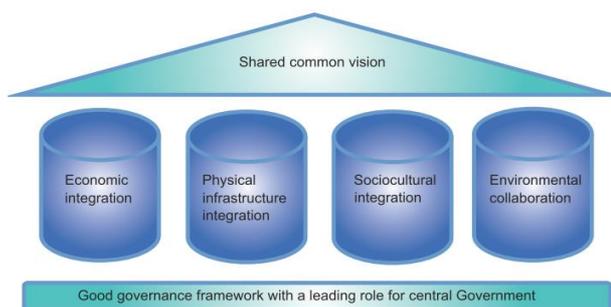


Regional Integration in North-East Asia through Connectivity Conservation

Diversities and complementarities in factor endowments among North-East Asian countries have led the subregion to a relatively high level of regional integration.

The scope and type of integration has also evolved to expand beyond economic, trade and infrastructure integration, and include people-to-people connections and environmental cooperation.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of a regionalization¹



Widening the scope of integration to go beyond the traditional arena of economic integration by including environmental and social integration, provides extra 'pillars' to support and strengthen regional cooperation and integration (Figure 1). Environmental issues, unlike trade, economic and infrastructure, are not always confined within physical boundaries due to the geographical and ecological interdependence. Environmental externalities are naturally and inevitably shared among countries thus cooperation in addressing environmental issues is core to ensure that development is sustainable.

North-East Asia, with its rapid economic growth and globally significant share of population and resource-use, is facing large-scale and multiple environmental challenges such as transboundary air pollution, marine environment and biodiversity in transboundary areas, etc.

In association with the lack of multilateral political and economic institutions, intergovernmental environmental cooperation in North-East Asia tends to be open-ended and programme-based.

Environmental Cooperation: Connectivity Conservation

Among cross-border environmental issues, transboundary cooperation in conservation is unique for its relatively neutral nature. Transboundary environmental issues such as cross-border pollution or shared natural resources including freshwater or marine resources often have a more sensitive nature and could even be the source of conflict. In contrast, transboundary conservation provides a neutral platform for dialogue and can deliver multiple objectives, including conservation outcomes, sustainable socio-economic development, promotion of peace and international collaboration in times of climate change and political instability.²

In North-East Asia, a large number of protected areas are adjacent to each other along national borders (Figure 2) many of which are the only remaining habitats for critically endangered species such as the Sino-Russian border areas for the Amur Tigers and Leopards. With the emerging challenges of climate change and population growth, protected areas are often the remaining 'islands' of habitats and become insufficient on its own for species to cope with these changes. **Connectivity conservation** has therefore emerged to link habitats across landscapes, enabling species and their ecosystems to move or adapt. It is a way of maintaining connections for nature by involving people. It has gained momentum internationally

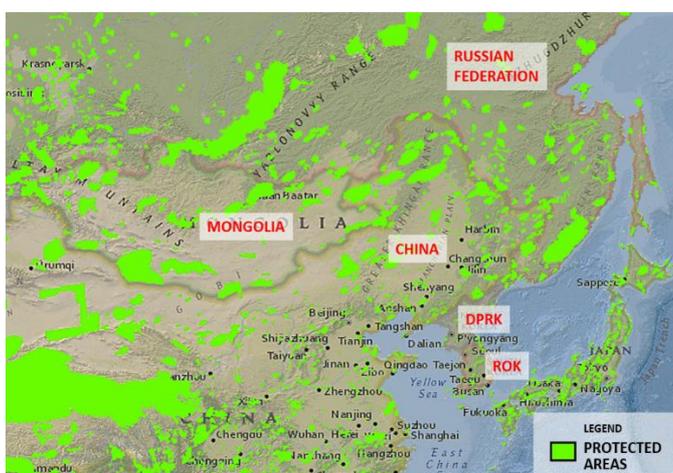
¹ OECD, 2009. OECD Territorial Review: Trans-border Urban Cooperation in the Pan Yellow Sea Region

² World Conservation Congress 2016, Resolution WCC-2016-Res-035-EN.
https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/resrecfiles/WCC_2016_RES_035_EN.pdf

with initiatives launched by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)³ and UNEP⁴.

Strengthening human and institutional connections across borders is essential to effectively conserve these areas and North-East Asian countries have begun to cooperate in some transboundary protected areas, for instance, the bilateral agreement on protected areas in Xingkai/Khanka Lake at the China-Russia border, and the trilateral agreement on the Daurian International Protected Areas at the China-Russia-Mongolia border. The overall level of cooperation in North-East Asia, however, has been hindered by various reasons including political tension and still considered very limited with *‘the least cross-border cooperation for environmental conservation’*⁵.

Figure 2: Distribution of Protected Areas in North-East Asia



Source: ARCGIS
<https://www.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer.html?webmap=2e5ee035ad374779ae768860b8d93b15>
 (modified from the World Database of Protected Areas Annual Release 2007, a joint product of UNEP and IUCN)

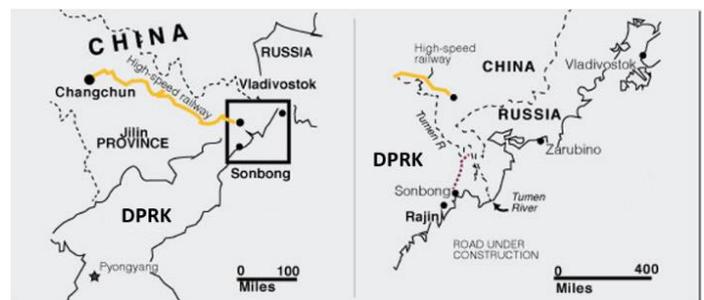
Connectivity Conservation and People-to-People Connections

Effective conservation does not simply translate into isolating the area from humans. Humans are also part of the ecosystem and conservation in fact aims to maintain balance of the system and allowing it to operate within its capacity including human activities. This involves long-term monitoring and management of the ecosystem thus requires considerable investment of resources. Ecotourism has become increasingly important in motivating and sustaining habitat conservation through managed access whilst generating income for local development and conservation. Transboundary protected areas, in particular, are often ideal multi-destination ecotourism attractions bringing in tourists and enabling

cross-border people-to-people exchange. Joint conservation and ecotourism management of these areas can also facilitate institutional integration within and among countries as border areas are closely managed by both local and national authorities. Cooperation in transboundary conservation and ecotourism can therefore promote: (i) domestic, multi-level and multi-sectoral connections; as well as (ii) international connections among countries.

Along with economic and infrastructure integration, environmental cooperation such as **connectivity conservation**, can diversify and expand the type of cooperation and integration. The Tumen River delta area (Figure 3) among China, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Russian Federation, where the Rason Special Economic Zone locates in DPRK, has international railway connections and the Rason port is utilized by China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation⁶.

Figure 3: The Tumen River Delta Area (modified maps from the source)



Source: Gene Thorp, The Washington Post

This area also has very high conservation value where three national protected areas from each country are adjacent to each other. For that reason, multi-destination ecotourism in the area has rapidly grown furthering exchange and connections among countries. China has established an international tourism development zone and the three countries have recently finalized the Tumen River Delta International Tourism Cooperation Zone Plan including measures to facilitate cross-border transportation and tourism⁷.

The ENEA Policy Briefs aim at providing a subregional-level review on common challenges and opportunities, and generating forward-looking discussions among key stakeholders. The views and options expressed in the briefs are the author’s own and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the UN. ESCAP East and North-East Asia Office welcomes proposals from officials and experts for the Briefs. For further information, please contact the Office (escap-sroenca-registry@un.org).

This issue is prepared by Gabrielle Chan, Associate Environmental Affairs Officer, ESCAP East and North-East Asia Office, and issued without formal editing.

³ IUCN Connectivity Conservation
<https://www.iucn.org/theme/protected-areas/wcpa/what-we-do/connectivity-conservation>

⁴ <http://beta.unep-wcmc.org/news/unep-launches-global-connectivity-conservation-project>

⁵ World Conservation Congress 2012, Resolution WCC-2012-Rec-152-EN.

https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/resrecfiles/WCC_2012_REC_152_EN.pdf

⁶ <http://af.reuters.com/article/africaTech/idAFL3N0Z51XV20150619>

⁷ http://www.jl.xinhuanet.com/2017-02/26/c_1120529810.htm



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