

**The Role of Civil Society
Organisations and Sustainable
Peacebuilding in Inter-Korean
Relations**

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Declaration

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Abstract

Inter-Korean relations have remained volatile since the end of the Cold War, marked by recurring cycles of rapprochement and rupture that undermine the sustainability of peace. Departing from the dominant state-centric approach, which primarily focuses on political and security concerns, this study examines the role of civil society organisations (CSOs) as non-state actors. Focusing on inter-Korean exchange and cooperation (IKEC) initiatives, which have enabled substantial contact between North and South Koreans since the division of Korea, this research analyses the period from the Kim Dae-jung administration, during which such efforts were realised, to their effective suspension under the Moon Jae-in administration.

Drawing on John D. Brewer's conceptualisation of the strategic social spaces of civil society — intellectual, institutional, market, and political spaces — this study provides a framework for understanding how CSOs contribute to sustainable peacebuilding on the Korean Peninsula. Despite the volatility of administrations and policies, South Korean CSOs have played a critical role in continuously promoting IKEC by accumulating knowledge and generating alternative ideas (intellectual spaces), institutionalising creative ideas (institutional spaces), mobilising diverse resources (market spaces), and engaging directly or indirectly with government policy and inter-Korean dialogue (political spaces). The roles of CSOs in these four spaces have complemented the limitations of government-led efforts and demonstrated the potential for sustainable peacebuilding, despite oscillating political and social peace processes.

However, the most significant constraint on CSO engagement has stemmed from policy and institutional frameworks in South Korea that have either failed to recognise the roles of civil society or have been reluctant to provide institutional guarantees for its engagement, thereby undermining the potential of CSOs to contribute meaningfully to sustainable peacebuilding.

By connecting theoretical perspectives in peace and conflict studies and Korean studies, this thesis provides conceptual and empirical insights that were difficult to find in the existing framework of international relations. It shows that sustainable peace on the Korean Peninsula cannot rely solely on state-led efforts, but rather proves that civil society participation is an essential yet under-explored path toward sustainable peacebuilding.

Keywords: Inter-Korean relations; civil society; sustainable peacebuilding; strategic social spaces, social peace process; political peace process; contact

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List of Abbreviations

CSO – Civil Society Organisation

DPRK – Democratic People’s Republic of Korea

DMZ – De-Militarised Zone

IKCF – Inter-Korean Cooperation Fund

IKEC – Inter-Korean Exchange and Cooperation

IPUS – International Peace and Unification Studies

IR – International Relations

KINU – Korean Institute for National Unification

KNCCNK - Korea NGO Council for Cooperation with North Korea

MoU – Ministry of Unification

NCRK – National Council for the Reconciliation of Koreans

NGO – Non-Government Organisation

ROK – Republic of Korea

UNSC – United Nations Sanctions Committee

US – United States (of America)

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Research Aim and Background

This thesis explores how South Korean Civil Society Organisations (hereafter CSOs) contributed to sustainable peacebuilding via inter-Korean exchange and cooperation projects (hereafter IKEC projects). It focuses on the period from the Kim Dae-jung administration (1998-2003) through to the Moon Jae-in administration (2017-2022).

The central difficulty in inter-Korean relations has consistently revolved around questions of sustainability. From the 1953 signing of the Armistice Agreement right up to March 2025, the two divided Korean jurisdictions engaged in a total of 667 official intergovernmental talks, resulting in 258 agreements.¹ Notwithstanding repeated negotiations at a governmental level, small-scale military clashes and confrontations between the two Koreas have persisted, and a prolonged antagonism endures despite North and South Korea's deep, shared, historical, ethnic, and cultural ties (C. H. Kim 2010:141–142). This juxtaposition illustrates that, in the Korean conflict as in other peace processes cases, the central issue lies in sustainability, namely the difficulty of maintaining momentum once agreements have been signed (D. J. Kim & Mitchell 2022:2). In the inter-Korean context, this problem has been particularly pronounced, as recurring cycles of rupture and renewal—driven by shifts in political leadership in the South—have become one of the

¹ Source: <https://dialogue.unikorea.go.kr/ukd/b/be/usrCmsStat/List.do?tab=1>, Date of Access: 31 March 2025

most significant obstacles to improving inter-Korean relations (H.-J. Kim 2018:158)

In response to the broader tendency of inter-Korean ties to experience temporary progress followed by renewed confrontation, Paik (1998: 18–22) has characterised this phenomenon through the notion of the '*division system*'. The term 'division system' refers to a regional variant of the Cold War structure characterised by the systematic reproduction of military confrontation, economic disparity, and political and cultural separation. This framework suggests that the division of the Korean Peninsula is not merely a matter of geopolitical partition, but has become entrenched through the institutionalisation of a mechanism of enduring hostility, making the establishment of sustainable relations particularly difficult.

In addressing the challenges posed by this division system, mainstream academic research perspectives have usually adopted either '*realist*' or '*liberal*' paradigms (D. J. Kim 2019:45). Accordingly, most research has been centred upon promoting the role of the state as the primary actor, while prevailing issues are generally addressed through the lens of geopolitical power dynamics, political institutions, negotiation frameworks and security (S. S. Lee 2015; H. J. Kim 2018; K.-W. Koo 2018; B. C. Park & I. S. Joo 2019).

Recent research, adopting a peace studies perspective, has offered a critique of these kinds of realist and liberal approaches (Y. K. Park 2016; D. J. Kim 2019; B. H. Suh et al. 2019; J. Y. Heo 2021). In particular, Y. K. Park (2016:50–56) argues that these approaches tend to entrench security-first

policies and fail to address the root causes of conflict by prioritising state-centric deterrence over a focus on fostering social reconciliation. Privileging national security concerns and promoting the state as a central actor has demonstrably proven to be an inadequate method for resolving the deeply embedded tensions that persist on the Korean Peninsula, and may inadvertently have reinforced the structures of adversity which these approaches purport to overcome.

Recent debates in peace studies have also placed relationship-building at the heart of peacebuilding. From this perspective, they have challenged approaches that treat conflict resolution primarily as a political, security, or institutional matter. Instead, they stress the importance of understanding the nature of conflict itself and highlight the need for long-term relationship-building with adversaries. They also emphasise the importance of striking a balance between bottom-up and top-down processes in peacebuilding (Lederach, 1997: 3–22; Lederach & Appleby, 2010; Mac Ginty, 2010). Furthermore, there is an increasing focus on local agents who have the potential to address such conflicts, in recognition of civil society's ability to act at the regional level (Lederach, 1997; Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006; Mac Ginty, 2010; Paffenholz, 2010; Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013).

Building on this perspective, this thesis employs Brewer's theory of '*strategic social spaces*' (Brewer, Higgins & Teeney 2010: 1024–1025; Brewer et al. 2010: 55–66; Brewer 2022: 503–505) to situate civil society at the core of sustainable peacebuilding on the Korean Peninsula, examining its roles and contributions. Yet in the Korean context, this area of inquiry remains relatively under-researched (D. J. Kim 2022: 2). Additionally, further

challenges must be taken into account: the question of how local agents, such as civil society, can exercise agency amid the pervasive structural limitations imposed by great power politics and broader geopolitical dynamics; the difficulty of conceptualising the often-elusive roles played by civil society; and—even when such roles are acknowledged—the analytical challenge of determining how the impact of civil society on the peace process can be identified and assessed.

Confronting these obstacles, Brewer's framework of strategic social spaces offers a valuable prism through which these dynamics can be examined. Brewer (2010: 2) adopts a perspective similar to that of Lederach in emphasising the restoration of relationships. Reflecting on the fragility of peace processes marked by the legacy of communal violence from a sociological approach. He (2010: 17–30) argues that one of the principal reasons for failure lies in an excessive concentration on the 'political peace process'—that is, state-led negotiations and institutional reform. In contexts where the legacy of severe violence persists, peace processes remain inherently fragile unless complemented by a 'social peace process' that seeks to overcome cultural divisions and relational distance, while fostering shared identities through respect for difference. Crucially, Brewer (2010: 46) maintains that civil society actors are the central agents oscillating between these two processes, advancing both political and social transformation, and conceptualises their roles in terms of four strategic spaces: intellectual, institutional, market, and political spaces.

In addition, this thesis draws on complementary theoretical perspectives—including structure–agency theory, contact theory, and existing scholarship

on the role of civil society—which together provide a more comprehensive framework for analysing whether civil society can serve as a meaningful actor in the Korean context, how its role may be conceptualised, and how its contributions can be understood within the broader peace process.

Against this backdrop, this thesis focuses on the sphere of IKEC for two key reasons. Firstly, it is the only area of inter-Korean relations where civil society has been actively engaged since 1953, when it was monopolised by state actors. This offers a valuable perspective from which to evaluate its potential and limitations. Secondly, the IKEC sphere is a unique space, where South Korean citizens, who have lived in near-total separation from their northern counterparts since 1953, have been able to engage in legal interaction and build relationships with North Korean residents. Correspondingly, this sphere goes beyond the idea of merely a physical meeting place, encompassing socially and culturally embedded spaces. Spaces are places that exist as physical locations, but they also transcend place by having social and cultural qualities that extend beyond any one physical location (Brewer, Higgins & Teeney, 2011: 126–7). This makes it a critical arena for evaluating the relationship-centred potential of peacebuilding.

Predictably, the development of IKEC has not proceeded linearly or sequentially. Beginning in earnest under the Kim Dae-jung administration (Feb.1997-Feb.2003) and expanding significantly with proactive political and financial support during the Roh Moo-hyun presidency (Feb.2003-Feb.2008), momentum was curtailed during the subsequent Lee Myung-bak (Feb.2008-Feb.2013) and Park Geun-hye administrations (Feb.2013-

Mar.2017), both of which prioritised security concerns. Despite a brief resurgence of IKEC activity initially, under the Moon Jae-in government (May 2017-May 2022), initiatives stalled in the latter half of the term of office, highlighting the vital role of government in determining the scope and effectiveness of CSOs' operations.

Brewer et al. (2010: 65–66; 2022: 504) contextualise these dynamics within the broader framework of government–civil society relations, and questions about how the role of civil society is facilitated or constrained by the determinative context of its relationship with the state are emphasised. Steen-Johnson's (2017) revised framework further develops this concept, acknowledging that governmental factors may exert an even more profound influence on these dynamics in particular national contexts, especially those characterised by authoritarian or quasi-authoritarian governance. Building upon Brewer's theoretical model and incorporating Steen-Johnson's insights, this thesis aims to identify contextual variables in government–civil society relations that have shaped the IKEC role of CSO operations.

Owing to the significant impediments in gaining access to the DPRK, the scope of this thesis is necessarily confined to South Korean society. Controversially, the 1953 Armistice Agreement and the subsequent creation of a Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) on the Korean Peninsula, which established a buffer for the maintenance of peace, also severely restricted direct contact between residents of North and South Korea (D. J. Kim 2019:53). Recent deteriorations in inter-Korean relations have exacerbated this spatial separation, making access to the DPRK impossible under current conditions. Hence, the scope of this thesis has been limited to South Korea. However,

this limitation does not diminish the value of the study. While it could be argued that this thesis's exclusive focus on the South Korean side of the peace process is a limitation, valuable insights have nevertheless been gained by examining the internal mechanisms that operate in South Korean society that have historically driven progress in inter-Korean relations. As Armstrong (2005:2) observes, the main driver of change in inter-Korean relations since the end of the Cold War has been the internal dynamics woven between the two Koreas, most notably within South Korea itself, as opposed to the influence of external foreign powers.

To summarise, this thesis forms part of an attempt to identify pathways to sustainable peacebuilding in the highly volatile context of inter-Korean relations, which are inclusive of civil society. This is an area that has hitherto received limited scholarly attention. More specifically, this study explores CSO roles through the IKEC projects, while tracing the evolution of these roles and terms of engagement from the Kim Dae-jung administration through to the Moon Jae-in administration amid successive changes in political leadership. Furthermore, this study investigates how CSOs contributed to both political and social peace processes within South Korea, while exploring the contextual factors within government-civil society relations that have either facilitated or constrained these roles.

1.2 Existing Research

D. J. Kim (2019: 218) points out that scholarship on inter-Korean peace and conflict has been predominantly concerned with intergovernmental relationships, with less focus on personal or interpersonal dimensions. A

'realist' approach, emphasising the need primarily to address geopolitical factors, such as the influence of external powers (e.g. United States and China), as well as political and military tensions between North and South Korea, has also generally been adopted (Armstrong 2005; S. S. Lee 2015; K.-W. Koo 2018; B. C. Park & I. S. Joo 2019). Moreover, scholars from a *'liberal'* perspective have also pointed to problems of institutional design inherent in the division that produced North and South Korea. As a result, peace on the Korean Peninsula was initially institutionalised by external forces at a low level, making socioeconomic exchange and cooperation inhibited, unstable, and politically dependent (H. J. Kim 2018). A state-centred approach, which presumes DPRK military or economic submission under the pretext of preventing war and building peace through international cooperation (D. J. Kim 2019:229), has been heavily criticised for actually destabilising the peace process. In response, the following studies are noteworthy for their shift away from a state-centred approach and their re-focus on the role of CSOs in providing assistance to, as well as promoting social and cultural exchange with the DPRK. Commencing with several studies that have examined the impact of interventions by NGOs involved in assistance to the DPRK, notably, Smith (1999) addresses the impact of aid received by the DPRK from UN agencies, South Korea, and other international NGOs ('the humanitarian community'). Discussing how these NGOs implemented programmes during the DPRK's food crisis in the 1990s, despite resistance from DPRK representatives who lacked experience working with external organisations, Smith claimed that these activities not only raised the 'curtains' on 'a window' into the DPRK, revealing it visibly

to the world, This constituted an informal way of communicating more information to the international community about the country's practical situation than official statements which conform to state propaganda and ideological rhetoric.

These important interventions were acknowledged by Reed (2009), who focused primarily on South Korean NGOs in the DPRK while seeking to identify the role they played in promoting reconciliation and reunification in North-South relations. Arguing that a distinctive feature of South Korean NGOs was their aim to contribute to reconciliation by going beyond the provision of assistance/aid to North Korea, Reed suggests that NGO activities ultimately helped to reduce misunderstandings, build trust, and create alternative channels of communication, and continued to function when official government channels became constrained, restricted, and/or frustrated. Reed, however, questioned the long-term role of NGOs in terms of supporting the DPRK, noting that as relations between authorities in each jurisdiction improved, the need for NGOs tended to diminish.

S. M. Han's work (2008) is one of the earliest studies of the role of NGOs in inter-Korean relations. It focuses particularly on the Korean Sharing Movement, the largest NGO supporting North Korea. Han evaluated the organisation favourably, describing it as an exemplar of how South Korean NGOs, promoting a sense of compatriotism, could draw people from various sections of society into inter-Korean relations (a sector previously monopolised by government-controlled appointments). However, Han also noted that NGOs, which grew reliant upon funding from the South Korean government, were then susceptible to shifts in the political landscape.

Furthermore, when military and security concerns, particularly concerning the DPRK's nuclear programme, hampered and undermined the effectiveness of NGO/DPRK engagement, appeals to 'compatriotism' became subsumed under a mantle of nationalist rivalry, which exacerbated value systems and discourses based upon self-interest and survival.

A slightly different perspective offered by K. Y. Moon (2011) has focused on the political role of South Korean NGOs engaged with the DPRK. He argues that NGO advocacy efforts influenced policy-making processes, thus enabling the South Korean government to provide large-scale food aid to the DPRK. Additional studies (K. Y. Moon 2016; K. Y. K. Y. Moon, W. Y. Lee & S.-M. Jung 2017; K. Y. Moon & A. S. Lee) sought to elucidate the potential benefits of civic-led humanitarian assistance initiatives for the DPRK, particularly in terms of their role in fostering a climate of trust between the two Koreas. These initiatives were evaluated not only for their contribution in terms of alleviating the humanitarian crisis in the DPRK, but also for their significant influence on the policy approaches of the South Korean government. Moon et al. (2017:63) noted, however, that the most significant challenges facing NGOs included the ongoing difficulty of verifying aid distribution amid frequent DPRK provocations.

Some studies focused on the role of CSOs in the field of socio-cultural exchange have examined socio-cultural exchanges between North and South Korea in the areas of academia, environment, language, and religion, highlighting how such activities contributed to reconciliation, as well as analysing factors that limited their effectiveness. Jonsson (2006), for example, has argued that, while CSO cooperation in this context had generally positive

effects, outcomes such as reducing tension and increasing mutual understanding should not be overstated. This is because their impact was severely limited by the fundamentally negative stance of the DPRK regime in relation to inter-Korean socio-cultural exchange, aggravated by the South Korean government's inconsistent policy implementation, as well as the short-term, one-off nature of many planned events. More fundamentally, Jonsson pointed out that the scale of exchange activities between residents across the border between North and South Korea was much less than in other comparative contexts (e.g., Germany and Yemen).

Some studies have assessed the impact of CSO projects across the full spectrum of their activities. Kudláčová (2014), for example, in evaluating the impact of CSOs in South Korea on trust-building, including support for the DPRK, socio-cultural exchange, human rights, and the resettlement of North Korean defectors, encompassed all areas in which CSOs were active. He concluded that the activities of South Korean CSOs held significant potential for trust-building, particularly in areas where there was a high possibility of face-to-face contact with DPRK representatives. In terms of specific projects, however, support for DPRK human rights and defector resettlement was seen as less effective in building trust in comparison with assistance/aid and/or socio-cultural exchange. Moreover, the impact of CSO trust-building efforts was often constrained by poor governance (including legal and institutional barriers that limited CSO activities), low public interest/support within South Korean society in relation to the DPRK, and media portrayals that cast the DPRK in a negative light.

Studies on institutional and legal aspects concerning inter-Korean exchange and cooperation have analysed governance structure and the relationship between the government and CSOs in the field of humanitarian assistance. Yang and Kang (2009), for example, criticise the Civilian-Government Council because of its lack of institutionalised formal policy conduits and loosely connected structure. Yang and Kang also criticised the KNCCNK, describing it as a structure whereby member organisations coordinated external responses only as and when major issues arose, while neglecting engagement in substantive cooperation or information sharing. By contrast, Kim and Lee (2023) focused on the legal aspects of inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation, arguing that inter-Korean relations exist in a dual regulatory space, where both Korean jurisdictions treat each other both as rivalrous enemies and as partners for cooperation simultaneously. Noting that political and military security crises frequently undermined the stability of inter-Korean cooperation, Kim and Lee emphasise the need for a systematic overhaul of the basic legal framework to ensure coexistence and cooperation between the two Koreas in the medium to long term.

Recently, research examining IKEC and the role of civil society has emerged from a peace studies perspective. D. J. Kim (2019) has attempted to apply theoretical frameworks such as the peace process and peacebuilding to inter-Korean relations, and in doing so, has pointed out the limitations of the existing government-led top-down approach. While arguing for a comprehensive peacebuilding strategy, or strategic peacebuilding approach that could involve various actors, including the government, civil society, and the international community, he raised the prospect of a comprehensive

peacebuilding framework to be developed that could include civil society as an actor with the potential to fill vertical or horizontal gaps in the peace process, D. J. Kim has argued in a study with Chung (2022), that civil society demonstrably has the potential to create niche spaces for peace building, yet the government has repeatedly failed to ensure or develop space for these activities, because of its reluctance to promote a sense of collaborative agency. Instead, conflict resolution is prioritised at a national level, which reinforces and centralises government authority. Meanwhile, Lee (2024), using Lederach's concept within the framework of strategic peacebuilding theory, analysed the operation of the Inter-Korean Cooperation Fund (IKCF) as the financial instrument that supports inter-Korean exchange and cooperation projects. Finding that Lederach's '*gaps*' were evident in the operation of the IKCF under different governments, Lee argued that citizen participation in the management of the IKCF could be strengthened to ensure the sustainability of inter-Korean cooperation.

Although limited in number, the studies mentioned are particularly noteworthy in their adoption of alternative perspectives in a field otherwise dominated by *realist* and *liberal* approaches. Consequently, they have made meaningful contributions by shedding light on the roles of CSOs in a range of areas such as providing assistance to the DPRK, promoting socio-cultural exchange and cooperation, and government/CSO relations.

At this juncture, attention should also be paid to studies focusing on the role of civil society in other international peacebuilding cases, beyond the Korean Peninsula example where research on civil society's role has been relatively underemphasised. A review of such cases affords a comprehensive

perspective on the multifaceted nature of civil society's role in peacebuilding processes: specifically its positive and negative functions, the potential and limitations of those roles, and civil society's relational dynamics with government and grassroots actors. The international cases examined in this study are Rwanda, Palestine, and Sri Lanka. These were selected because they represent instances of extreme conflict, analogous to the Korean Peninsula, and are expected to offer significant insights for the peace process in Korea.

Firstly, turning to the case of Rwanda, the role of civil society has been discussed primarily in relation to the Gacaca courts, established to prosecute genocide perpetrators. Ingelaere (2008) critically argues that in Rwanda's state-dominated peacebuilding context, NGOs adopted a "narrow legalistic approach" that ignored the socio-political complexities of the Gacaca courts to survive politically. This "self-imposed blindness" reduced civil society to a service provider rather than a counter-power, resulting in "donor-driven justice" that failed to challenge the exclusionary and contradictory nature of the state's reconciliation efforts. Megwalu and Loizides (2010) underscore that the NGO discourse surrounding the Gacaca courts was by no means monolithic, but rather characterised by two opposed positions. Contrasting the 'legalist' critique of international human rights bodies with the 'pragmatist' support of operational agencies like the IRC, they argue that a 'pragmatic' approach, which permits a degree of compromise regarding fair trial standards to facilitate participation and resolution, is more consonant with the needs of the Rwandan populace and the findings of field-based NGOs.

Subsequently, attention turns to civil society's role in Israel and Palestine. In a significant body of literature regarding the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the structural context of '*settler colonialism*' is frequently accorded greater emphasis than the role of civil society itself. Wolfe (2006), for instance, locates the essence of the Israel-Palestine question within a structure of settler colonialism animated by a '*logic of elimination*', contending that Zionism aims to permanently displace the indigenous population to secure land, in contrast to simply exploiting their labour. Echoing these structural concerns, Çuhadar and Hanafi (2010) proffer a critical evaluation, contending that civil society has largely failed to catalyse substantive political change owing to its detachment from the grassroots and an over-reliance on donor-driven agendas, which served to depoliticise the conflict. They maintain that civil society initiatives were rendered ineffective as they failed to address the structural asymmetries and the persistent reality of occupation, ultimately leaving civil society in a state of despair. Highlighting a recent and alarming intensification of these structural impediments, Zorob and Paluszek (2025) analyse how Israel's instrumentalisation of counter-terrorism measures systematically shrinks civil society space by criminalising Palestinian CSOs and delegitimising them amongst international donors. They contend that this securitisation strategy has exacerbated 'chilling effects' and severely curtailed the scope for activism, notwithstanding the coping mechanisms adopted by these organisations.

Next, within the Sri Lankan context, the role of NGOs brings to the fore the long-standing debate regarding the nexus between foreign aid and peacebuilding. Orjuela (2003) notably argues that the influx of external

funding has fostered the bureaucratisation of peace initiatives, thereby alienating NGOs from their grassroots constituencies. Furthermore, she warns that such donor-driven interventions risk exacerbating the antagonism between peace proponents and nationalist hardliners, consequently deepening social fissures. In a similar vein, Walton (2012) argues that the efficacy of civil society in Sri Lanka is severely curtailed by internal fragmentation and the emergence of ‘uncivil’ elements. He contends that rather than being a unified force for democratic values, civil society is deeply divided along ethnic and political lines, with certain groups mobilising to resist peace processes and promote nationalist agendas. Moreover, Walton highlights that a heavy reliance on foreign aid shifts NGO accountability away from local constituencies towards international donors, forcing a professionalisation of activities that undermines local legitimacy and spontaneity. Ultimately, the influx of aid for peacebuilding can inadvertently intensify social friction by sharpening the divide between pro-peace advocates and hardline nationalist groups. Expanding on these limitations, Campbell and Spilker (2022) raise questions regarding the actual efficacy of civil society, noting that while it is theoretically expected to fulfil seven pivotal functions—ranging from protection and monitoring to social cohesion and service delivery (Paffenholz & Spurk 2006)—it often lacks the requisite political leverage to influence the behaviour of military and political elites. They suggest that in the vacuum of a fragile or failed state, although civil society serves as a vital conduit for meeting societal needs, it faces a fundamental ‘belling the cat’ dilemma, possessing little practical power to

restrain the actions of warlords or high-level political actors who drive the conflict.

As evidenced by the aforementioned studies, the role of civil society within peace processes must not be subject to romanticisation. As Paffenholz (2014:26) observed following a review of two decades of civil society peacebuilding interventions, civil society should not be perceived merely as a “homogenous and necessarily good entity”. Civil society may exhibit both civil and uncivil characteristics and is frequently fragmented along ethnic and political fault lines. However, it is insufficient to categorise civil society solely through binary oppositions such as good versus bad, civil versus uncivil, or progressive versus regressive. If a primary impetus for civil society research is the endeavour to ascertain whether local agents constitute essential actors for achieving “any viable, sustainable form of peace” (Mac Ginty & Richmond 2013:770)—transcending the limitations of the liberal peace—then a theoretical framework is required. Such a framework must move beyond merely identifying *who* these actors are and *what* roles they have played; rather, it must conceptualise *how* they can influence peacebuilding. In this regard, this paper aims to transcend these dichotomies and elucidate how civil society can function as a bridge in peace processes, specifically through the lens of the occupation of strategic social spaces (Brewer, Higgins & Teeney 2011:26).

Crucially, in any effort to conceptualise the role of civil society, the significance of context cannot be overstated. As demonstrated by the cases of Rwanda, Israel/Palestine, and Sri Lanka—as well as the Korean Peninsula—the operational space of civil society functions within social

environments wherein conflict is deeply entrenched. In the former cases, the contextual dimensions of this space acted as pivotal enablers or constraints, proving just as influential as the agency of civil society itself. On the Korean Peninsula, salient contextual factors include the geographical bifurcation across the DMZ and the fierce competition for political legitimacy following the Korean War in 1953, which marked a volatile flashpoint in the Cold War. Consequently, regarding peacebuilding efforts on the Korean Peninsula, a methodology that isolates the role of civil society from these contextual determinants would be analytically incomplete. It is, therefore, imperative to analyse these contextual constraints in tandem with the agency of local actors.

While existing scholarship has documented the activities of CSOs engaging with the DPRK, there remains a paucity of systematic research that conceptualises the role of civil society with a distinct focus on how it contributes to peacebuilding, whilst critically examining the contextual factors that either facilitate or constrain this agency. Previous studies have often focused on the descriptive outcomes of aid or exchange projects, failing to fully account for the mechanisms through which political rigidities restrict the sustainability of such efforts. Addressing this lacuna, this thesis investigates the role of CSOs engaged in humanitarian aid and socio-cultural exchange from the perspective of ‘strategic social spaces’. By synthesising the analysis of agency with an examination of enabling and constraining contextual factors, this research seeks to determine whether, and how, these actors can foster sustainable peace despite the entrenched division. In contributing to this field, this thesis raises the following questions:

1.3 Research Questions

Main Research Question:

- How have CSOs contributed to building sustainable peace in the context of inter-Korean relations?

Supplementary Sub-questions:

- What roles have CSOs played in inter-Korean relations via inter-Korean exchange and cooperation projects from the period of the Kim Dae-jung administration to the Moon Jae-in administration, and how have their roles changed under each administration?
- How have CSOs contributed to the development of political and social peace processes of South Korea?
- What factors have promoted or constrained the role of CSOs within the context of government-civil society relations?

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This thesis has engaged with five distinct theories. First, Giddens' '*structuration theory*' (1984) provided a reference point for determining whether civil society actors and the government can play a meaningful role in terms of a North–South Korean relationship, often referred to as a '*division system*'. Second, '*contact theory*', as developed by Allport (1954) and other scholars (Pettigrew 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp 2006; Al Ramiah & Hewstone 2013; Zuma 2014), sheds light on the significance of inter-Korean exchange and cooperation projects in peacebuilding under conditions where direct contact has been severely restricted. Three subsequent theories contribute to the conceptualisation of the role of civil society in peacebuilding: Paffenholz

and Spurk's '*functional approach*' (2006) which helps to distinguish the various roles of civil society and identify their importance; Lederach's '*middle-out approach*' (1997) which helps aid understanding as to why the role of civil society in peacebuilding is not merely supplementary, but essential; finally, Brewer and his colleagues' '*strategic social spaces theory of civil society*' (Brewer 2010; Brewer, Higgins & Teeney 2011; Brewer 2022), which serves as the main theoretical framework of this thesis, and delineates civil society's multifaceted roles across political and social peace processes through four diverse spaces. This approach refreshes our understanding of the contextual variables contained within state–civil society relations, and how various roles are influenced, maintained, and implemented as interventions.

Although Anthony Giddens' '*structure-agency*' theory (1984) does not explicitly address the role of civil society, it offers insights into the potential role that actors such as CSOs can play within the structures of conflict. At the core of the theory is the concept of '*duality of structure*' (Giddens, 1984: 25), which challenges approaches that overemphasise either structures or agency exclusively. Instead, Giddens proposes that structure and agency are mutually constraining and constitutive entities. Highlighting the conditionality and subjectivity of agency, Giddens suggests that being an agent means possessing the 'ability to act differently', as well as having the capacity to bring about noticeable change in existing conditions or events (Giddens 1984:9–15).

Peace and conflict resolution scholars employ Giddens's ideas as a conceptual framework that can analyse the potential effectiveness of civil

society actors and their contribution in relation to post-liberal peacebuilding arenas (Hancock 2017:258–260). Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013) introduce the concept of '*local agency*' as a key idea behind what they describe as a '*local turn*', suggesting that cooperation, capitulation, and/or resistance to governmental and structural power can be observed to occur simultaneously. Similarly, Richmond (2011: 420) considers the potential of grassroots civil society to exercise agency by critically accepting or rejecting the norms, markets, and institutions prioritised by liberal peace building within local contexts. Richmond posits that civil society can transcend the limitations of liberal peacebuilding, revealing the possibility of a more sustainable and just form of peace. In a similar vein, D. J. Kim and Y. Chung (2022:6) argue that the government can also be viewed as a form of agency. Accordingly, while the government sometimes functions as a structure in relation to civil society, it also operates independently as an agent in its own right.

In sum, Giddens' structure-agency theory provides a framework with which to re-evaluate the structural context of conflict, so that civil society and the government are not merely conceived as being constrained by structural forces but are considered agents capable of acting differently and independently from each other, as competitors and/or collaborators.

Secondly, *contact theory*, originally proposed by Allport (1954) and continuously refined by later scholars, provides a valuable framework for understanding the significance of IKEC initiatives in inter-Korean relations. According to this theory, when the necessary conditions are in place, contact with a conflicting group can overcome prejudice and improve attitudes towards that group. Conditions include: the pursuit of shared goals,

intergroup cooperation, equality of status between groups, and institutional support (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998).

Subsequent studies, which have further enhanced the applicability of contact theory, include Pettigrew and Tropp (2006), who draw on a wide range of empirical cases, demonstrating that positive effects of contact emerge even when some of the aforementioned optimal conditions remain unmet. Another study (Lytle 2018:9–10) found that contact can take multifarious forms, including: '*extended contact*', whereby members of an ingroup become aware that some members of an outgroup have formed friendships with them; '*vicarious contact*', whereby positive interactions are observed through the media; and '*imagined contact*', whereby positive interactions are imagined. The argument was made that these various forms of indirect contact exhibit the same positive effects as direct contact.

In this regard, contact theory is particularly important as it serves as a theoretical framework for reassessing the roles of actors who have facilitated various forms of contact—both direct and indirect— from a peacebuilding perspective, even in contexts such as the Korean Peninsula where opportunities for everyday contact are severely restricted.

Thania Paffenholz's work (2010) is considered to be landmark research, epitomising a functional approach² to the role of civil society. Alongside her co-authored work with Spurk (2006), her research has been recognised for its

2 In this thesis, to distinguish Paffenholz's(2010) approach and her work with Spurk (2006), which focuses on the functions of civil society, from that of Lederach and other scholars, the author will refer to it as the 'functional approach', in accordance with the classification used by several scholars (Obi 2018; Kim 2019:12).

importance in developing an understanding of the role of civil society in peacebuilding (Mac Ginty 2012:281). Based on a comparative study of numerous cases, Paffenholz and Spurk (2006:13) developed a comprehensive framework which identified the following seven potential civil society functions in peacebuilding: (1) protection of citizens; (2) monitoring for accountability; (3) advocacy and public communication; (4) socialisation; (5) building community; (6) intermediation and facilitation between citizens and state; and (7) service delivery. It was concluded that of these seven functions, six (when the service provision function is excluded) designate civil society roles that actively contribute to peacebuilding. Paffenholz's functional approach to the role of civil society, praised for presenting a comprehensive framework (Ginty 2012:282), has also been criticised for continuing to treat the role of civil society as secondary to that of the government (Kim 2019:12–15). Correspondingly, Lederach's middle-out approach is regarded as a theory that emphasises the importance of civil society's role.

The middle-out approach proposed by Lederach addresses the vulnerabilities inherent in peacebuilding. Accordingly, Lederach defines gaps between the peacebuilding process and three tracks of organised engagement: i.e., top-level leadership, middle-range leadership, and grassroots. This approach highlights the crucial role of civil society and affords it significant bridging potential. Lederach identifies three key gaps that undermine the sustainability of a peace process: the '*interdependence gap*', the '*justice gap*', and the '*process-structure gap*'. These represent what he regarded as the most critical challenges facing modern peacebuilding (Lederach, 1999: 29). Lederach's gaps may arise from failures of leadership at various levels to acknowledge

interdependence (the interdependence gap), the disparity between the high expectations of a peace agreement and its actual outcomes (the justice gap), or the perception of peace as an ongoing process without tangible results (the process-structure gap). Lederach also noted the problems associated with viewing peace as a static process, which renders it unable to adapt to change (Lederach, 1999: 29–35).

Addressing these gaps, Lederach's peacebuilding strategy, centred upon civil society, is referred to as the '*middle-out approach*' (Lederach, 1997: 39). He categorised actors in conflict societies into three groups: Track I: top-level leadership; Track II: mid-range leadership; and Track III: grassroots, and subsequently contrasted the limitations of Tracks I and III with the potential of Track II. Specifically, he concluded that top-level leadership was limited in terms of its flexibility, given its exposure to public scrutiny and high visibility, as well as the pressure it was under to maintain influence. Additionally, grassroots leadership, preoccupied with the daily survival of a large population, was challenged when required to implement a comprehensive peace strategy. By contrast, mid-level civil society leaders bridged the gap between process and structure by building horizontal relationships via networks that spanned conflict divides. Track II, Lederach maintained, was able to foster peace by advocating for social justice issues that potentially could link leadership and grassroots levels vertically. By incorporating these concerns into its agenda, Lederach contends that mid-level leaders have demonstrable potential to bridge both the interdependence and justice gaps (Lederach, 1997: 38–42).

Lederach's middle-out approach has been widely adopted due to its focus on the potential of civil society to make an impact in conflict-ridden societies. However, it has also been criticised for its ambiguity regarding the specific ways in which civil society can effectively contribute to practical peacebuilding strategies (Hancock, 2008:233). In this context, Brewer's theory of strategic social spaces becomes significant, in that it provides an alternative that can overcome the limitations of Lederach's framework.

Finally, Brewer's theory of strategic social spaces offers a sociological response to Lederach's critics. Arguing that traditional peace studies approaches focus too much on political agreements and specific political and economic institutions (Brewer 2010; Brewer et al. 2011; Brewer 2019: 273–276), Brewer and his colleagues refer to this approach as the '*good governance approach*', and insist that reconciliation and relationship-building processes - referred to as '*social peace processes*' - should be given equal importance and pursued concurrently. Hence, two complementary processes: 1) political agreements which create the space needed to address sociological issues, and 2) the process of repairing broken social relationships, provide the conditions necessary for political processes to be sustained (Brewer 2010: 203).

Brewer argues that civil society plays a pivotal role in peacebuilding because it influences both of these processes (Brewer 2010: 31). Civil society operates as a hub that co-opts the various underlying issues inherent in conflict-ridden societies into the public sphere, thereby influencing and prompting public policy agendas. At the same time, Civil Society assists in addressing the underlying societal problems that can persist even after peace

agreements are reached. Brewer conceptualises this civil society role across four '*strategic social spaces*': intellectual, institutional, market, and political (Brewer, Higgins & Teeney 2010: 1024–1025; Brewer et al. 2010: 55–66; Brewer 2022: 503–505). Accordingly, intellectual space serves as a platform for contemplating alternative ideas about peacebuilding and for envisioning peace, while institutional spaces are where these alternatives are implemented. Market spaces involve the mobilisation and materialisation of these alternatives beyond civil society, and draw upon cultural, social, and material resources sourced from local and global networks. Political space interacts with political processes, aiding peace settlement negotiations and facilitating back-channel communications (Brewer et al. 2011). Brewer argues that this conceptual framework is important because it clarifies the complex and varied functions of civil society without romanticising or obscuring its role (Brewer 2010: 55–67).

Brewer et al. (2010: 1029–1030; Brewer 2022: 504–505) further argue that state-civil society relations, as part of the broader political context, can both constrain and/or facilitate civil society activities within each defined space. He illustrates this with examples of peace efforts conducted by religious organisations, such as Catholic and Protestant churches, during the Northern Ireland peace process, where key variables included the majority or minority status of distinct religiously defined communities, and whether their involvement in peacebuilding was characterised and acknowledged in terms that encompasses formal and/or informal processes (Brewer 2022: 504–505).

Brewer's approach has been lauded for theorising social peace processes from a sociological perspective, and is acknowledged as offering a

contrasting perspective to politically orientated peace processes (Ganiel et al. 2012; D. J. Kim 2019; J. S. Hwang 2021). Steen-Johnsen (2017: 34–36), however, suggests a revised theoretical framework, arguing that in countries with fundamentally different state-civil society dynamics, such as authoritarian or semi-authoritarian states (e.g., Ethiopia), the characteristics of the state, rather than those of civil society, may have a greater determinative influence.

In summary, this thesis presents an analytical framework centred on Brewer's theory of 'strategic social spaces' to examine the roles, opportunities, and constraints of CSOs engaged in inter-Korean exchange and cooperation projects. (For details, see Chapter 2).

1.5 Definitions and Scope of Research

Definitions

This section explores the key concepts utilised in this thesis and defines the scope of the research by examining their definitions. In analysing sustainable peacebuilding, inter-Korean exchange and cooperation, civic exchange and cooperation, it acknowledges notions of '*conservative*' and '*progressive*' related to the classification of the characteristics of the Korean government.

In defining sustainable peacebuilding within the context of inter-Korean relations, this thesis has adopted the concept of '*relationship building through continuous inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation*'. This approach adheres to the increasing emphasis on relationship-building as a fundamental element of sustainable peace. While various discussions have addressed sustainability in peacebuilding (Richmond 2005; eds. Philpott &

Powers 2010; Paffenholz & Zartman 2019; Coleman et al. 2021), Lederach and Appleby (2010:23), in particular, highlight the importance of building human connections, arguing that peacebuilding necessitates a broad range of relationship-building activities which span the entire conflict cycle, and are not limited to post-accord or post-violence phases. Lederach's assertion that "relationship building is the basis of conflict and its long-term solution" (Lederach 1997: 12) succinctly encapsulates this perspective.

Considering that it is difficult to assert that a single conceptual definition of sustainable peacebuilding applies universally to all cases, it is necessary to redefine peacebuilding according to specific stages of the peacebuilding journey within each specific societal context (T.Kim 2020:228–229). Correspondingly, the concept of sustainable peacebuilding can be redefined within the Korean context. Given this context, where formal peace negotiations have yet to commence, a relationship-building concept can be redefined as the 'basic conditions for establishing sustainable peace.' For example, D. J. Kim (2019: 53) criticises the creation of the DMZ under the 1953 Armistice Agreement as being representative of a negative peace. Hence, the DMZ serves as a '*peacekeeping line*', while it has also functioned as a barrier to free exchange between North and South Korea, thereby hindering any pursuit of an active peace. As Lederach (1997: 26) notes, the most basic condition for relationship-building is 'encounter with the other party to the conflict'. Securing the continuity of exchange and cooperation can therefore be seen as foundational in terms of relationship-building within the Korean context. In consideration, at this juncture, building relationships through continuous exchange and cooperation across intractable boundaries

established as peace guarantees between North and South Korean residents can be regarded as the most essential and fundamental condition for achieving sustainable peacebuilding in the context of inter-Korean relations. Regarding the definition of inter-Korean exchange and cooperation, this thesis adopts a broad concept that encompasses not only the direct movement of people and goods across the border between North and South Korea, but also all activities facilitating such exchanges. This accords with the definition provided by the IKEC Act, enacted in 1990, which defines inter-Korean exchange and cooperation as,

“a wide range of activities carried out between South and North Korea, including travel, contact, trade, cooperation projects, and the provision of communication services between South and North Korea” (Article 3 of the Inter-Korean Exchange and Cooperation Act).

Notably, the Act defines 'inter-Korean cooperation projects' as:

"all activities related to culture, tourism, healthcare, sports, academics, and the economy, jointly conducted by South and North Korean residents (including corporations and organisations)" (Article 2, Clause 4).

To summarise, inter-Korean exchange and cooperation can be understood as either direct or indirect contact and exchange between South and North Korean residents (including corporations and organisations), whether reciprocally or through a third country, along with related joint projects and all related activities aimed at this purpose (G. C. Lee et al. 2018: 24). In other

words, the concept of inter-Korean exchange and cooperation broadly encompasses the various projects undertaken between North and South Korea, as well as all activities intended to facilitate such exchanges which includes international relationships.

Next, the definition of '*assistance to the DPRK*' (including humanitarian aid and development assistance to the DPRK) and the concept of '*socio-cultural exchange and cooperation*' will be examined. These two areas constitute part of IKEC and are fields in which Korean CSOs have been actively engaged. They are therefore the focal point of this study. Defining assistance to the DPRK, the 'Regulations on Handling Humanitarian Aid Projects and Cooperation Projects with North Korea' stipulate that 'Assistance to the DPRK' projects include: relief and recovery efforts for disaster victims, agricultural development initiatives to address food shortages, health and medical services, forest restoration, and environmental conservation projects.

Academic discourse defines '*assistance to the DPRK*' into two categories: 1) emergency and general relief, and 2) development assistance projects. The former refers to temporary humanitarian aid provided to an unspecified number of beneficiaries, without targeting specific age or gender groups, typically in response to man-made or natural disasters (K. Y. Moon, W. -Y. Lee & S.-M. Jung 2017: 38–39). The latter involves activities aimed at building physical and human capacities for sustainable production, or acquiring essential goods to improve living standards (J. M. Lee, C. Y. Choi & J. R. Park 2009: 19–20). In most cases, however, the Ministry of Unification and approved South Korean NGOs engaged in '*assistance to the DPRK*' do not strictly differentiate between these two categories. Instead, the

term '*assistance to the DPRK*' is used generally. Correspondingly, this thesis similarly defines '*assistance to the DPRK*' as a term encompassing both emergency and general relief, including mid-to long-term development assistance projects, either provided by South Korea or jointly implemented with the DPRK for humanitarian purposes.

Similarly, '*socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation*' programmes can be broadly defined as encompassing not only activities involving direct contact between North and South Korea but also activities aimed at promoting such engagement, as detailed below:

“various activities related to culture, sports, academics, etc., that are jointly carried out by the residents of South Korea and North Korea by agreement or contract, to restore national homogeneity and form a social and cultural community”. (Article 3 of the Regulations on the Management of Inter-Korean Socio-Cultural Cooperation Projects)

Meanwhile, numerous academic studies (J.-H. Kim 2001; S.-H. Lee 2017; H. H. Lee 2020) refer to both CSO-led '*assistance to the DPRK*' and '*socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation*', under the distinct term "*civic exchanges and cooperation*". In line with this terminology, this thesis will also use the term "*civic exchanges and cooperation*" to refer to these two categories of projects.

Scope of Research

This thesis primarily focuses on South Korean CSOs involved in IKEC projects during the five consecutive administrations from the Kim Dae-jung to the Moon Jae-in. The scope of IKEC addressed in this study centres on CSOs involved in providing ‘assistance to the DPRK’, and promoting ‘socio-cultural exchange and cooperation projects’ between the two Koreas (hereafter civic IKEC projects). Since the 1990 enactment of the IKEC Act and its subordinate legislations, up until 2023, the legitimate actors in civic IKEC projects have been limited to corporations and organisations. (As previously noted, economic cooperation projects led by private enterprises are excluded from this analysis, while the rationale for focusing on CSOs is explained in detail below.)

According to the OECD (2008), CSOs are defined as:

"the multitude of associations around which society voluntarily organises itself, representing a wide range of interests and ties".

In a similar vein, Kudláčová (2014: 34) describes South Korean CSOs in the context of inter-Korean relations as ‘*non-profit entities, relatively independent of state and international actors*’, capable of mediating dialogue between conflicting groups, and directly engaged in North-South Korean interactions. These are often collectively referred to as ‘*the third sector*’.

Although the CSOs examined in this study broadly conform to the above definitions, within the context of inter-Korean relations, however, there is an additional defining parameter, whereby all CSOs must first be approved by the government to legally participate in inter-Korean affairs. In regulating

‘assistance to the DPRK’, a system was put in place whereby aid NGOs had to be approved as '*designated private organisations*' by the Ministry of Unification. Established in 1999, this system was abolished in April 2023. Before its abolition, although requirements for approval changed over time, in general, organisations had to be constituted as legal entities, which precluded individuals. Furthermore, these entities had to meet certain ill-defined and vague criteria, such as maintaining stable relations with the DPRK and having the capacity to ensure transparency. By the end of March 2023, just before the system was abolished, 150 aid NGOs (excluding 243 local governments) were registered to provide aid to the DPRK. By the end of 2007, 151 socio-cultural cooperation projects had been approved. In practice, these projects were conducted by corporations or organisations, while individuals were effectively excluded from participating or contributing outside of approved organisational frameworks. Although systemic designation for organisations in the field of inter-Korean socio-cultural exchange and cooperation was abolished in September 2009, the approval system for projects engaging the DPRK continues to be maintained by the Ministry of Unification.

Correspondingly, this thesis focuses on organisations, corporations, and entities designated/approved by the South Korean government, including those that are voluntarily organised and represent diverse stakeholders and interests, and those with experience in providing aid to the DPRK, as well as those engaged primarily in socio-cultural exchange and cooperation projects.

The temporal scope of this study spans from the beginning of the Kim Dae-jung administration (February 1998) to the end of the Moon Jae-in

administration (May 2017). This period was selected based on two key considerations:

Firstly, CSO involvement in inter-Korean relations via IKEC projects began in earnest during the Kim Dae-jung administration and ceased under the Moon Jae-in administration, which provides a timeframe useful for trend analysis. Numerous existing studies (S. I. Bae & K. G. Lee 2003:284–289; S. H. Kim & K. Y. Moon 2014:163; G. C. Lee et al. 2018:41–42; K. Y. Moon, J. Y. Park & Y. H. Song 2018:109–114) cite the Kim Dae-jung administration as the period when inter-Korean relations started to be significantly impacted by the substantial involvement of Korean CSOs. In contrast, the Moon Jae-in administration saw a near cessation of private sector exchanges between North and South Korea, creating a sharp contrast with earlier administrations (G. Choi 2020; C. Kim 2023).

Secondly, this period was chosen because of its usefulness in terms of analysing the impact of regime change in South Korea (i.e., from conservative to progressive and vice versa) on the role of CSOs. Numerous studies (Jonsson 2006:395–395; Ouellette 2013:137; Kudláčová 2014:39–40), have identified regime change between conservative and progressive administrations as a key factor contributing to various issues in inter-Korean relations and commencing with establishment of the Kim Dae-jung administration in 1998, marked as the first change of regime, this period, which saw a change in government from progressive to conservative and then back to progressive, provides an opportune temporal window to examine the impact of this change on the role of CSOs. In other words, the period covered by this thesis, a time when civic exchanges in inter-Korean relations were

actively promoted and rescinded, gives a dynamic context for examination and inquiry into the conditions of CSO involvement and engagement with inter-Korean relations.

Before engaging in a substantive discussion, however, it is first necessary to clarify the concepts of '*conservative*' and '*progressive*' as employed in a South Korean context. This is because the criteria distinguishing conservatism and progressivism in Korean society possess certain distinctive characteristics that differ from those found in Western contexts. According to Han and Jang (K. Han & Y. Jang 2012:72–82), Korean conservatism typically reflects an attitude that values the continuity of the existing system and seeks improvement through maintaining tradition and custom, while Korean progressivism is characterised by an optimistic view of human reason and free will, combined with an attitude that actively embraces change. In the Korean context, however, attitudes toward North Korea tend to serve as a primary reference point for distinguishing between progressives and conservatives. Hence, progressives tend to perceive North Korea as an entity that can be engaged with through cooperation, whereas conservatives view North Korea as a hostile entity. This divergence leads to significantly different and even opposing approaches to North Korean policy. While progressive governments tend to support engagement with North Korea and favour comprehensive reciprocity, by contrast, conservative governments tend to oppose engagement and advocate '*strict reciprocity*'. This is often expressed in more moderate terms as opposition to providing assistance to the DPRK. Critical scholars often refer to this approach more explicitly as a '*hardline policy*' towards the North (S. Lee 2015:56 ; S. Lee 2022:25–41).

Correspondingly, three of the five administrations from Kim Dae-jung to Moon Jae-in (Kim Dae-jung, Roh Moo-hyun, and Moon Jae-in) can be categorised as progressive, while a further two (Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye) can be construed as conservative. Given South Korean electoral shifts from progressive to conservative to progressive again, it is incumbent upon this research to examine how these changes in administration impacted the role of Korean CSOs involved in exchange and cooperation with North Korea, and analyse findings in the expectation of yielding valuable insights. Finally, although this study focuses on CSOs involved in inter-Korean exchange and cooperation, its scope is primarily confined to South Korean society. The research investigates the role of South Korean CSOs and examines factors influencing their activities within a South Korean context. In other words, the aim is to explore various factors that shaped the role of CSOs involved with exchange and cooperation with the DPRK within South Korea. Ideally, an investigation into the DPRK, the counterpart in these exchanges, would be necessary to maintain rigour in research terms; however, given the current state of inter-Korean relations and the DPRK's negative or frequently hostile and suspicious attitude toward South Korean influence in relation to civic exchange and cooperation projects, it is practically impossible to approach the DPRK to conduct rigorous research.

In establishing terms of reference for researching peacebuilding activities within South Korean society, this study, employing Lederach's triangle (Lederach 1997: 39) as a framework, has opted to exclude the grassroots level of participation and to focus instead on civil society actors within the middle-range leadership, while also considering the role of top-level leadership. The

exclusion of grassroots actors from the scope of this research is based on the premise that the primary focus of Brewer's strategic social space theory (discussed in detail in the following chapter), which serves as the theoretical framework for this study, relates to the role and agency of middle-range civil society.

An additional consideration is that comprehensive research on grassroots actors would require a fundamentally different mode of inquiry and approach to evidence gathering that would impact the quality of the research required to answer the designated questions for this thesis. This is not to say that an examination of grassroots activity is not a valid research objective; however, it would require a parallel study, which would suitably be the object of further research. International factors were also excluded from this study, as they too do not constitute its primary focus (see Chapter 8 for a detailed discussion of limitations and suggestions for future research)

1.6 Research Contributions

This study will systematically elucidate the distinct roles that South Korean CSOs have played via IKEC, examining roles that have been overlooked in favour of giving attention to governmental actors. Moreover, this study will also reveal contextual variables within the relationship between government and civil society that influence the ability of South Korean CSOs to perform these roles. More specifically, the academic and policy contributions of this research will be as follows:

Firstly, this thesis will investigate whether Korean CSOs can exercise agency and meaningfully contribute to building relationships between North and

South Korea. In a context where mainstream research has focused on the structural aspects of division or the prioritisation of state actors, it will renew understanding of what it means for CSOs to be active agents in peacebuilding. Secondly, the study aims to move beyond functional and fragmented perceptions of the role of CSOs. Previous analyses have often focused on specific functions, such as citizen protection and advocacy for peace-friendly policies, or have offered an ambiguous recognition of CSOs' role as bridging the vertical or horizontal gaps between grassroots and top-level actors. This thesis, however, will use Brewer's strategic space theory to conceptualise the multifaceted and dynamic roles that Korean CSOs have played via IKEC projects, and shed light on how these roles can contribute to the political and social peace process of South Korea, as well as to the establishment of sustainable relations between the two Koreas.

Thirdly, this thesis will contribute to a renewal of the understanding of factors that have shaped the role of CSOs. While existing discussions have focused on broad factors, such as the government's favourable stance towards civil society or the nature of conflicts experienced by society, in the Korean context, the alternation between conservative and progressive governments has been identified as a key variable affecting inter-Korean relations. This thesis is expected to contribute to understanding how political changes, exemplified by conservative/progressive shifts, have affected the role of CSOs and whether there were any contextual factors arising from the government-CSO relations.

In terms of theoretical perspective and research innovation, this thesis marks an innovative application of Brewer's framework to the Korean case, which allows for an evaluation of its theoretical contributions and limitations. Brewer's framework, developed in the context of religious conflict in Northern Ireland, contrasts with the Korean case, where contact between residents of the North and South continues to be severely restricted by the DMZ, and strong government control further limits interaction. Unlike Northern Ireland, peace negotiations on the Korean Peninsula have yet to be formalised, yet by applying Brewer's theory to this distinct context, this study is expected to shed light on both the limitations and applicability of the framework.

Lastly, from a policy perspective, this thesis offers important implications for reassessing the role and potential of civil society in building sustainable inter-Korean relations. It challenges the limitations of a government-centric, top-down approach and the dominant focus on political and security issues in inter-Korean relations. The study aims to provide new insights into complementary approaches that consider the role and potential of CSOs in partnership with the government. Furthermore, from a legal and institutional standpoint, the expectation is that this thesis will offer significant insight into identifying deficiencies in the current legal system and promote the establishment of new frameworks that maintain, ensure, and enhance the role of CSO involvement in inter-Korean relations.

1.7 Research Structure

This thesis is organised into nine chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the research aims and background, research questions, definitions of key concepts, the scope of the study, and its contributions. This thesis defines sustainable peacebuilding in the context of inter-Korean relations as ‘relationship building through continuous inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation’.

Chapter 2 explains the theoretical framework used in this thesis. It first examines the role of civil society in conflict-structured societies through Giddens' Structure-Agency theory, a sociological framework addressing structure and agency. In relation to peacebuilding through inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation, analysis draws on the prism of contact theory. Subsequently, the chapter reviews theoretical perspectives on the role of civil society, including the functionalist approach of Paffenholz and Spurk as well as Lederach's middle-out approach, discussing both their contributions and limitations. In addressing these limitations, Brewer's theory of strategic social spaces is introduced as a complementary framework, which then serves as the basis for constructing the analytical framework of this research. Furthermore, Brewer's theory is supplemented by the revised framework proposed by Steen-Johnson concerning government–civil society relations that influence the role of civil society.

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology. It reviews relevant literature and data collection methods, as well as the sampling techniques used for interviews to minimise bias. The chapter also discusses the sampling methods

employed, includes a section on research ethics, and concludes with an outline of the study's limitations.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the Korean government's exchange and cooperation policies and the activities of Korean CSOs to contextualise this study. First, in terms of historical background, it examines the context of the Korean conflict, the development of inter-Korean relations, the growth of Korean civil society and its involvement in inter-Korean relations, as well as the changes in exchange and cooperation policies, and government-civic sector governance of the Korean government from the Kim Dae-jung administration to the Moon Jae-in administration. It also presents the major activities of Korean CSOs in the field of 'assistance to the DPRK' and inter-Korean 'socio-cultural exchange and cooperation activities'.

Chapters 5 to 7 investigate the evolving role of CSOs across three pivotal political eras in South Korea: the progressive Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations, the conservative Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye governments, and the subsequent progressive Moon Jae-in administration. Utilising empirical data from interviews with civil society actors and government officials, these chapters categorise and conceptualise CSOs' roles within IKEC projects, underpinned by Brewer's four analytical framework—intellectual, institutional, market, and political.

Chapter 8 employs a synthesis of Brewer's strategic social spaces theory and Steen-Johnsen's revised framework to scrutinise the contextual factors and enabling conditions that have either facilitated or constrained CSO involvement in IKEC and peacebuilding across five consecutive

administrations. By interrogating these variables within the context of government-CSO relations, the analysis highlights how such shifting dynamics have reshaped the capacity of civil society to foster sustainable inter-Korean relations.

Chapter 9 concludes the study by summarising the answers to the research questions outlined in Chapter 1 and drawing out the theoretical contributions and policy implications of the research. Finally, this chapter will address the limitations of this study and provide recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter explores the theoretical framework for understanding the role of civil society in peacebuilding.

Firstly, although Giddens' structure-agency theory is not explicitly focused on civil society, it provides valuable insights into how non-governmental actors can play a meaningful role in societies where conflict is entrenched structurally. Additionally, contact theory serves as a useful framework in examining how IKEC projects relate to peacebuilding on the Korean Peninsula, as its concept of intergroup contact illuminates the effects of contact with conflict partners in the process of IKEC.

Turning towards the functional approach presented by Paffenholz and Spurk (2006) to civil society, this chapter highlights its increasing relevance to peace and conflict studies, while acknowledging criticism that it unduly positions civil society as a secondary actor to the state. Lederach's '*middle-out*' approach, introduced to address '*gaps*' between the various levels of leadership in peacebuilding, locates civil society as a bridge-builder between actors at each designated level. The Strategic Social Spaces Theory developed by Brewer et al. adds a sociological perspective to this discourse, which acknowledges the importance of relationship-building, referred to as '*social peace processes*', in conflict-affected societies. This framework identifies four spaces: intellectual, institutional, market, and political, which offer a prism for comprehensively understanding civil society's multifaceted role in peacebuilding. Moreover, Brewer's concept of state-civil society relations emphasises the dynamic characteristics of civil society and provides

contextuality for the role of civil society, especially when examined alongside Steen-Johnson's amended framework, which balances Brewer's emphasis by addressing determinative state-level factors. Finally, this chapter synthesises all these theoretical perspectives to present an analytical framework utilising Brewer's Strategic Social Spaces Theory as its central discursive thread.

2.1 Structure-Agency Theory

Anthony Giddens' '*structuration theory*' was considered to have made a major contribution in its attempt to overcome the traditional sociological opposition between '*structural*' and '*action*' approaches (Browne 1993:139). 'Structure', defined by Giddens as "social practices ordered across space and time"(Giddens 1984:2), in a sociological context, suggests that while individual actors – also known as '*human agents*' – are unable to control the spatial and temporal extension of social systems as structures, they can and do influence and reshape these systems through their activities (Giddens 1984:24–25).

Throughout the literature on peace and conflict, Giddens' structuration theory has attracted attention in two ways: firstly, in terms of its acknowledgement of the structural dynamics of conflict, which moves away from a selective/exclusive emphasis upon either structural factors and/or the role of specific actors such as states and political parties in the conflict resolution process (Hughes 2018:624; D. J. Kim and Y. Chung 2022:1–2); And secondly, its emphasis on agency (Richmond 2011; Mac Ginty & Richmond 2013), particularly with regards to civil society organisations – considered a

"missing element in local peacebuilding practice" (Hancock 2017:255), was considered implicitly as a criticism of liberal peace approaches which tend to extol the simple importation of good governance norms from developed countries.

The Duality of Structure

Particularly noteworthy in view of the first aspect is the concept of the "*duality of structure*". According to Giddens (1978: 17, 25), structure refers to "rules and resources, or sets of transformation relations, organized as properties of social systems" (1984:25). In this context, a social system, defined as "the repetitive implication of this structure, which constitutes the activities of human actors reproduced over time and space," is contrasted with social systems, in which structure is recursively implicated and dynamically reconstituted, composed of the situated activities of human agents in specific contexts. Giddens emphasises the recursive nature of social structures as both the medium and the outcome of the activities/practices that it in turn shapes. Moreover, Giddens (1984: xxii–xxiii, 9) argues that the term 'agency' must also be reconsidered and re-explained. Positing that agency is not about people's intentions but their capacity to act, human agents are thus seen as possessing "the capacity to understand what they do", and their "reflective capacities" are continuously related to the flow of everyday actions within social activities. Human actors are therefore not merely embedded subjects within structures, but can and do exercise choice through their daily activities, thereby altering pre-existing structures, halting the reproduction of social systems while also creating new systems (Giddens 1981; D. J. Kim and Y. Chung 2022).

Encapsulated by the term ‘the duality of structure’, Giddens rejects the notion that agents and structures are two separate entities, and instead emphasises their interdependent relationship. Accordingly, ‘duality of structure’ implies that the structural properties of social systems function as "both the medium and the outcome of the practices they recursively organise". (Giddens 1984:25) In other words, structure cannot be viewed solely as a constraint but as both constraint and possibility; hence, "structure and human agency constrain and reshape each other in a mutually constitutive relationship". (Liviatan 2015:87)

The Subjectivity of Agency

For Giddens, agency is related to the capacity to act, as opposed to merely being the intention behind an action. Agency involves being a ‘perpetrator’ of events, with the potential to act differently at any stage of an action sequence. This means that actions continuously and dynamically flow, and are deeply interconnected with the reflexive monitoring of the individual, while impacting their day-to-day physical activities. The ability to ‘*act otherwise*’ implies the capability to influence or refrain from influencing a process or state of affairs. Thus, being an agent means having the ability to exert causal powers continuously in everyday life, affecting both personal circumstances and those of others. Agency is therefore essential in making a discernible difference to pre-existing conditions or events (Giddens 1984:9–15).

Hancock (2017:258-260) notes that Giddens' ideas on structure and agency have been employed by peace and conflict resolution scholars as a conceptual

framework to highlight the potential of agency in post-liberal peacebuilding debates. While defining agency as "the power of actors to operate independently of the determining constraints of social structure", scholars critical of liberal peace who adhere to this definition emphasise the significance of agency as a previously overlooked element in local peacebuilding practices. This renewed focus on agency underscores its importance in shaping and driving peacebuilding efforts beyond the limitations imposed by existing social structures.

Notably, Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013) present '*local agency*' as a key concept supporting the '*local turn*' in research focus. Underlying their emphasis on 'agency' are criticisms of conventional liberal peace approaches. They claim that the '*local turn*' affords an effective reconstruction of emancipation through everyday activities, where subjects have 'agency'. In this sense, 'local agency', seen as 'limited and subaltern', becomes imbued with significant social legitimacy from the everyday practice perspective. From a philosophical and theoretical perspective, agency is regarded as a local actor's capacity to 'confront governmental and structural power' which strives to co-opt or countermand its imperative (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013: 770). In a similar vein, Richmond (2011) argues that through resistance and critical subjectivity, post-colonial civil society can challenge the authority of the state and international organisations, thereby brokering new hybrid forms of peace. Mac Ginty (2011:2012) asserts that resistance is not necessarily manifested as violent rebellion, but can take on subtle everyday forms, such as acts of civil disobedience or tactics such as 'waiting', 'delaying', or 'postponing' participation/engagement.

In addition to discussions on agency centred around civil society, there is also debate regarding whether the state itself can possess agency. D. J. Kim and Y. Chung assert,

“[that] the state is not only a structure that interacts with citizens, but as long as individual citizens within the nation share a collective understanding of the concept of the state, the government can act as a collective agency”. (D. J. Kim and Y. Chung 2022:6)

Using the example of inter-Korean relations, D. J. Kim & Y. Chung (2022) argue that despite the structured division, civil society has contributed to creating ‘niche spaces’ for contact between North and South Korean residents; however, they also contend that the government can also act as an oppositional agent, undermining these ‘spaces’ by prioritising national-level concerns.

Contributions and Critiques

Hence, ‘structuration theory’ acts as a prism, illuminating the ongoing structuration process by refracting the interplay of structure–agency dynamics, by not exaggerating structural aspects nor underestimating the active role of agents in creating and reproducing these structures. In addition, this theory presents the possibility of transformation in deeply divided societies by emphasising the role of creative agents with an appetite for change, who remained ambiguous or hidden within the framework of societal structures which were viewed as unchangeable or static (Liviatan 2015:87).

Despite being lauded for presenting a constructive resolution of core dilemmas within social theory through structuration theory (Browne 1993:148) and for inspiring much of the peace and conflict resolution literature, Giddens's work has been subject to criticism. A major issue is that Giddens' concept of agency-structure has not clearly explained how agency and structure are actually related in practice (Browne 1993; O'Boyle 2013). More specifically, this theory has not sufficiently explained how system reproduction aligns with processes that are both constituted by and not merely reducible to practices of agents (Browne 1993:147–148). Critics argue that while systems may be shaped by individual practices, they also have qualities and dynamics that cannot be fully understood just by examining the actions of individuals.

The issue of the ambiguity in the relation between structure and agency can arguably be reconciled by adopting the following conceptual frameworks, which have paid more attention to the role of agency under the duality of structure: e.g., the so-called '*middle-out approach*' presented by Lederach; or the civil society spaces approach proposed by Brewer et al. First, however, an analysis of 'Contact Theory' and of the Functional approach to the role of civil society is necessary to set the context for such an examination.

2.2. Contact Theory

Allport's '*contact hypothesis*' (Allport 1954) is considered one of the most influential and long-standing theories on reducing prejudice through contact (Lytle, 2018: 1). Allport (1954:xvii, 281–282) argued that prejudice, formed and maintained by complex factors, is as difficult to break down as atoms.

However, Allport maintained that it can ultimately be overcome, and claimed that '*intergroup contact*' could be one of the most effective ways of addressing prejudice. Under appropriate conditions, and through the establishment of common goals, intergroup cooperation, and the promotion of equal status between groups, coupled with institutional support, attitudes towards outsider groups can improve as experiences and contact with those groups become more frequent (Allport 1954; Pettigrew 1998).

Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) meta-analysis reaffirmed Allport's hypothesis that contact between members of conflicting groups generally reduces intergroup prejudice. Their analysis of 515 studies (involving 713 independent samples) revealed that the positive effects of contact tend to increase when Allport's optimal conditions are more fully realised (Pettigrew & Tropp 2006:751). Furthermore, Pettigrew & Tropp (2006:766–767) noted that even in the absence of some of these optimal conditions, increased contact alone led to a reduction in prejudice. Lytle (2018:9–10) also observed that various forms of indirect contact, such as *extended contact* (knowing that members of one's own group have friendships with members of another group), *vicarious contact* (observing interactions between groups through the media), and *imagined contact* (imagining positive interactions with conflict opponents), can also foster more positive attitudes. Pettigrew and Tropp (2006:766) therefore argued that Allport's optimal conditions should be understood as facilitating measures rather than necessary conditions for positive outcomes. Moreover, *reduction of uncertainty* was identified as a key mechanism by which increased contact reduces prejudice, when

conjoined with the alleviation of negative emotions such as anxiety or fear of threat.

Contributions and Critiques

Critical perspectives on Allport and subsequent research acknowledge the theoretical premises of the contact hypothesis, while arguing that its emphasis on ideal contact situations and its focus on individualised responses and actions, while neglecting structural issues (Zuma 2014; Hughes 2018), limit its practical applicability (Dixon, Durrheim & Tredoux 2005; Paluck, Green & Green 2019). Correspondingly, Allport's original contact hypothesis has evolved over decades to adopt a more comprehensive perspective now referred to as 'contact theory' (Zuma 2014:40).

Dixon et al. (2005) characterise Allport's contact hypothesis as 'the optimal contact strategy', but argue that its applicability is limited within the prevailing research paradigm. Dixon et al. (2005:697) claim that the dominant tradition of contact research is problematic in three main aspects: 1) it tends to prioritise the study of interactions that take place under highly idealised and uncommon conditions, 2) it reformulates everyday understandings of intergroup contact into a generic typology of idealised dimensions, thereby abstracting from the nuances of ordinary experience, 3) it relies primarily on changes in individual prejudice as the principal outcome measure. As a result, this research tradition often overlooks the harsher realities of protracted intergroup relations and how ordinary people actually experience and interpret contact, which invokes broader socio-political consequences that extend beyond the reduction of personal prejudice. Accordingly, Dixon (2005:708–709) contends that there is a pressing need

for a critical examination of how ordinary individuals understand, enact, and negotiate encounters with out-group members in everyday contexts, rather than an adherence to the kind of utopian framework associated with classical contact theory.

On the latter point, Hughes's study (2018), which critically examines the limitations of contact theory from a peace studies perspective, criticises its foundation in structure-agency theory. Hughes argues that while contact theory may posit the potential for reconciliation, its approach risks overlooking structural issues that perpetuate conflict within societies. According to Hughes (2018: 637–638), by presupposing the primacy of agency over structure, and envisioning individuals as potential agents of change, Allport's contact theory assumes that, under non-hierarchical and non-threatening conditions, and with the mediation of suitably motivated and trained professionals, values and behaviours can be gradually modified between individuals from antagonistic groups. By contrast, Hughes contends that even if shared identities can be constructed in this manner, the applicability of contact theory is limited when segregation is structurally embedded within society. For instance, in a context such as Northern Ireland, segregationist policies necessitate the concurrent dismantling of inherited structural arrangements, something that contact theory cannot by itself resolve.

2.3 A Functional Approach to the Role of Civil Society in Peacebuilding

Any discussion on the role of civil society in peacebuilding generally will include the work of Thania Paffenholz (2010) and her co-author Spurk (2006). Paffenholz's research is regarded as significant because it specifically examines the role of civil society in relation to peacebuilding, rather than merely outlining its broad characteristics (Mac Ginty 2012:281). She categorises the role and importance of civil society according to Richmond's (2005:85–123) classification of peace schools: i.e., the conflict management school, the conflict resolution school, and the conflict transformation school (Paffenholz 2010:56–58). While 'conflict resolution' and 'conflict transformation' schools both recognise the importance of civil society, they diverge on whether the primary actors are external parties or internal actors. Of the two, the conflict transformation school places greater emphasis on the role of civil society as the key to achieving sustainable peace (Paffenholz & Spurk 2006:24).

Seven Functions of Civil Society in Peacebuilding

A comparative research project conducted across thirteen countries led Paffenholz and Spurk to develop a comprehensive framework centred upon seven potential functions of civil society in peacebuilding (Paffenholz & Spurk 2006; Paffenholz 2009; Paffenholz 2010). Drawing on democratic theory, development discourse, and case study knowledge to construct an analytical framework for understanding the role of civil society, specifically in the context of peacebuilding, Paffenholz and Spurk (2006:1) noted that this approach to analysis was fundamentally 'functional' in its orientation.

The seven potential functions of civil society they proposed were: (1) protecting citizens from violence by all parties; (2) monitoring human rights violations and the implementation of peace agreements; (3) advocating for peace and human rights; (4) fostering socialization into the values of peace and democracy and developing in-group identities for marginalized groups; (5) promoting intergroup social cohesion by bringing together hostile groups; (6) facilitating dialogue between various actors at local and national levels; and (7) providing services that create entry points for peacebuilding (Paffenholz & Spurk 2006:13). Subsequently, they concluded that six of these functions are directly applicable to peacebuilding. In terms of the excluded seventh function – service provision – they argued that rather than being viewed as an independent function of civil society, it could be better understood as providing an entry point to social integration and mediation (Paffenholz & Spurk 2006:27–32). While this framework primarily was focused on apprehending the role of civil society, an acknowledged limitation, addressed in her subsequent study (2010), was the need for further research into contextual factors that influence the activities of civil society (Paffenholz & Spurk 2006:33–34).

The Enabling and Disabling Factors in Civil Society Peacebuilding Roles

Paffenholz (2010:405–424) argues that the environment in which civil society operates is determinative when it comes to its fulfilment of a peacebuilding role. Subsequently, she identifies six factors influencing that space: (1) state behaviour, (2) the level of violence, (3) the freedom and role of the press, (4) diversity within civil society, (5) the influence of external political actors, and (6) donor participation. The most decisive of these six

factors are: firstly, state behaviour and, secondly, the level of violence (Paffenholz 2010:423).

In addressing state behaviour, Paffenholz suggests that democratic countries provide civil society with more opportunities to operate effectively. Contrastingly, in states with merely official democratic structures or hereditary power systems with neo-patrimonial characteristics, particularly in conflict-affected regions, the activities of civil society are often hindered or inhibited (Paffenholz 2010:406–9). With regards to the second decisive factor, she argues that higher levels of violence correspondingly decrease the amount of operational space for civil society, further reducing its ability to act (Paffenholz 2010:409–411). Violence can also destroy civil society networks and organisations and cause operational activities and functions to cease completely.

Paffenholz also notes that diversity is important in society, and suggests that increasing polarisation and radicalisation can negatively impact efforts to secure civil society space. Hence, the media plays a vital role in protecting, monitoring, and advocating for civil society. Moreover, the influence of external actors, such as neighbouring powers, along with the characteristics of donors providing financial and technical support to civil society, are also significant factors shaping civil society's role (Paffenholz 2010:411–423).

Empirical findings, in line with Paffenholz's theoretical framework, show that diverse actors drawn from civil society can play a crucial role at various stages of conflict resolution. Although this role is deemed to be secondary to that of political actors, it can make a substantial difference if executed

effectively at the right moment. To summarise, after the end of the Cold War, in response to the failure of numerous diplomatic and peacekeeping efforts, the role of civil society in peacebuilding gradually emerged. Civil society groups have subsequently contributed to the reduction of violence, the achievement of negotiated settlements, and the maintenance of peace following large-scale violence in pronounced conflict situations. However, their role and functions can vary significantly depending on environmental factors and the specific context in which civil society operates. Of particular importance are governmental attitudes towards civil society and the level of violence occurring in the conflict-ridden society (Paffenholz 2010:425–430).

Critiques of the Functional Approach

Paffenholz's functional approach to the role of civil society is widely appreciated and praised as "the most comprehensive and in-depth" research focusing on the relationship between civil society and peacebuilding (Mac Ginty 2012:282). Nevertheless, her study contrasts significantly with Lederach's position (examined in the next section), particularly her view that the role of civil society is one that is secondary or supplementary (Kim 2019:12–15). However, in her follow-up study (2011:138), she acknowledges that her perspective on the relationship between civil society and peacebuilding tends to emphasise the importance of external actors over the internal dynamics of conflict-affected societies. The functional approach to civil society and peacebuilding, influenced by Paffenholz, has faced several further criticisms. First, it has been noted that civil society is often marginalised in top-down peace processes, being limited to implementing agreements reached at higher levels (Farrington 2008a; Paffenholz 2011;

Kim 2021). Second, it has been criticised for legitimising the status quo rather than transforming it (Bendaña 2003). Third, the approach has been described as a tool for promoting liberal peacebuilding agendas associated with capitalist and democratic institutions (Paris 2004), with the inherent bias that goes with that position. Finally, it has been criticised for its inability to advocate for radical social change (Heathershaw 2008).

The following section will explore Lederach's theoretical framework, which promotes the role of civil society as an essential factor in addressing conflict.

2.4 The Middle-out Approach

Considering the nature of contemporary conflicts, occurring in what are characterised as '*deeply divided societies*', Lederach proposes the so-called 'middle-out approach' as a method for achieving sustainable peace. Civil society, the fulcrum of Lederach's approach, is considered a key actor capable of exercising transformative agency in contemporary conflict resolution (Lederach 1997; Lederach 1999; Lederach 2001). He identifies the concept of the "*gap*" as the principal challenge in peacebuilding, which he defines as,

“an inability or insufficiency in our conceptual and practice frameworks that weaken our capacity to sustain a desired process” (Lederach 1999: 29).

Lederach contends that “the most significant challenges to contemporary peacebuilding” are the following three gaps: the '*interdependence gap*', the '*justice gap*', and the '*process-structure gap*' (Lederach 1999: 29). Firstly, the interdependence gap stems from the absence of responsive and

coordinated relationships across different levels of leadership; secondly, the justice gap refers to the disparity between the high expectations for social, economic, religious, and cultural change following peace accords and the actual societal outcomes; and finally, the 'process-structure gap' refers to the conceptual and practical rupture that arises when peace is understood exclusively as either a process or a structure. Lederach employs a river analogy to illustrate his perspective, emphasising that peace ought to be conceived as a 'process-structure', that possesses both fluidity and direction. He maintains that, in practice, following the conclusion of peace agreements, peace is frequently reduced to a rigid, bureaucratic structure, thus marginalising the flexible and adaptive relational processes that are essential for the establishment of an enduring transformation (Lederach 1999:29–35). Civil society, highlighted as a key middle-range actor with "the greatest potential to build the infrastructure for peace", is tasked with bridging these 'gaps' (Lederach 1997:151). Outlined in his 'middle-out' approach, Lederach's society centred peacebuilding strategy categorises conflict societies into three levels of actors: Track I – top leadership, Track II – middle-range leadership, and Track III – grassroots leadership (Lederach 1997:39). In his three-tiered pyramid, Track I includes key political, military, and religious leaders who are highly visible and pursue personal and political ambitions through media exposure. Often entrenched in fixed positions on issues related to conflict, and under pressure to maintain a strong stance, their decisions have high stakes for their careers and goals. Although perceived as wielding significant power and influence, in reality power may be more diffuse, brokered at various levels not necessarily aligned with the top

leaders. Thus, hierarchical representation makes the implementation of peace processes difficult. Second, Track II includes leaders from ethnic or religious groups, academic or intellectual groups, and humanitarian NGOs, not directly linked to official government or major opposition structures. These middle-range leaders are generally connected to wider constituencies and tend to be known to top-level leaders. Their influence comes from ongoing built-up relationships rather than from political or military power, allowing greater flexibility and lower visibility. Additionally, Middle-range leaders often have pre-existing relationships that span conflict lines, which connect them to many influential people in diverse networks. Finally, Track III includes local leaders, indigenous NGO leaders, community developers, local health officials, and refugee camp leaders. Grassroots leaders are likely to be focused on addressing immediate needs such as food, water, shelter, and security for their communities (Lederach 1997:38–43). Lederach labels an approach focused on the role of middle-range leadership in peacebuilding as the ‘middle-out approach’, and distinguishes it from the top-down approach – focused on a small group of top leaders, and the bottom-up approach – driven by local characteristics at the grassroots level. Underpinning Lederach's view that the middle-out approach uniquely holds the greatest potential for sustainable peacebuilding is his analysis of limitations inherent in top-level and grassroots leadership. According to Lederach's assessment, top-level leadership has several weaknesses; firstly, their reliance on publicity and visibility to maintain influence, often centres attention on the leader rather than the issues, thus reinforcing their held position at the cost of constraining flexibility; secondly, their high public

profile forces them to adopt rigid stances on conflict issues, and they try avoid appearing weak by not deviating from their publicly stated positions. Grassroots leadership also is likely to be hampered by the sheer number of people involved and their focus on daily survival, which makes comprehensive long-term peace strategies difficult to implement (Lederach 1997:38–42).

Contrary to these two levels, middle-range civil society leaders are determined by Lederach to be more likely to be known by the top leadership, while also carrying an awareness of suffering and injustices at the grassroots level. Therefore, Lederach claims, they have the potential to bridge interdependence and justice gaps by establishing vertical relationships between top and grassroots levels and the capacity to incorporate social justice into the peacebuilding agenda. Civil society also offers a potential to narrow the process-structure gap in its tendency to form horizontal relationships across the conflict lines. Thus, they are in a decisive position to create platforms for sustained relationship building within a societal ecosystem by applying both vertical and horizontal relationships to bridge the deficiencies inherent in the activities of actors related to Tracks I and III.

In sum, middle-range actors are strategically positioned to maintain connections and earn the trust of both top-level leadership and grassroots leaders. They exhibit greater flexibility in their thinking and actions compared to top-level leaders and are significantly less susceptible to the daily survival challenges faced by those at the grassroots level (Lederach 1997:94). In his subsequent work, Lederach (2005:79–80) rebranded the 'middle-out approach' as the '*web approach*', maintaining the core principles

of his original concept and re-framing the '*strategic networking*' that encompasses multi-level relationships and activities as akin to a spider's web.

Contributions and Critiques

Although widely adopted, Lederach's theory has also faced the following criticisms: 1) a lack of power analysis (Fetherston 2000); 2) an overemphasis on the role of civil society and underemphasis on the role of external actors (Paffenholz 2010:53–55); and 3) insufficient attention given to the political system and regional/international context of the conflict-affected society (Miall 2004).

Specifically criticising the middle-out approach, Paffenholz (2014) argues that Lederach's approach has not been sufficiently challenged, and that there is little empirical evidence to support its theory of change, given its encounter with over 20 years of peacebuilding activity. She asserts that although peacebuilding practitioners have widely acknowledged the importance of Lederach's emphasis on middle-range actors like civil society organisations, this recognition has not translated into the expected peacebuilding results. More specifically, she points out that middle-range actors did not demonstrate the greatest potential for transforming violent conflicts; rather, top-level leaders were found to be the most significant in perpetuating both war and peace. Moreover, numerous examples have shown how the activities of middle-range actors were dependent on the negotiated progress of top-level leadership. Furthermore, in some cases, grassroots initiatives alone have been found to have had a significant impact on localised peacebuilding (Paffenholz 2014: 24).

These criticisms demonstrate that the role of civil society needs to be assessed more specifically within the political and social context in which it is embedded, which in sociological terms means analysing the interplay of structures and agencies. In his comparative analysis of different approaches to peacebuilding, Hancock (2008:233) highlights the importance of unravelling interaction and impact at each level of Lederach's peacebuilding pyramid, arguing that although this is an extremely difficult task, it is nevertheless central to the rigorous study of sustainable peace.

One solution that presents itself is Brewer's sociological approach, which divides peace processes into political and social processes to analyse their recursive relationship and the role of civil society in relation to them. The following section discusses Brewer's sociological approach in detail.

2.5 Strategic Social Spaces of Civil Society

Brewer is credited with providing a comprehensive sociological analysis of peace processes, which challenges any characterisation of peace as simply the absence of conflict, demonstrating effectively that peace processes are dynamic, intricate, varied, and fundamentally fragile (Ganiel et al. 2012).

Attempting to understand the process of peace from a sociological perspective, Brewer (2010: 30-42) argues that the legacy of 'communal violence' embedded within social structures comprehensively influences peace processes. This is often rooted in structural inequalities which are endemic to conflict-ridden societies, observed in cases where apartheid and structural racism become institutionalised forms of discrimination (Brewer

2010: 11-13). Consequently, the issue of violence does not readily recede; even as a peace process advances, it often becomes a critical factor that renders a peace process inherently fragile. This is because violence restricts the scope for compromise between antagonistic parties while exacerbating emotional tensions within society. Furthermore, the peace process itself can generate profound challenges with respect to the existing identities of societal members, eliciting anxiety and fear; hence, 'peace itself can be a problem' (Brewer 2010: 30-36).

The enduring presence of violence, which cannot be easily eradicated, coupled with the inability of a peace process to effectively resolve this issue, and the psychological/ontological uncertainty invoked by the peace process itself, form the backdrop to Brewer's argument. These challenges, Brewer contends, underscore the need for a sociological approach to peacebuilding, particularly one that emphasises the crucial role of civil society in sustaining and legitimising peace (Brewer 2010: 29-43).

Political and Social Peace Processes

Brewer (2010, 2019; Brewer et al. 2011) conceptualises a peace process as a long-term sequence of initiatives and policy measures designed to achieve a durable peace. Within this broad understanding, he distinguishes between political and social dimensions of peacebuilding. Political peace processes, according to Brewer (2010: 200–201), centre on negotiations that lead to formal agreements and on ensuring compliance with governance reforms in the post-conflict phase, thereby contributing to national stability and institutional improvement. In contrast, social peace processes address the

reconstruction of interpersonal and intergroup relations, the renewal of community ties, and processes of reconciliation and healing, while also confronting deeper structural inequalities to promote inclusive and sustainable peace.

According to Brewer (2010: 203), relations between political and social processes are 'recursive', meaning they 'enable and promote one another.' In other words, social peace processes are largely driven by political processes and vice versa, as political agreements address sociological concerns, and the efforts of the state and civil society are combined to create spaces that facilitate the social change necessary for peaceful coexistence. Social measures such as memory work, truth recovery, and emotion management are much more effective following a peace agreement, highlighting the fact that ending violence via the political process is a prerequisite to engagement through a social peace process. Similarly, for the political peace process to be sustainable, the social peace process must progress in tandem. Moreover, successful social peace processes will accommodate civil society and grassroots initiatives to transform individual issues into public concerns, while encouraging ordinary people to acknowledge differences and reflect upon the societal change that is required for peaceful coexistence. Hence, a social peace process complements good governance and ensures the long-term stability of political peace agreements. Moreover, any political peace process resulting from a negotiated settlement/compromise must be accompanied by a strategic social peace process if it is expected to have lasting stability (Brewer 2010: 203; Brewer et al. 2011: 209–210).

Nevertheless, it is important, as Brewer (2019: 276–277) points out, to recognise the differences and tensions that exist between political and social peace processes, particularly about priorities, key actors, and time frames. An overdetermined focus on political peace processes, for example, whereby negotiators are primarily concerned with bringing opposing parties to the negotiating table and establishing functional governance structures and institutions, often leads to a neglect of social change. Additionally, when political peace processes focus on nation-building, the responsibility for peacebuilding tends to rest solely with governments and political actors. Recognising the need for a social peace process, however, shifts this responsibility to involve a wider range of actors, drawn especially from civil society. Finally, objectives such as the establishment of governance structures can be achieved by political peace processes over a relatively short term, whereas social reconciliation is necessarily a long-term process requiring more time and patience.

In practical terms, according to Brewer (2010: 203–204), political agreements led by negotiating parties are often concluded before the restoration of social relations, with most peace processes concluding in accords negotiated by an elite group with limited scope for a convergence of opinions drawn from the grassroots. Typically, there is little room for a social peace process during the pre-agreement/accord phase. Moreover, consolidating a social peace process is a much more difficult exercise than achieving a political agreement. As a result, people can often feel frustrated and disappointed by the outcomes of peace agreements. Peace processes must therefore incorporate both political and social dimensions, employing both

top-down and bottom-up approaches, if they are to be successful. This is because political compromises negotiated by an elite cannot be sustained in the long term without policy initiatives aimed at social reconciliation and wider engagement. Because social peace processes are more likely to succeed when managed at all three levels: the state, civil society, and at the grassroots, these constituents must take responsibility for addressing social peace objectives that lie within their own spheres of influence (Brewer 2010: 504–505).

Strategic Social Spaces of Civil Society in Peacebuilding

At the core of Brewer's sociological understanding of the peace process (outlined above) lies a pronounced conceptualisation of civil society:

"Civil society is a key actor in peace-making. Civil society refers to institutions and organisations that mediate between the state and the grassroots, such as NGOs, churches, trade unions, universities, businesses, charities, and the like. These organisations promote peace-making by harnessing grassroots enthusiasm for peace and deploying civil society's wealth of skills, resources, and international networks to advance peace". (Brewer 2010: 31)

In situations where communal violence persists both before and after peace negotiations, Brewer (2010: 46) insists that civil society must go beyond merely implementing changes in governance, along with economic and legal reforms. He argues that it must embrace fundamental social change and work

to resolve deep structural divisions to become an agent of change, as this is essential for achieving lasting peace.

Brewer, with his co-authors Higgins and Teeney, identify four ‘strategic social spaces’ where civil society can actively engage in peacebuilding (Brewer, Higgins & Teeney 2010: 1024–1025; Brewer et al. 2010: 55–66; Brewer 2022: 503–505). Moreover, Brewer (2010: 55) argues that using the term ‘space’ is an effective way to simplify and explain the diverse and complex role that civil society plays in any peace process. These spaces are understood to encompass not only physical locations and infrastructures, but also the ideas, values, practices, and beliefs that influence and shape civil society’s impact on the broader society (Brewer et al. 2011: 126–127). In this sense, four key strategic social spaces are proposed, where progressive civil society can usefully engage to advocate for positive peace: intellectual spaces, institutional spaces, market spaces, and shared political spaces (Brewer et al. 2011: 133).

Intellectual spaces – this serves as a platform for considering alternative ideas and envisioning peace. When civil society organisations turn private troubles into public issues, they play a crucial role in reframing the terms of a conflict so that solutions can be more easily considered, identifying issues that need to be addressed by advocating for alternative visions (Brewer et al. 2011: 133). According to Brewer et al. (2010: 1025), civil society can use intellectual spaces to transcend and even end conflicts by rethinking the terms that give rise to them and clarifying the scope of the problems that must be resolved. Brewer cites the intellectual spaces created by Catholic clubs in communist Poland, through which a new Poland was imagined. The Catholic

Church promoted an independent intellectual movement using a human rights discourse to oppose the presiding government's constitutional amendments, a movement that was unimaginable at the time.

Institutional spaces – this is where civil society organisations at both local and global levels implement the alternative ideas developed intellectually in practice. These organisations act as role models and catalysts for change and become an embodiment of a vision of peace, while civil society, through its activities, traverses the boundaries that typically separate people. Often, these organisations practice or hold principles such as non-racism or non-sectarianism long before others adopt them (Brewer et al. 2011: 133–134). Brewer et al. (2010: 1027) highlight the ecumenical efforts of religious organisations in Northern Ireland during the 'Troubles', where many churches engaged in non-sectarianism, ecumenical dialogue, new forms of common liturgy, and interfaith activities that challenged entrenched divisions between Catholics and Protestants.

Market spaces – this is the arena where civil society organisations utilise cultural, social, and material resources drawn from local and global civic networks. In this space, they mobilise and articulate alternative visions, turning them into policy issues within the public sphere, both nationally and internationally. It is referred to as 'market spaces' because civil society, in this realm, deploys resources such as labour, finance, education, and networks to advance alternative visions of peace through advocacy campaigns (Brewer et al. 2011: 134). Brewer et al. (2010: 1024–1028) describe how in Northern Ireland, church-based involvement in social justice has been realised through a range of social action programmes. These

initiatives illustrate how the religious organisations operate within market spaces, utilising resources to address issues such as employment, security, poverty, and family life, or providing young people with a sense of ownership and engaging them in positive activities, which fosters constructive rather than destructive behaviour as a practical means of reducing violence. A further example of this is the role undertaken by the Catholic Church in Colombia, whereby local churches provided basic social services, such as education and health care, and alternative welfare systems. Importantly, the Church also supported civil society efforts to promote change amidst the conflict (Brewer et al. 2011: 142–145).

Political spaces – this is where civil society organisations interact directly with the political process, assisting in peace negotiations and/or acting as back channels for communication. In these spaces, civil society can participate directly in negotiations or indirectly by highlighting the policy dilemmas that negotiators must address. This space can also be used to promote political negotiations domestically, to leverage diaspora networks that can pressure domestic governments and policymakers to engage in dialogue or to internationalise the negotiations by advocating for the involvement of third parties and neutral mediators (Brewer et al. 2011: 134). A notable relevant example relates to Northern Ireland, when church groups and leaders organised secret meetings with politicians before the commencement of the peace process and then participated in independent committees during the demilitarisation stage following the negotiated peace accord (Brewer et al. 2010: 1025–1029).

Brewer argues that this conceptual spatial framework is a significant development, in that it simplifies the diverse and complex roles played by civil society without idealising them (Brewer 2010: 55–67). It is important to note, however, that Brewer does not imply that these four spaces develop sequentially, nor does the concept provide a means of evaluating the quality of the peace process within each space. Rather, depending on the broader political context, when civil society assumes a peacebuilding role, the nature of the relationship between the state and civil society is said to either constrain or facilitate civil society's activities within each space (Brewer et al. 2010: 1029–1030; Brewer 2022: 504–505). The following section expands on Brewer's argument that state–civil society relations influence both the opportunities and limitations of civil society space.

State-Civil Society Relations and Their Impact on Strategic Social Spaces of Civil Society

In the previous section, the multifaceted role of civil society in peacebuilding efforts was examined through the concept of strategic social spaces through which civil society was engaged during peace processes. Using the example of the contribution of religious leaders during the Northern Ireland peace process, Brewer et al. presented how the broader framework of state-civil society relations created both opportunities and constraints for this contribution (Brewer, Higgins & Teeney 2011:125). Church-state relations, elaborated as a ‘church–civil society–state matrix’ in Brewer’s recent work (Brewer 2022:502), manifest with two key determinants: firstly, whether they are conducted from a majority or minority social and political position; and

secondly, whether religious group interventions are acknowledged officially or unofficially (Brewer et al. 2011:149).

In Brewer's view (2010:65–66; 2022:504), the minority or majority status of churches greatly influences their level and form of engagement, particularly as majority religions are often connected to state apparatus or reflect dominant group culture and are acknowledged as established churches. A majority status can provide easier political access due to established positions of influence and greater resources, which in turn offer potential opportunities to act as powerful agents during a peace process, when a privileged status can be leveraged. Nevertheless, a fear of alienating the church congregation or community may also limit the ability of religious leaders to take critical stances. Often driven by political interests rather than genuine peace efforts, majority status is rarely used proactively for peace processes, especially as a tendency to align with the status quo can entrench societal division. In contrast, minority status offers several advantages, as it facilitates intellectual and cultural challenges, enhances a critique of social relations, fosters empathy with other minority communities, and motivates the effort for peace because of feelings of marginalisation. However, the drawbacks of minority status include limited material and cultural resources, restricted social capital, a lack of acknowledged legitimacy, a low political profile, and potential hostility from majority or rival church members. Hence, access to essential resources for peace work can often be difficult for these designated groups.

Additionally, Brewer (2022:505) distinguishes between official and unofficial interventions, asserting that churches have generally been slow to

develop official engagement policies. This has controversially often placed them at the forefront of unofficial religious peacemaking efforts during periods of severe violence. According to Brewer and his co-authors (Brewer et al. 2011:159–166), official interventions, often endorsed by the institutional church, provide legitimacy and access to resources, but they can also be constrained by conservative hierarchies and political considerations. A cautious approach inhibited by these constraints can limit the effectiveness of these groups in addressing injustice and oppression. That said, unofficial interventions, typically those undertaken by religious organisations that avoid state repression or hierarchical constraints, offer flexibility and the opportunity to take risks. This is often necessary during periods of intense conflict, and allows individual or small cohorts of peacemakers to engage in groundbreaking activities without formal institutional backing. However, this can come with significant drawbacks. Without official endorsement, peacemakers face substantial personal risks, and their activities can easily be dismissed, which can also lead to psychological strain and feelings of abandonment. Despite these challenges, unofficial interventions can still play a crucial role in peacebuilding by enabling secret and semi-official activities and communications that allow for considerable progress in negotiations and conflict resolution, as long as consideration is given to the reputation and image of institutional supporters.

Emphasising the state-side factors in government-civil society relations

Steen-Johnsen (2017) expands upon the role of state-civil society relations in affecting civil society's roles in peacebuilding, particularly within the context

of authoritarian and semi-authoritarian societies. Acknowledging the contribution made by Brewer et al.'s framework, she argues that civil society access to strategic social spaces is mediated and determined by state-civil society relations, hence, she emphasises apprehending interaction between civil society organisations within a political context (Steen-Johnsen 2017:34). Steen-Johnsen argues that with political systems with authoritarian characteristics, more attention should be given to the political strategies employed by state authorities to regulate civil society, rather than solely focusing on the character of civil society itself (Steen-Johnsen 2017:52-55). Bringing state-religion relations to the forefront, and identifying them as central to understanding the role of religion in peacebuilding (Steen-Johnsen 2017:34–36), she criticises Brewer et al., noting that while they acknowledge the mediated nature of state-religious relationships, they do not fully explore how state policies influence and, to an extent, determine religious peace initiatives. As a result, the state's political-religious interactions are under-analysed and the practices through which these interactions are enacted receive less attention.

Steen-Johnsen focuses on the concept of 'political strategies', whereby state authorities "open or close opportunities for religious peacemakers", while regulating the behaviour of civil and religious societies (Steen-Johnsen 2017:3). These strategies, she argues, vary across different political contexts and evolve. In authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes, state policies differ significantly from those in liberal democracies, with some encouraging critical viewpoints and others suppressing them. The nature of these relationships is therefore shaped by each specific political context, including

ethno-political agendas and adaptations to authoritarian governance, exemplified and evidenced by the case of Ethiopia (Steen-Johnsen 2017:3–4).

One of the key features of 'political strategy', according to Steen-Johnsen (2017:16), is its inclusion not only of the formal laws and policies that govern the civil and religious spheres, but also more subtle forms of control and coercion. Using Ethiopia as a case study (Steen-Johnsen 2017:101–104), she highlights 'securitisation' policies, whereby inter-religious antagonism is sometimes framed as a security issue to justify state intervention. Informal strategies, such as the use of security forces and the media to instil fear and compliance, also play a role. Thus, apprehension of political strategies requires an examination of both formal and informal mechanisms of control within state-civil society interactions. Steen-Johnsen argues that authoritarian regimes use subtle political strategies to restrict the role of religious actors in peacebuilding. She contends that understanding such tactics is crucial to recognising how states intervene to curtail the capacity of civil society to engage meaningfully in a peace process (Steen-Johnsen 2017:95).

In summary, Steen-Johnsen's revised framework integrates the political strategies employed by state authorities to regulate civil and religious societies, and emphasises their significant role in shaping the opportunities available to religious peacebuilders. While Brewer et al.'s original framework situates religious peacebuilding within the broader context of religion, civil society, and state relations—focusing on factors such as the majority or minority status of religious groups and the official or unofficial

nature of peace initiatives—Steen-Johnsen argues that state-civil society interactions play an equally critical role, with a particular emphasis on the state's influence in shaping these dynamics. Using Ethiopia as a case study, she highlights how political authorities exercise subtle control over religious actors, even while officially denying interference. This underlines the need to examine both formal policies and informal mechanisms of control to fully understand the dynamics of religiously affiliated peacebuilding (Steen-Johnsen 2017:174–176)

Contributions and Critiques

John Brewer's work is generally lauded for its pioneering sociological analysis of peace processes from a comparative perspective, in particular for presenting and theorising social peace processes as opposed to political peace processes – the ‘*good governance*’ approach (Ganiel et al. 2012; D. J. Kim 2019; J. S. Hwang 2021). Ganiel notes that Brewer acknowledges the importance of good governance, while pointing out its limitations in addressing everyday social interactions, and correctly recommends that sustainable peace requires a consideration of both political and social dimensions (Ganiel et al. 2012:159). Echoing Brewer's diagnosis that contemporary peace processes are fragile and are often reduced to government reform, Kim notes that local realities and socio-cultural issues, and can often lead to communal violence and resistance due to one-size-fits-all Western prescriptions (D. J. Kim 2019:5). In line with the assessments of the previous two scholars, J. S. Hwang suggests that more attention should be paid to the social structures that support ‘spoilers’ of the peace process,

while focusing more on long-term responses through peaceful means as advocated by Brewer (J. S. Hwang 2021:113).

Although Brewer's arguments are largely considered to be valid, his approach is not without its controversy. Siniša Malešević (Ganiel et al. 2012:162) expresses concern that Brewer takes an over optimistic view of the role of civil society in peacemaking, even when acknowledging its darker side. This is grounded in historical evidence that civil society can sometimes exacerbate conflicts rather than resolve them. In a more fundamental sense, as previously discussed, Brewer et al.'s significant contribution to the discourse on religious actors and peace lies in their argument that strategic social spaces are influenced by state-civil society relations. However, as Steen-Johnsen (2017:34–36), modifying Brewer et al, contends that the qualitative nature of the state (i.e., democratic vs. authoritarian forms of governance) can determine whether state policies have a greater or lesser impact upon civil society actors, and create or deny opportunities for agency. Steen-Johnsen's analysis complements Brewer et al.'s framework by emphasising that state politics significantly affect religiously affiliated peacebuilding opportunities, particularly in the context of an authoritarian or semi-authoritarian state, a point Brewer himself acknowledges in his follow-up research (Brewer 2022:505).

Consequently, and necessarily, this overarching theoretical framework requires further elaboration through additional case studies and specific research focused on factors which influence civil society's role as a key driver of sustainable peace. In this regard, this thesis's analysis of the peacebuilding

activities of Korean NGOs and the impact of government-civil society relations within the context of the inter-Korean relations provides an opportunity to assess the validity of Brewer et al.'s theoretical framework within the Korean context and propose potential refinements.

2.6 An Analytical Framework

To conclude, the implications of the aforementioned three theoretical frameworks for analysing the inter-Korean relations can be summarised as follows.

Firstly, in applying Giddens' theory of structuration to peacebuilding, particularly when addressing the question of how local agents exercise their agency in initiating and sustaining relationship-building within the seemingly unchangeable structure of protracted conflict (D. J. Kim and Y. Chung 2022:1–2), Brewer et al.'s conceptual framework of strategic social spaces of civil society offers valuable insights. This framework moves beyond viewing civil society spaces purely through the lens of 'actors' agency'; instead, it situates them within the context of state-civil society relations, highlighting how these spaces are shaped by both opportunities and constraints within specific conflict settings.

Secondly, the theoretical perspective of contact, first articulated by Allport and progressively elaborated upon later, underpins the rationale for why IKEC holds particular significance in the pursuit of lasting peace between North and South Korea. These exchanges constitute the sole legitimate space in which ordinary South Korean citizens have been able to engage directly with their North Korean counterparts. Within the context of the Korean peace

process, therefore, the framework of contact theory provides a valuable lens through which to examine how IKEC is connected to peacebuilding.

Thirdly, Brewer's theory of civil society space both cements and complements Lederach's middle-out approach. While Lederach's framework is widely acknowledged for its emphasis on the importance and potential of civil society beyond state-centric and negotiated settlement approaches, it has been criticised for romanticising civil society and lacking contextual nuance. Brewer addresses this criticism by distinguishing between political and civil society peace processes, clarifying the roles of civil society in each, and re-evaluating opportunities and limitations from the perspective of state-civil society relations. This enhances and strengthens Lederach's framework and provides a more comprehensive understanding of civil society's role in peacebuilding.

Lastly, it has been noted that Brewer's framework of state-civil society relations, which impacts the opportunities and constraints of civil society space, must consider the varying characteristics of different countries. Steen-Johansen's subsequent research demonstrates that in authoritarian or semi-authoritarian states, political strategies can constrain civil society roles through both formal and subtle informal means. Therefore, the variables of state-civil society relations should be further developed and refined through diverse country-specific case studies.

In light of these considerations, this chapter seeks to propose an analytical framework for examining the roles played by CSOs amidst political transitions, how these roles have contributed to political and societal peace

processes within South Korea, and the factors—arising from the context of government–civil society relations³—that have either enabled or constrained CSO engagement. To this end, the analysis will primarily draw upon Brewer et al.’s theory of the strategic spaces of civil society, while also incorporating Steen-Johnsen’s revised model to address the dynamics of state–civil society relations.

Using Brewer's theoretical framework, which defines the role of civil society as a 'strategic social space' and categorises it into four spaces—intellectual, institutional, market, and political—this paper examines the role of Korean CSOs in sustaining exchange and cooperation.

At this point, it is necessary to clarify the definitions of the terms ‘role’, ‘function’, and ‘space’. Although the authors of the aforementioned theoretical frameworks employ these terms with slightly varying connotations—making it difficult to identify a clear-cut distinction—certain conceptual boundaries can be drawn. For instance, Paffenholz and Spurk (2006:27–32) use ‘role’ to denote the general significance or contribution of civil society, whilst employing ‘function’ as a categorical concept for the specific activities that civil society contributes to the peacebuilding process.

³ Although the terms ‘government’ and ‘state’ are not synonymous, it is customary to distinguish the state as a permanent juridical entity within the international legal order, while the government is understood as a temporary, legally coercive organisation responsible for collective decision-making and enforcement (Robinson 2022:167–168). In view of this, this thesis adopts the term ‘government–civil society relations’ in place of ‘state–civil society relations’, as the analysis is conducted with reference to each successive South Korean government.

In a similar vein, Lederach (1997:46–50) conceptualises ‘role’ as the status or identity adopted by actors in conflict situations—such as educators, advocates, and mediators—whereas ‘function’ refers to the practical tasks and activities undertaken for peacebuilding, including relationship building, problem-solving workshops, and prejudice reduction education.

In contrast, in exploring the role of civil society, Brewer (2013: 55–64) focuses more on the concept of 'spaces' as a social domain rather than on the distinction between 'role' and 'function.' More specifically, through the concept of 'spaces,' he appears to proffer a means of simplifying the diverse and complex roles performed by civil society while simultaneously encapsulating the social contexts in which these roles operate. Indeed, as previously noted by Brewer et al. (2011: 126–127), spaces are not limited to physical locations; rather, they represent a conceptual domain defined by distinct ideologies, values, and interpretive frameworks regarding the social world.

Synthesising these discussions, this study employs the term 'role' to comprehensively denote the broad contributions of civil society within the peacebuilding process, while 'function' is utilised to specify the concrete tasks of individual actors. Within the context of IKEC, 'function' refers to specific operational tasks, such as serving as a direct or indirect communication channel with the DPRK partners in lieu of the government, or acting as a cultural interpreter between North and South Korean officials. Conversely, 'role' is conceptualised through the lens of 'spaces,' serving as an overarching framework to categorise the diverse contributions made by civil society to the broader peacebuilding trajectory of IKEC.

In this regard, this thesis applies Brewer's four spatial concepts within the context of inter-Korean exchange and cooperation, as outlined below:

- **Intellectual spaces:** The core of intellectual spaces lies in presenting alternative ideas that were previously absent. It encompasses activities related to the conception and realisation of new ideas, such as redefining North Korea as a partner for exchange or exploring the challenges and tasks involved in inter-Korean exchange and cooperation.
- **Institutional spaces:** This involves activities at the CSO level aimed at putting the alternative ideas identified in intellectual spaces into practice and establishing them as norms and core operations of the organisation.
- **Market spaces:** CSOs invest human and material resources, including funding sourced independently or from government support, in initiatives such as aid to North Korea, as well as in social and cultural exchange projects. These activities extend beyond the scope of civic groups, often involving networks with North Korea or the international community.
- **Political spaces:** This refers to the influence of CSO activities on government-led political arenas, including the establishment or modification of policies, laws, and systems related to inter-Korean exchange and cooperation, dialogue between North and South Korean authorities, and engagements with policymakers involved in these processes.

Meanwhile, the concept of political and social peace processes, as defined by Brewer, also needs to be redefined within the scope of this study. He defines political peace processes as 'a process of negotiation that culminates in an agreement to regulate compliance with good governance reforms in the post-conflict phase'. He then defines the social peace process as being 'concerned with the restoration and reconstruction of social relations, reconciliation between individuals and groups, the restoration of community and social bonds, and social and personal healing' (Brewer, 2010: 200–201). Based on this conceptual definition, this study is focused on the process of inter-Korean exchange and cooperation. However, it has been necessary to narrow the scope of this study, considering that it focuses on the government and civil society within South Korea, and that inter-Korean relations have not yet entered a formal peace process involving the conclusion of a peace agreement. Taking these points into consideration, this thesis uses the term 'political peace process' to refer to 'the process of establishing and implementing policies, laws, and institutions related to inter-Korean exchange and cooperation, as well as the process of dialogue between South and North Korea'. The term 'social peace process' will refer to 'the process of building overall relations, including improving South Korea's society's perception of North Korea as a partner in exchange and cooperation'.

Additionally, this thesis will examine how these dynamics have influenced the opportunities and constraints faced by CSOs in the process of exchange and cooperation between North and South Korea. In analysing the factors that shaped these opportunities and constraints, Brewer et al.'s framework of state-civil society relations and the revised theoretical framework proposed

by Steen-Johnsen will be comprehensively considered. Through this analysis, we will determine which factors exerted a greater influence throughout the history of North-South Korean relations. Furthermore, we will assess the applicability of concepts such as 'political strategy' and 'subtle control,' as explained by Steen-Johnsen, in relation to forms of government intervention. Moreover, the context of government-civil society relations that shaped the role of South Korean CSOs in IKEC will be analysed, along with how these relations influenced the activities of CSOs. With this in mind, the next chapter first explores the historical context of inter-Korean exchange and cooperation, followed by an examination of the policies of successive South Korean governments and the activities of CSOs in relation to inter-Korean exchange and cooperation.

Chapter 3. Research Methodology

The primary research objective of this thesis is to examine how CSOs have influenced sustainable peacebuilding through IKEC, focusing particularly on non-numeric data such as the experiences of government officials and CSO representatives. In essence, this research aims to conduct an in-depth investigation into the role of CSOs, with the intention of moving beyond the limitations inherent in conventional, government-led approaches to inter-Korean relations. Accordingly, a qualitative methodology has been selected, as it is well-suited to examining the meanings and processes underlying social phenomena (Lamont 2015:95).

Typically, in terms of qualitative research data collection methods, this study employs a review of relevant literature alongside interviews with CSO practitioners and government officials who have been involved in IKEC projects. Thematic analysis, which is widely recognised as ‘a foundational method for qualitative analysis’ (Braun & Clarke 2006:78), has been employed to engage fruitfully with collated primary and secondary data. The following sections elaborate on the research design, research ethics, strategies for mitigating bias, and the limitations of this study.

3.1 Research Design

This section presents the methods of data collection and analysis employed throughout this thesis. The former includes secondary source material in the form of literature reviews and desk research, and primary source material, e.g., interviews. Thematic analysis has been used throughout to extract

relevant material that can usefully be constructed into an evidence base that critically engages with the argument of this thesis.

3.1.1 Data Collection

Principal methods of data collection employed throughout this study have included a comprehensive review of relevant existing literature and accessing primary data sources maintained by governmental bodies, national research institutions, and CSOs engaged in IKEC projects. The literature review was further extended to secondary sources, including scholarly journals pertinent to peacebuilding and inter-Korean civic exchange, as well as materials presented at both domestic and international seminars.

Primary data comprised materials held by government and state-run research institutions, publicly accessible legal information, and relevant statistical data. The government data set included annual white papers on ‘Unification’, published by the Ministry of Unification from the Kim Dae-jung administration through to the Moon Jae-in administration, as well as intermittently published White Papers on the Inter-Korean Cooperation Fund (hereafter IKCF). The data set was further supplemented by reports commissioned by the Ministry of Unification (as listed on PRISM—the Public Sector Information Management System, the South Korean government’s online platform for managing and disclosing public policy and budget information), as well as statistics relating to IKEC, the IKCF, and

inter-Korean dialogue, all of which are publicly available via the Ministry of Unification's official website.⁴

Certain data, no longer accessible through public records, owing to the expiration of the statutory retention period, was obtained by submitting formal requests for information disclosure to the Ministry of Unification. These included records of the amounts of humanitarian assistance to the DPRK by each successive South Korean administration, statistics on the number of individuals travelling between the two Koreas for aid work and socio-cultural exchange and cooperation projects, as well as data on government approval of private organisations designated to engage in humanitarian aid and the authorisation of socio-cultural projects by each successive government. Additionally, data sourced from national research institutes included research reports on IKEC, periodic issue reports published by the Korea Institute for National Unification (hereafter KINU) and the Korea Development Institute (KDI), as well as statistical data on the Inter-Korean Cooperation Fund (IKCF) provided by the Export-Import Bank of Korea. Beyond the interview data, the aforementioned primary data served to substantiate the quantitative indicators regarding the scope and level of CSOs's involvement in IKEC initiatives across different South Korean administrations. In particular, the empirical trends presented in Chapter 4—specifically those concerning the fluctuating scale of inter-Korean aid, the volume of assistance diverted through CSOs, and the trends in the number of '*designated private organisations*' by the Ministry of Unification were

⁴ https://www.unikorea.go.kr/eng_unikorea/

utilised to visually demonstrate the stark contrasts in government-CSO relations.

Thanks to extensive experience in public service, this author had privileged access to official publications and research materials produced by government ministries, including the Ministry of Unification. The author's prior familiarity with catalogues and lists of official documents and publications issued by such government bodies was a distinct advantage. However, the author was also aware of the inherent limitations of official documents and the need to critically scrutinise their veracity. Given Lamont's (2015:99–100) observation that official reports published by specific government agencies have sometimes been shown to contain unreliable historical information, official reports and documents from government ministries were used solely to verify objective facts. Any opinion or evaluative content derived from these sources was only incorporated once reliability had been corroborated via triangulation or similar methodological approaches. In this context, triangulation involved checking material through interviews with government officials and CSO representatives, as well as reports from other media outlets. This constituted the main source for cross-verification for data collation.

In addition to official government documents, this study also utilised materials independently held by CSOs. Notably, these included ten-year and twenty-year white papers on humanitarian assistance to the DPRK, published by the KNCCNK. Furthermore, the study drew upon records of activities and reports to supporters made publicly available by individual NGOs engaged

in humanitarian assistance and socio-cultural exchange with the DPRK, as disclosed on their respective websites.

Among these sources, the white papers on humanitarian assistance to the DPRK published by the KNCCNK are of particular significance, as they provide a comprehensive account of the activities of major aid organisations from 1995 to 2015. The value of these documents as historical sources is further enhanced by the fact that KNCCNK is officially recognised as a government partner in the field of humanitarian assistance to the DPRK and serves as an umbrella organisation encompassing most of the key NGOs continuously engaged in such work. As such, these white papers offer an effective means of examining both the scope of CSO involvement in aid to the DPRK and the perspectives of CSOs themselves. It is noteworthy that, while the first ten-year white paper was jointly produced with the Ministry of Unification, the subsequent twenty-year white paper was published independently by KNCCNK (KNCCNK 2015:32). In this regard, the twenty-year white paper exhibits a more critical stance towards government policy, particularly in light of increased governmental control over aid projects and differing views on the modalities of assistance. However, like the government's official publications, the reliability of these white papers was critically examined via triangulation with relevant government documents and interviews with government and CSO participants.

3.1.2 Literature Review

Secondary data used in this thesis included academic discussions on the role of civil society from the perspective of peace studies, as well as the activities of CSOs involved in IKEC. This comprised Korean and international

publications, as well as materials presented at relevant seminars and conferences, focused on DPRK-oriented humanitarian aid and socio-cultural exchange and cooperation projects. Recent growing discussion on the role of civil society reflects a growing recognition of its importance in peace and conflict studies and its need for a more sophisticated theorised accommodation. This discussion is reflected in this thesis's mapping of the theoretical framework established to take into account the role of civil society. Even though there is insufficient research on the IKEC role of CSOs in terms of both quantity and quality, and little progress has been made in researching specific areas of IKEC, a review of existing studies and subsequent analysis has provided valuable insights.

Additionally, this study utilised the 'Unification Survey' conducted by the Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU) and the Unification Attitudes Survey conducted by the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies (IPUS) at Seoul National University, to analyse trends in South Korean public perceptions of North Korea. The KINU survey, conducted intermittently between 1993 and 2005, and the IPUS survey, carried out annually since 2007, represent the work of two institutions, both employing a five-category typology: aid recipient, cooperation partner, competitor, entity to monitor, and adversary, to classify public perceptions of North Korea. Accordingly, this thesis relied on the KINU survey for data up to 2006 and on the Seoul National University survey for data from 2007 onwards.

3.2 Interviews

This section details the interview methodology employed as a core component of the data collection for this thesis:

Although the researcher conducting this study was based in Belfast, all interview participants were located in South Korea. Consequently, every interview for this study was conducted online via the video conferencing platform Zoom. The development of new communication technologies made it possible to conduct online interviews via Zoom, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, at least in Korean society, most people became familiar with such online interviews via Zoom. Even participants in their seventies expressed no discomfort with the online setting. Despite interviews being conducted in a virtual environment, ethical standards, consent procedures, and pre-interview notifications (described later) were not relaxed in any way.

3.2.1 Semi-structured Interview

This thesis chose to employ semi-structured interviews as a method of participant engagement. This format is the most commonly used in qualitative research in the field of International Relations (IR) (Lamont 2015:101). This study used semi-structured interviews because they provided a degree of structure that allowed cross-referencing between participants while enabling the researcher to investigate issues of interest in depth. This approach also avoids the limitations of structured interviews, where pre-selected questions and answer options can restrict the scope of responses and potentially result in important insights being missed (Lamont 2015: 102). A further justification for this methodological choice lies in the interviewees

themselves. The main participants in this research are termed ‘elites’. This follows Lamont (2015: 101), who understood the term in a broad sense to include anyone holding a position of influence or significance within the target organisation, rather than an exclusive sense confined solely to those in senior or executive roles. Accordingly, leaders of civil society organisations and current or former mid- to high-level officials involved in South Korea’s inter-Korean exchange policy, included within this definition of elites, are particularly well-suited to the semi-structured interview format.

From this standpoint, interviews were designed to address the central questions:

1. What roles have CSOs played in inter-Korean relations via IKEC projects from the period of the Kim Dae-jung administration to the Moon Jae-in administration, and how have their roles changed under each administration?
2. How have CSOs contributed to the development of political and social peace processes of South Korea?
3. What factors have promoted or constrained the role of CSOs within the context of government-civil society relations?

Interviews conducted via Zoom video conferencing spanned from July 2023 to February 2024, with each session lasting between one and two hours. This allowed for in-depth discussions on both research questions.

The following recommended guidelines (Lamont 2015:103) were rigorously observed throughout the interview schedule:

Firstly, before each interview, participants were provided with

comprehensive information regarding the aims of the study and the nature of the interview, along with an informed consent form. Participants were explicitly granted the option to remain anonymous, and any requests for anonymity were strictly upheld. A consent form transparently outlined the objectives of the research, the intended use of the interview data, and the measures in place to ensure the confidentiality of participants.

Secondly, the interview questions were designed as semi-structured, in-depth, open-ended prompts to elicit participant insight and perspective. Rather than adhering rigidly to a predetermined sequence of questions, interviews were conducted in a manner that encouraged participants to speak freely and elaborate on issues they deemed significant.

Thirdly, particular care was taken to avoid conveying any sense of approval or disapproval, whether verbally or through body language, during the interviews.

Finally, with the explicit consent of each interviewee, all interviews were meticulously recorded using audio devices to ensure accurate documentation of the discussions.

3.2.2 Sampling Strategy

This thesis employed a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling, both of which are widely used methods of non-probability sampling, characterised by the fact that certain elements of the population have an unknown or unlikely chance of being selected. Unlike probability sampling, where the likelihood of selection is predetermined, non-probability sampling leaves the inclusion of each population member uncertain (Vehovar,

Toepoel & Steinmetz 2016).

Purposive sampling was used to select a small representative group that could focus on specific elements that best address the research question (Rai & Thapa 2015; Devi 2017). This method is known for enhancing the rigour and validity of a study by ensuring that the sample aligns closely with the main aims of the research and its objectives (Campbell et al. 2020:653–654). It is particularly useful in cases where the population is small, offering valuable insights. However, because it relies on the researcher's judgement, potential issues, such as bias or challenges in maintaining the representativeness of the sample, have to be addressed (Rai and Thapa 2015).

Government participants were selected through purposive sampling, in consideration of the following factors. As the pool of government officials responsible for IKEC is relatively limited, the author leveraged personal networks developed over nearly two decades of professional experience within relevant ministries, as well as referrals from initial contacts, to secure access to key informants. To minimise the potential for researcher bias, selection criteria were determined as follows:

1. Participants were chosen to ensure a balanced representation across different administrations, from the Kim Dae-jung government through to the Moon Jae-in administration.
2. A balance was maintained in respect of recruiting senior officials, managers, and working-level practitioners.
3. Given that the Ministry of Unification and the National Security Council in the Presidential Office are the principal decision-making

bodies for IKEC policy, the primary focus was on central government officials with experience in these institutions. However, officials from local governments and related agencies involved in IKEC were also included.

Specifically, out of a total of 27 interviewees, 10 were government officials. Among these, three were senior officials who had served as Ministers of Unification during the three distinct phases defined in this study—namely, the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations, the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administrations, and the Moon Jae-in administration. Some of these individuals had prior experience working at the Presidential Office before their ministerial appointments, or had accumulated substantial knowledge and experience in IKEC through academic or corporate research institutions, either before or after their public service. At the mid-level, seven officials were selected, five of whom were working-level staff in central ministries. Of these, two had experience in humanitarian aid to the DPRK, one in socio-cultural exchange and cooperation, and the remaining two in both areas. Additionally, one practitioner from local government and one from the Inter-Korean Exchange and Cooperation Support Association were selected; all had long-standing responsibilities in assistance to the DPRK and inter-Korean socio-cultural exchange and cooperation projects.

With respect to civil society participants, a snowball sampling technique was employed. Snowball sampling is a widely used non-probability sampling method in qualitative research, particularly valued for its reliance on networking and referrals. The process begins with a small number of initial contacts (seeds) who meet the research criteria and are invited to participate.

These participants are then asked to recommend others who also meet the criteria and may be interested in participating. This referral process continues iteratively until the desired sample size or saturation point is reached (Parker, Scott & Geddes 2019:3)

In the case of CSOs, the sample pool is relatively larger than the government and, due to inter-organisational networks, information about the activities of other organisations is comparatively transparent and frequently shared. Accordingly, in this study, initial contacts were selected from individuals with experience in organisations representative of both assistance to the DPRK and socio-cultural exchange and cooperation projects, respectively – e.g., the Korea NGO Council for Cooperation with North Korea (KNCCNK), and the June 15 South Committee. Further participants were recruited through referrals, according to the following criteria:

1. A minimum of ten years' experience in the aforementioned two fields;
2. Direct engagement with DPRK counterparts in the implementation of IKEC projects;
3. A balanced distribution across both fields of activity.

Based on these criteria, a total of 16 civil society representatives were selected: eight from organisations involved in assistance to the DPRK, five from those engaged in socio-cultural exchange and cooperation, and two with experience in both areas. The socio-cultural exchange and cooperation category included representatives from a diverse range of sectors, such as religion, peace and reunification movements, women's organisations, and academia. In addition, one academic expert on civil exchanges was included, who was also active in a humanitarian aid organisation. (A detailed list of

interviewees is provided in the Appendix.)

3.2.3 Interview Questions

This section presents an overview of the interview questionnaire. The interview questions were structured to distinguish between government officials and CSO (Civil Society Organisation) participants. For both groups, the primary focus of the questions was on the roles played by South Korean CSOs under successive administrations in the context of inter-Korean relations, as well as factors that either facilitated or constrained those roles. While government officials who could be associated with specific administrations were asked to respond from the perspective of NGO observers, by contrast, CSO representatives were asked to reflect upon and assess their own roles, taking into account activities across multiple administrations.

The main areas addressed by the questions included:

- 1) An introduction to the organisation to which the interviewee belonged and their individual role;
- 2) An evaluation of the roles performed by CSOs in inter-Korean relations;
- 3) Differences between CSOs and other actors engaged in similar fields, such as state bodies or international organisations;
- 4) Factors that promoted or restricted the activities of CSOs, and the extent of their influence.

As previously noted, the interview questions were provided to participants in advance. However, in line with the semi-structured nature of the interviews,

the questioning and answering process was conducted flexibly, respecting the duties, roles, and areas of emphasis identified by each interviewee, rather than rigidly adhering to the questionnaire.

The specific questionnaire is presented in Appendix 2.

3.3 Data analysis

Throughout this thesis, thematic analysis was employed to analyse data obtained through interviews. Thematic analysis is widely recognised for offering an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to the analysis of qualitative data (Braun & Clarke 2006:78). Despite criticisms that it lacks explicit rules and proofs and tends to be “much more subjective” (Lamont 2015:97), the rationale for selecting this method, is that it offers the prospect of insightful analysis while affording considerable flexibility in terms of analytic options (Braun and Clarke 2006:96–97). Given the paucity of existing research on CSOs in this field, a flexible yet insightful approach was required in addressing the central research question of this study, regarding the roles CSOs have played in inter-Korean relations.

Although there is neither a universally agreed definition of thematic analysis, nor consensus on its precise procedures, Braun and Clarke view thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke 2006:79), which offers a practical framework adopted by this study. A theme, according to (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas 2013:402) acts as a systematic fusion of varied informational units, distilling core interpretive motifs that offer substantial insight into the underlying inquiries of the study. Consequently, in

identifying themes, analysis was practically grounded in participant responses to interview questions, rather than adhering to or being constrained by pre-existing theoretical frameworks or preconceptions. Moreover, analysis was focused on the relatedness of key themes to the research questions, classifying and interpreting them accordingly (Braun & Clarke 2006:82–83), as opposed to the quantitative frequency of responses.

Given the broad spectrum of approaches to thematic analysis, it is necessary to clarify the methodological orientation of this study. In line with Braun and Clarke's typology (2006:83–85), the analysis adopted here is positioned within an *essentialist* or *realist* paradigm, rather than a *constructionist* one. Analysis was conducted at a semantic level, concentrating on meanings and content explicitly articulated by interviewees, rather than seeking to interpret latent meanings or socio-economic and psycho-cultural backgrounds underpinning their statements.

Regarding the scope of analysis, this study prioritised detailed accounts of specificity (such as the role of CSOs in building inter-Korean relations) over providing a broad, rich description of the diverse roles played by CSOs. Methodologically, the analysis is more theoretical than inductive; rather than being driven solely by the data, it was guided by Brewer's theory of civil society as strategic social spaces. In this respect, coding and interpretation were shaped by theoretical concerns, rather than aiming to exclude the researcher's analytic perspective entirely.

Prior to engaging with the detailed discussion of the thematic analysis employed in this study, it is important to address issues relating to language

and translation. As all interview participants were Korean, the interviews were conducted exclusively in Korean. As the author is a native Korean speaker with a background in Korean culture, there were no substantial obstacles to interpreting the data in its original language. The thematic analysis described below is based entirely on these Korean-language interviews. Once the data analysis was complete, the relevant extracts selected for inclusion in this article were translated into English. Translating Korean interview data into English inevitably presented challenges relating to conceptual equivalence between the two languages, particularly about ensuring the validity of meaning and interpretation (J. Choi et al. 2012:656–657). Given the prevalence of metaphorical expressions in Korean, a meaning-based approach to translation was prioritised over a literal, word-for-word rendering. To guard against potential misinterpretation further, the accuracy of the translations was checked by means of back-translation, as recommended by J. Choi et al. (2012: 659).

The thematic analysis in this study broadly followed the six phases outlined by Braun and Clarke, et. al. (Braun & Clarke 2006:86–93; Nowell et al. 2017):

1. Familiarisation with the data;
2. Generating initial codes;
3. Searching for themes;
4. Reviewing themes;
5. Defining and naming themes; and
6. Producing the report.

However, consistent with Braun and Clarke's guidance (2006:86), these phases were treated as an outline guide rather than a set of rigid rules, and the process was iterative rather than strictly linear.

For the first phase, audio recordings from 27 interviews were transcribed into written texts using Naver ClovaNote. All transcripts were subsequently checked for accuracy. The complete responses or summaries for each interviewee were then organised in Excel, which served as the primary tool for subsequent analysis, as the volume of data was manageable and Excel facilitated an overall view of the dataset. While the use of NVivo was considered, Excel was deemed more suitable for these purposes.

In the second phase, Excel was employed as a supporting software tool to facilitate an efficient and sophisticated coding process (Nowell et al. 2017). By utilising this software to manage and organise the data, the analysis focused on two core questions: the roles of CSOs and the factors that facilitated or constrained those roles. Excerpts that captured the 'keyness' of the interviewees' responses to these two questions were selected and categorised (Braun & Clarke 2006:82). For the excerpts relating to the roles of CSOs, relevant keywords were first extracted from each one. Drawing upon Brewer's theoretical framework of political and social peace processes, the roles were then subdivided into categories of political or social roles. A similar procedure was adopted to analyse facilitating and constraining factors. After extracting the relevant excerpts and keywords, all excerpts were coded as either facilitators or constraints. These categorised excerpts were then sub-classified into three categories of influencer —CSOs, government, and external factors — to highlight the distinct influences operating at each level.

Rather than coding the entire dataset exhaustively, attention was directed to content relevant to these two focal points.

Phases three to five involved selecting and refining the main themes emerging from the initial coding. The roles of CSOs were classified according to three periods reflecting the political orientations of successive governments: the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations, the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administrations, and the Moon Jae-in administration. Within each period, the roles of CSOs and influencing factors were identified as themes.

This study employed a ‘hybrid approach’ to thematic analysis, adhering to the integrative methodology outlined by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006). In the deductive phase, an *a priori* ‘template’ or ‘codebook’ was constructed based on Brewer’s theoretical framework, specifically targeting facilitators and constraints within political and social peace processes, as well as government–civil society interactions. Crucially, while these preliminary codes provided structural guidance, they did not constrain the interpretive process. As transcripts were analysed, inductive codes were assigned to data segments, revealing emergent themes not previously accounted for (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006:88). These newly identified codes either functioned as autonomous categories or served to expand and refine existing codes within the manual. Through this hybrid thematic analysis, the research not only validated Brewer’s theoretical framework but also uncovered novel facilitators and constraints specific to the distinct socio-political context of the Korean Peninsula.

Thematic analysis involved reclassifying excerpts previously coded as political or social processes and grouping those with similar keywords. This process aimed to encompass the range of extracted keywords and to refine and articulate them in a way that captured their breadth and contextual specificity. The final phase culminated in the completion of Chapters 5, 6, and 7 of this thesis. This process was not strictly unidirectional; rather, multiple rounds of refinement were required to clarify and define these themes.

Throughout thematic analysis, particular attention was paid to potential pitfalls identified by Braun and Clarke (2006:95–96), including: failure to analyse (presenting data extracts without substantive analysis or narrative); using data collection questions as themes (rather than identifying themes across the dataset); weak or unconvincing analysis (themes that lack coherence or are overly broad); mismatch between data and analytic claims; mismatch between theory and analytic claims; and lack of methodological and theoretical clarity. In this study, special care was taken to avoid weak or unconvincing analysis, as repeated refinement of themes related to CSO roles tended to increase their level of abstraction, potentially obscuring their substantive content. In accordance with Braun and Clarke's advice (2006:91), the refinement process was halted when further changes ceased to add substantive value. Additionally, in line with their recommendation (2006:92), each theme was evaluated in terms of the story it told in relation to the research questions and the study's overall narrative.

3.4 Research Ethics

This thesis adheres to the research guidelines of Trinity College Dublin (TCD, 2021) and the Guidelines for Ethical Fieldwork Overseas issued by the Development Studies Association of Ireland (Van Bavel et al., 2016). In addition, the ethical practice guidelines established by the Sociological Association of Ireland (SAI, 2003) were followed. Before conducting interviews, the research topic, interview questions, and the interviewee consent form were reviewed and approved by the Religion, Theology and Peace Studies Research Ethics Committee at Trinity College Dublin on 1 July 2023. The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of free and informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality.

To ensure informed consent, participants were provided in advance with a document outlining the research aims and content in detail, as well as information regarding how the interviews would be conducted, recorded, stored, and shared. The researcher's contact details were also included.

In relation to data protection, participants were informed of their rights, including the right to request a copy of the interview, to restrict or object to the processing of their data, to request correction or deletion of inaccurate information, and to request the erasure of their personal data. It was communicated in writing that the data could be provided in a portable format or transferred to another data controller upon request.

Regarding anonymity, participants were explicitly informed that they could choose to remain anonymous, and their preferences were strictly respected throughout the study. For all data where anonymity was requested,

organisational names were replaced with references to the relevant field of activity, and individuals were identified only by randomly assigned numbers, making personal identification impossible. All participants received a consent form regarding their willingness to participate in the interviews, and only those who provided explicit consent were interviewed.

Lamont (2015:73–74) outlines six ethical codes of conduct, including those described above, and emphasises that interviewees must not be exposed to harm, either during the research process or thereafter. In the context of this study, particular care was required as some interviewees were current or former officials of the Ministry of Unification. The author was acutely aware that the research could, albeit unintentionally, be perceived as critical of their professional activities. Accordingly, the author made every effort to maintain a neutral stance throughout the interview process, ensuring that neither explicit nor implicit expressions of personal opinion – whether verbal or non-verbal – were conveyed in response to interviewees’ remarks.

Furthermore, given the sensitive nature of inter-Korean relations, there was a risk that personal views could be subject to criticism from either progressive or conservative administrations. Most current and former officials of the Ministry of Unification who participated in the interviews insisted on strict anonymity. In response, the study took rigorous measures to protect the confidentiality of those participants, ensuring that neither their names nor positions were disclosed, and that no identifying information could be inferred from the interview content.

The author acknowledges that, among the civil society representatives, some previously had interacted with the author in a professional capacity during the author's tenure at the Ministry of Unification, or might do so in the future. To address this, it was clearly communicated that the interviews were conducted solely for academic purposes. Most CSO representatives understood this context and, as a result, expressed their critical perspectives on South Korean government policy towards North Korea and civil society without reservation.

The final ethical requirement identified by Lamont is that research must be conducted independently, free from conflicts of interest and partiality. Although this study received some support from the Korean government, the author remained committed to maintaining a balanced and objective stance throughout the research process. Despite being affiliated with the government, the author adopted a reflexive approach when evaluating the government's role (this will be discussed in subsequent sections). Regarding the use of government-held information, the author refrained from relying on personal networks for data collection, instead obtaining official documents through the government's public information disclosure platform (www.open.go.kr) administered by the Ministry of Justice.

3.5 Overcoming Bias and Research Limitations

Potential biases in the methodology of this study may include the author's long experience in inter-Korean exchange and cooperation and the resulting unintentional biases. These biases may manifest as excessive leniency or

criticism of the government, or excessive criticism or romanticisation of civil society.

Rose and Johnson (2020:432–435) address the mitigation of bias in qualitative research by underscoring the importance of methodological rigour to enhance trustworthiness. They particularly highlight the role of researcher reflexivity, urging scholars to acknowledge their own influence and ontological stance throughout the research process. The authors (2020:435–440) also advocate for the inclusion of diverse perspectives during data collection and analysis, and stress the need for analytic transparency by clearly justifying methodological choices and delineating analytical procedures. Although not always explicitly stated, these strategies—when combined with critical peer review—function to minimise bias and ultimately reinforce the credibility and robustness of qualitative findings.

With regard to the data utilised in this study, the author approached civil society sources and academically published data from an objective, independent position, rather than relying solely on government-published data. This approach helped maintain a more neutral and scholarly stance. Additionally, the process of critical peer review with colleagues who possessed experience in both government and NGO sectors proved instrumental in mitigating potential researcher bias. As Rose and Johnson (2020:443) contend, collaboration with individuals who are methodologically and analytically adept, yet not deeply involved in the research topic or process, can be highly advantageous in qualitative research. Such individuals contribute to the resonance of the research by interrogating

methodological practices, analytical techniques, and the overall clarity of the study, thereby enhancing its trustworthiness.

Hence, in this study, two distinct groups participated in a critical peer review. The first comprised mid-level government officials – specifically, section chiefs from the Ministry of Unification with over a decade of experience – based at Trinity College Dublin’s Belfast campus as visiting scholars or postgraduate students. Regular peer debriefing sessions with these colleagues enabled ongoing critical engagement with the research. The second group consisted of experienced NGO practitioners (not interviewees in this study), who had long-standing involvement in inter-Korean relations. Among them were individuals who were both familiar and unfamiliar with the research topic, which facilitated a multifaceted examination of the study’s arguments and evidence.

Although these peer review processes were informal and involved a relatively small number of participants, the opportunity to receive candid feedback – particularly from colleagues active in the NGO sector – was invaluable. Such engagement helped counterbalance any inclination towards a government-centric perspective, thereby contributing significantly to the objectivity and credibility of the research.

In terms of the methodological limitations of this study, two principal issues warrant consideration. The first pertains to restricted access to DPRK counterparts, who constitute the primary partners for South Korean CSOs. These DPRK partners are typically officials from government or quasi-

governmental organisations. While the central focus of this research is the role of CSOs in inter-Korean relations (specifically, their interactions with the South Korean government), direct engagement with the DPRK counterparts would have delivered a more nuanced and multidimensional understanding of CSO activities. However, given the current near-total suspension of IKEC and the increasingly adversarial situation in inter-Korean relations, as well as the historically passive stance of the DPRK officials towards IKEC, it was deemed infeasible to obtain access to the DPRK stakeholders for this study.

The second limitation lies in the exclusion of grassroots actors within South Korean society. According to Lederach's pyramid model (1997:39), the grassroots represent a crucial layer for understanding the roles of CSOs. Nonetheless, this research has deliberately concentrated on the interaction between CSOs and the government, particularly in relation to factors influencing CSO activities. This focus is justified by previous studies, which have highlighted the highly restricted involvement of ordinary citizens in inter-Korean cooperation, due to the prevailing legal and contextual environment (Jonsson 2006:253; Reed 2009:211). Moreover, given the sensitive nature of their North Korean counterparts, South Korean CSOs have operated in circumstances that limited close engagement with the broader public (E. Lee 2024:148–151). These observations were furthermore corroborated by several interviewees in this study. The dynamics and limitations of interaction between CSOs and the general public in South Korea, thus, remain an area for further research.

Finally, this study does not address the impact of external variables, such as international political factors, on South Korea's inter-Korean cooperation policies. As discussed in Chapter 1, numerous previous studies have identified international political issues, such as the North Korean nuclear question and US–DPRK relations, as key determinants of South Korean policy. While this research does not disregard the influence of such factors, its primary focus is on those domains where the South Korean government has retained a measure of autonomy, in particular, its interactions with CSOs. For example, during the Moon Jae-in administration, even amid the tightening of international sanctions by the UNSC and the worsening nuclear situation, certain forms of civil exchange remained feasible. Thus, this study seeks to examine how government policies and institutional arrangements relating to CSOs functioned within these constraints.

The following chapter provides an overview of the roles of South Korean CSOs, presenting the historical context of inter-Korean relations and the development of civil society, as well as a review of IKEC policies and major CSO activities from the Kim Dae-jung administration through to the Moon Jae-in administration.

Chapter 4. The South Korean Government's IKEC Policy and the Activities of South Korean CSOs

This chapter investigates how government IKEC policies and the activities of South Korean CSOs evolved from the Kim Dae-jung administration through to the Moon Jae-in administration. Situating the development of inter-Korean relations within the historical context of the Korean conflict, the trajectory of North–South relations and the emergence of a robust civil society in South Korea's post-democratisation era, it is subsequently explored and analysed to determine how these factors have shaped CSO engagement in inter-Korean affairs.

The IKEC policies of the South Korean government have been examined, with a view to highlighting how these have shifted in accordance with successive prevailing administrations, broadly characterised as either 'progressive' or 'conservative'. Correspondingly, analysis has been structured to accommodate three distinct periods: 1) the progressive administrations of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, 2) the conservative administrations of Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye, and 3) the progressive Moon Jae-in administration.

Finally, this chapter explores the principal domains of operation that have determined how Korean CSOs participated within the structured remit of IKEC, namely 'assistance to the DPRK' and 'socio-cultural exchange and cooperation'. It also assesses how CSO activities in these fields have

developed under different administrations and across diverse sectors. Additionally, this chapter broadly considers how South Korean public perceptions relating to the DPRK have evolved.

4.1 Historical Background

This section, divided into two main parts, presents the historical background relevant to this study, while broadly introducing a trajectory of inter-Korean relations within the context of the Korean conflict. Focusing primarily on developments in and around the time of the Kim Dae-jung administration through to the Moon Jae-in administration, it provides an overview of principal phases and dynamics that characterise inter-Korean relations during this time. Next is an examination of the growth of Korean civil society and the context in which CSOs engaged in inter-Korean affairs.

4.1.1 Context of the Korean Conflict and Development of Inter-Korean Relations

Apprehending the conflict in Korea is controversial and complex, as it is with the history of any other society affected by conflict. Recently, however, the term ‘*multilayeredness*’ has been applied in an attempt to address the various causal differentials that arise from diverse or even antagonistic perspectives (Y. C. Kim 2010:141). In the context of the conflict in Korea, multilayeredness can be considered as a prism that encompasses three principal dimensions: i.e., international, *inter*-Korean, and *intra*-Korean.

At the international level, emphasis is placed on the Korean Peninsula’s geopolitical position, which, since the nineteenth century, has been subject to the competing interests of major powers such as China, Russia, Japan, and

the United States. Rivalry among these powers was reflected in the fault lines of the North–South confrontation. This was further entrenched by the Korean War and the subsequent consolidation of the division of the Korean Peninsula (Armstrong 2013:6–9).

The second dimension of multilayered conflict is concerned with the ongoing antagonism and confrontation between North and South Korea, which, since the division of the Korean Peninsula, has manifested in systemic rivalry and competition. This further evolved into a politics of identity, thereby perpetuating structures of division at the inter-Korean level (K. S. Kim 2010:141–142; K.-W. Koo 2012:198–201).

The third dimension of multilayered conflict highlights internal issues within both North and South Korean societies, and contends that the Cold War cannot solely be considered the product of international and inter-Korean confrontation, but that it also reflected conflict structures embedded within the political and cultural fabric of each society involved (K. S. Kim 2010:142; K.-H. Choi 2016; D. J. Kim 2019:68–84).

Building upon a recognition of the multilayered nature of division on the Korean Peninsula, scholars have introduced a distinct series of conceptual frameworks to describe this phenomenon. Despite differences in terminology – such as Paik’s “*division system*” (N. C. Paik 1998), Park’s “*division order*” (M.-L. Park 1997), and Lee’s “*structure of division*” (J. Lee 1998). These perspectives share a fundamental emphasis in that they argue that inter-Korean relations function as a system of “*antagonistic interdependence*”, manifest as a “*mirror effect*” which perpetually

reproduces division. Antagonism inherent within this division also serves to reinforce the authority of both North and South Korean regimes (M. K. Park 2009:19-20). Particularly since the end of the Cold War, this system has been characterised by state dominance and the subordination of civil society. While both governments exercised considerable autonomy, each played a significant role in drawing US–China hegemonic rivalry into the conflict on the fractured Korean Peninsula (M. K. Park 2009). As Galtung (1969:219) observed, “North Korea developed into an increasingly absurd society, with a deep gap between propaganda and reality,” a condition that, to some extent, has also been reflected in South Korean society before democratisation.

Despite the entrenched structure of division on the Korean Peninsula, since the end of the Cold War, inter-Korean relations have increasingly been influenced by internal dynamics, which most notably impacted South Korean initiatives (Armstrong 2005:2)

This study focuses on the period from the Kim Dae-jung administration, when significant changes in inter-Korean relations began to emerge, through to the Moon Jae-in administration, which saw a high-level but unsuccessful rapprochement initiative with North Korea. Analysis divides the development of inter-Korean relations into three distinct periods: the first period encompasses the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations (February 1998 to February 2008); the second period covers the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administrations (February 2008 to March 2017); and the third period corresponds to the Moon Jae-in administration (May 2017 to May 2022).

This periodisation is informed by previous scholarship (Kim 2019:85–86), which delineates the stages of inter-Korean relations (outlined in Chapter 1) on the basis of distinguishing between progressive and conservative governments in South Korea, and in particular, their respective approaches towards the DPRK. Hence, the first period, under Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, is characterised by improvement in inter-Korean relations and the expansion of CSO participation, while the second period, under Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye, is marked by a general deterioration in inter-Korean relations and a contraction of CSO activities. The third period, under Moon Jae-in, is distinguished by the temporary resumption of high-level inter-Korean dialogue, but also by the suspension of direct exchanges between CSOs in the two Koreas.

Phase I: Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun Administrations (February 1998–February 2008)

The 1990s were a challenging decade for the DPRK, marked by the collapse of the communist bloc, the nuclear crisis, the death of Kim Il-sung, and severe famine (referred to by DPRK authorities as the 'Arduous March'). Efforts by the DPRK to preserve its socialist system and ensure regime survival by pursuing a nuclear weapons programme increased the potential for conflict with the United States. In 1994 crisis was averted, however, by former U.S. President Carter's visit to Pyongyang and the subsequent signing of the 'Agreed Framework' between the U.S. and DPRK (Armstrong 2005: 8–10). By the late 1990s, the DPRK's economy showed signs of recovery after a decade of decline; however, South Korea's Kim Young-sam administration

(February 1993–February 1998), the first civilian government since democratisation, viewed the ‘Agreed Framework’ with scepticism, particularly in respect of the nuclear issue. Hoping for and anticipating regime collapse, the administration sought to distance itself from agreements that might favour the DPRK (D. J. Kim 2019: 99-100).

Against this backdrop, and the tensions that it created, the subsequent Kim Dae-jung administration pursued an ‘Engagement Policy towards the DPRK’, more commonly termed the '*Sunshine Policy*'. From its outset, this policy emphasised consistent reconciliation, dialogue, and cooperation, underpinned by the principle of separating political matters from economic cooperation. Although there was criticism from those who doubted the DPRK’s capacity for change, and debates arose over the prioritisation of inter-Korean dialogue over international cooperation, there was anticipation that this policy would contribute in the long-term towards national unification. The ‘Sunshine Policy’ was later re-instituted, re-configured, and renamed as the 'Peace and Prosperity Policy' during the Roh Moo-hyun administration. This sought to expand economic cooperation with the DPRK through three major initiatives: 1) the development of the Gaeseong Industrial Complex, 2) the Mt. Geumgang tourism project, and 3) the railway-road connection (Ministry of Unification 2001; Ministry of Unification 2005; I. Heo 2012:170).

The first summit agreement since the wartime division of the Korean Peninsula was the June 15 Joint Declaration in 2000. Although this was not a formal treaty, it represented a monumental turning point in inter-Korean relations, and a transition from hostile inter-dependence to ‘peaceful’

coexistence (K.-W. Koh 2010:9). The main elements of the declaration reaffirmed the July 4 Joint Statement of 1972, recognising commonalities in both unification plans while also re-committing to the pursuit reunification through joint efforts, addressing humanitarian issues, revitalising economic cooperation and cultural exchange, and re-establishing governmental communication channels (Armstrong 2005:10–12; K. S. Kim 2006; D. J. Kim 2019:100–103).

While inter-Korean relations improved, however, DPRK/US relations faced renewed challenges. Suspicions that the DPRK was developing nuclear weapons surreptitiously, using highly enriched uranium, led to a ‘second DPRK nuclear crisis. Six-party talks, aimed at resolving this crisis, which culminated in a joint statement on 19 September 2005, were later impeded by the DPRK’s first nuclear test and by the response of US sanctions on Banco Delta Asia. However, inter-Korean relations did not completely break down (unlike during the first nuclear crisis in the 1990s). Despite public political mudslinging – Seoul opposing the DPRK’s nuclear weapons development, while Pyongyang criticised South Korea’s decision to send troops to Iraq – both sides managed to reach an agreement and continue talks on economic cooperation (Armstrong 2005:13–19; K.-W. Koo 2019:320).

The Roh Moo-hyun government held the second inter-Korean summit in October 2007, following an agreement on initial implementation measures at a bilateral meeting. This resulted in a joint declaration that included measures to promote economic cooperation and end the armistice system. However, due to its timing (occurring just four months before the end of the Roh administration), its lack of clarity on DPRK denuclearisation, vague

commitments to ending the war, and provisions that imposed disproportionate costs on South Korea, this declaration faced significant criticism (Kim 2014:11; D. J. Kim 2019:107–109).

While the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun's DPRK engagement policies on the one hand, have been hailed as a proactive effort by both governments to navigate geopolitical constraints (G. J. Yee 2014:143; H.-J. Kim 2018:158), more fundamentally, they are praised for creating a space for civil society to engage in inter-Korean relations (K. S. Kim 2006), and changing the paradigm of inter-Korean relations (K.-W. Koh 2010:9). They have, however, also been criticised for failing to dismantle the Cold War structure imposed upon on the Korean Peninsula because of the Korean post-war settlement, something particularly relevant in respect of the DPRK's nuclear issue. Also, arguably, internal divisions within South Korean society (known as 'South-South conflict') were exacerbated by the failure to address deeply entrenched hostilities inherited from the Cold War era (K. R. Seong 2008:300–302; K.-W. Koh 2010:10–14; Y. H. Kim 2011:138–139).

Phase II: Lee Myung-bak–Park Geun-hye Administrations (February 2008–March 2017)

Taking office in 2008, the Lee Myung-bak administration sought to differentiate itself from the previous two progressive administrations by criticising their policies towards the DPRK for their failure to bring about fundamental change in the North. Its new policy, 'Vision 3000', promised to raise the DPRK's per capita income to \$3,000 within 10 years through investment, contingent upon the DPRK abandoning its nuclear weapons and

opening its economy and society. Principles of strict reciprocity, as opposed to unilateral assistance, were stressed, and policy objectives were aimed at transforming the DPRK into a market-friendly economy while inter-Korean cooperation was linked to progress in terms of DPRK denuclearisation. Combining incentives with pressure, this policy also sought to prioritise the addressing of human rights issues in the DPRK (K.-W. Koh 2010:15; S. Lee 2015:56; D. J. Kim 2019:109).

Typically, the DPRK responded by escalating tensions, demanding full implementation of the June 15 Joint Declaration and the October 4 Declaration. A series of provocative incidents then followed, including the deadly shooting of a tourist at Mt. Geumgang, the sinking of the South Korean warship *Cheonan*, and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island. Responding to the *Cheonan* sinking, the Lee Myung-bak government announced the ‘May 24 Measures’, which effectively halted most IKEC projects, except the Gaeseong Industrial Complex. Although the government decided to maintain very limited humanitarian assistance for vulnerable groups, such as infants and children in the DPRK, even this aid was reduced through a restrictive, selective approval process, and civic society engagement was significantly curtailed (D.-H. Yook:28).

Inheriting the Lee Myung-bak administration’s DPRK policy, President Park Geun-hye, elected in 2012, advocated a doctrine of ‘*Trustpolitik*’ and attempted a balanced approach that combined cooperation with strong deterrence. However, following the DPRK’s third nuclear test in 2013, tensions on the Korean Peninsula increased, and the administration adopted a more hard-line stance. This escalated further after the DPRK’s fourth

nuclear test in January and the launch of a long-range rocket in February 2016. In response, the South Korean government closed the Gaeseong Industrial Complex, the last remaining symbol of inter-Korean cooperation, despite opposition from South Korean businesses that were operating there. Controversially, President Park, in an unprecedented move, also suspended humanitarian aid to the DPRK and prohibited assistance to the DPRK from civil organisations, effectively ending IKEC (K. S. Kim 2006:30–31; S. Lee 2015:56–62; D. J. Kim 2019:114–116).

Contrarily, while these principled responses of the two conservative governments led to a sharp decline in IKEC, the DPRK nuclear issue worsened, and in December 2008, the six-party talks reached a stalemate over verification measures. An absence of mutual trust between the DPRK and the United States left both sides unable to reconcile differences on the scope and method of verification, while both remained highly cautious about the potential for deception. Unlike its predecessor, the Lee Myung-bak administration adopted an ambiguous stance towards the September 2005 Joint Declaration, and while Lee Myung-bak's 'Vision 3000' and Park Geun-hye's '*Trustpolitik*' were effectively based on the premise of DPRK capitulation, they rejected mutual recognition as a prerequisite for improving inter-Korean relations. Hence, the primary focus of both administrations was the demand that the DPRK abandon its nuclear programme (K.-W. Koo 2011:118; D. J. Kim 2019:110–114; K.-W. Koo 2019:320–321).

In response, the DPRK escalated tensions, increasing its level of provocation by conducting its second nuclear test in May 2009 (shortly after the collapse of the six-party talks). Following Kim Jong-il's death in 2011, Kim Jong-un

(his son) assumed power, and, in 2013, introduced the '*Byungjin* policy' – the simultaneous pursuit of economic development and nuclear armament. Inevitably, this led to a paradox as international sanctions intensified in response to the pursuit of a nuclear weapons programme and the overall DPRK economy deteriorated. In March 2013, January 2016, September 2016, and September 2017, the DPRK conducted four nuclear tests and in April, August 2017, and November 2018, test-fired *Hwasong* intercontinental ballistic missiles. With each advancement in DPRK nuclear capabilities, however, the UN Security Council tightened sanctions. As the security dilemma on the Korean Peninsula became more precarious and sanctions bit deeper, the DPRK's chosen path out of this situation was to double down on its continued development of nuclear weapons (D. J. Kim 2019:113; K.-W. Koo 2019:321).

While the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye governments criticised the limitations of the functionalist approach associated with the previous administrations of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, their conservative approach also demonstrated problems and limitations, clearly evident in the failure to prevent DPRK nuclear development and to advance inter-Korean relations through diplomacy (J. S. Hwang 2017:31–34).

Phase III: Moon Jae-in Administration (May 2017 – May 2022)

In April and August 2017, the Korean Peninsula faced a crisis that brought the region to the brink of war. This was triggered by the DPRK's aggressive response to joint military exercises conducted by South Korea and the United States. Although such crises occurred repeatedly since the 1990s

(precipitated by DPRK reactions to ROK-US military drills), the severity of the 2017 crisis was unprecedented. Tensions escalated over the course of the year as the DPRK carried out a series of missile and nuclear tests, including the launch of the Hwasong-15 intercontinental ballistic missile. The DPRK's offer to suspend further testing in return for a cessation of joint military exercises was rejected by both the United States and South Korea, and the situation remained volatile as the DPRK declared the completion of its nuclear programme in November 2017 (K.-W. Koo 2018:322–323; B. C. Park & I. S. Joo 2019:118–120).

Amidst this crisis, and following the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye, the hastily formed Moon Jae-in administration attempted to de-escalate the situation by proposing a step-by-step approach to denuclearisation, clearly departing from demands for unilateral concessions from the DPRK. This strategy was ultimately oriented towards the conclusion of a formal peace treaty, and in line with this approach, President Moon, expressing hope for a positive shift in inter-Korean dynamics, proposed in December 2017 that the US–South Korea joint military exercises scheduled during the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics be postponed (K.-W. Koo 2018: 144–146). In 2018, inter-Korean relations decisively improved when DPRK leader Kim Jong-un, in his New Year's address, announced that he would send a delegation to the PyeongChang Winter Olympics. This marked a new starting point in relations between the two countries, and initiated a new phase of dialogue on the Korean Peninsula, resulting in three inter-Korean summits, two US–DPRK summits, and a tri-lateral summit at Panmunjom between

South Korea, the DPRK and the US. However, the second US–DPRK summit in February 2019 failed and resulted in no tangible outcomes due to disagreements over the specifics of denuclearisation and the extent of sanctions relief (B. C. Park & I. S. Joo 2019).

One of the biggest achievements in inter-Korean relations during this period, however, was the substantial reduction in military tensions after the signing of a comprehensive military agreement in September 2019, which limited various military activities in the vicinity of the DMZ. The inter-Korean summit agreement, which included economic cooperation projects, such as connecting east-west railways and reopening the Gaeseong Industrial Complex and Mount Kumgang tourist site, raised expectations for the resumption and expansion of inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation. However, following the breakdown of the US/DPRK summit in Hanoi in 2019, these measures remained unimplemented. In 2020, matters worsened when the Inter-Korean Joint Liaison Office, an institutional symbol for inter-Korean relations, was destroyed by the DPRK (G. Choi 2020: 59; C. Kim 2023: 164–165). Due to continued strong international sanctions against North Korea following the breakdown of negotiations between the United States and DPRK, North Korea's confrontational stance towards South Korea, and North Korea's restrictive control of all borders, including the inter-Korean border, under the pretext of responding to the Covid 19 pandemic, meant that almost all inter-Korean exchanges were suspended until the end of the Moon Jae-in administration,

Notwithstanding repeated high-level meetings and agreements between the two Koreas and between the United States and North Korea, the failure of the Moon Jae-in government's attempts at rapprochement towards Pyongyang has led to critical reflections on why inter-Korean relations declined so markedly, surpassing the setbacks experienced during previous administrations, when so much effort went into taking diplomatic initiatives (D. J. Kim 2019:117–118; D. J. Kim and Y. Chung 2022:21).

4.1.2 Growth of South Korean Civil Society and Its Involvement in Inter-Korean Relations

Civil Society, Democratisation and Unification/Peace Movements in Korea

Although the roots of the struggle for a 'just peace' on the Korean Peninsula can be traced back to the independence movement during the Japanese colonial period (1910 - 1945), the growth of South Korean civil society is more directly linked to the country's democratisation process in the late 1980s. Until the mid-1980s, discussions about unification were monopolised by the non-democratic government, which left no room for discourse within its rigid framework of authoritarian rule. This changed in the late 1980s when the unification movement, formed from within the radical national democratic movement, gained momentum. This eventually led, from the 1990s onwards, to the institutionalisation of civil society movements and the emergence of various unification-focused organisations. During this period, the radical unification movement and the student movement, led by the opposition party, drew public attention. Key events, such as visits to the DPRK by figures like Pastor Moon Ik-hwan, progressive writer Hwang Seok-young, and student activist Lim Soo-kyung, further heightened interest in the

cause of unification (D. Cho 2010:167–170; D. J. Kim 2017; D. J. Kim 2019:149–150)

Cho (2010:168-170), interestingly, marks a shift in the unification movement in the 1990s, pointing to a clear differentiation between the unification movement and an emerging peace movement. While in the 1980s, the unification movement, led by opposition parties, had ostensibly been a resistance effort rooted in a radical ideology opposed to the government's monopoly over the unification discourse, the 1990s saw the rise of a voluntary citizens' movement that characteristically advocated pluralism and de-ideologization of the discourse. In contrast to the unification movement of the 1980s, which was heavily defined by political ideology and nationalism, the newly developed peace movement embraced universal values such as human rights, equality, and environmental protection, while it focused on shared civic identity as opposed to ethnic boundaries and divisions. While critics argued that the unification movement was itself ideologically biased and promoted an idealised 'unification theory' that over-prioritised relations with the DPRK, the peace movement also faced criticism for uncritically placing an emphasis on peace in pursuit of unification, and overlooking practical realities to promote an idealistic pacifism (N.-C. Paik 2006; N.-J. Lee 2008).

CSO Involvement in Inter-Korean Relations

Following the path to democratisation in the late 1980s and later in the 2000s, particularly after the June 15 Inter-Korean Joint Declaration, South Korean civil society became increasingly active. Correspondingly, the demands of

civil society coalesced into a widespread peace and unification movement, aimed at seriously addressing the issue of division (G.-O. Kim 2006:87-88). During this period, various coalition groups emerged, most notably the Pan-National Alliance for Korea's Reunification (*Pan-Minryun*) – classified as a radical group – and the National Council for the Reconciliation of the Koreans (NCRK) – classified as a moderate group.

Pan-Minryun, established in 1990 as a coalition of groups from South Korea, the DPRK, and overseas, expanded the unification movement beyond political opposition parties, accommodating representatives from various political and social groups focused on unification. The NCRK, on the other hand, was launched in 1998 as a permanent consultative body for the civil unification movement, and included around 200 private organisations and political parties, both conservative and progressive. In contrast to *Pan-Minryun*, the NCRK was established from its inception with the assistance of the Kim Dae-jung government, and sought to foster domestic consensus on unification by facilitating private-level exchanges with the DPRK while, encouraging comprehensive dialogue between diverse political factions in South Korea – including conservatives, progressives, and both right and left-wing organisations and groups (J. H. Lee 1998:123–132; S.-M. Han 2008:87–90; D. Cho 2010:167).

Initially, until the mid-1990s, direct contact between South Korean CSOs and the DPRK was rare and was typically mediated through third countries. However, in response to the DPRK's food crisis in the mid-1990s, under the 'Sunshine Policy' of the Kim Dae-jung government, various projects

expanded, and new civil society organisations pursued direct consultations with the DPRK.

Kudláčová (2014:42–43), when analysing from the perspective of trust-building, classified the IKEC activities of South Korean CSOs into social, environmental, and cultural fields. Moreover, Korean scholars, such as G. Lim (2015:22–23) and T. K. Kim & K. Lee (2023), further simplified this classification into two categories: 1) aid/assistance to the DPRK, and 2) socio-cultural exchanges – this included factors relevant to inter-Korean cooperation in areas such as academia, culture, religion, sports, media, and publishing. This thesis will examine the various activities carried out by South Korean CSOs within the context of the unification and peace movement in inter-Korean relations, using the aforementioned categorisations, i.e., assistance to the DPRK and socio-cultural exchanges and cooperation (see 4.3 for details).

4.2 The South Korean Government's IKEC Policy, Legal System, and CSO Governance⁵

Efforts to institutionalise exchanges between North and South Korea have long been constrained by South Korea's institutional and legal frameworks, exemplified by the National Security Act (O. Jung 2003:81–82; Kudláčová 2014:40). The enactment of the IKEC Act in August 1990, which recognised

⁵ Regarding the concept of governance in IKEC, Park (2019:50–51) defined it as "a structure in which the public and civic sectors work together to achieve the public purpose of promoting peace and shared prosperity on the Korean Peninsula, within a legal and institutional framework". This thesis adopts Park's definition and defines governance as a 'cooperative network between the government and CSOs formed to fulfil the objectives of exchange and cooperation between North and South Korea. For a detailed discussion on governance in inter-Korean relations, see the following articles (Kang 2008; Kang & Jung 2010; D.-H. Yook; T.-K. Kim & K. Lee 2023)

DPRK as a partner for exchange and cooperation, was the first legislative step that significantly moved away from a hostile perception of the DPRK. However, it was only after the Kim Dae-jung administration that, under this law, CSO participation in inter-Korean exchanges truly materialised (H. Park 2019:54–58). It is important to note that the South Korean government's policies on exchange and cooperation have varied depending on the administration. In this section, therefore, the South Korean government's exchange and cooperation policy is categorised to examine development across the three stages identified earlier.

4.2.1 The Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun Administrations

As outlined above, during the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations, policies shifted to emphasise engagement, as they adopted a more open and assistive stance towards civil society participation in aid to the DPRK and inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges than preceding governments. This section will first examine each of these respective areas in detail.

Policy and Legal System for Providing Aid to the DPRK

In the mid-1990s, the DPRK experienced severe economic hardship and famine, commonly referred to as the 'Arduous March' (M.-S. Cha 2005; K.-S. Kim 2005; W. Y. Lee 2014), when the already fragile economy was further debilitated by the collapse of the Soviet Union, international sanctions, and North Korea was hit by natural disasters (D. J. Kim 2016: 479-480). It is estimated that approximately one million people perished as a result of

famine and the DPRK regime's insufficient response (Haggard & Noland 2005:18). As the humanitarian crisis worsened, the international community began promoting aid to the DPRK (Kim 2019:188), with the United Nations and individual countries providing humanitarian assistance to address DPRK food shortages. While some groups withdrew due to concerns over monitoring conditions, assistance from the international community focused on improving the humanitarian situation and achieved some progress in terms of refining monitoring processes and managing access and distribution (K. S. Lee 2000:8; K. S. Lee 2003:40-41; Haggard & Noland 2005:9-11; K. Y. Moon, J. Y. Park & Y. H. Song 2018:115-117; D. J. Kim 2019:188). That said, South Korea's Kim Young-sam administration authorised only limited aid to the DPRK in the name of national security. This was due to the combined effects of the DPRK's nuclear issue, political instability following Kim Il-sung's death, and a generally passive attitude towards South Korean aid (S.-M. Han 2008:81–82; D. J. Kim 2016:480).

In contrast, the Kim Dae-jung administration (February 1998 to February 2003) pursued a more progressive policy of engagement with the DPRK, better known as the 'Sunshine Policy' (K. S. Lee 2000:2-7). Significantly, the Kim Dae-jung administration made the guiding principle of its DPRK policy 'the people who choose wisely', a phrase which stressed the importance of expanding civil exchanges across the Demilitarised Zone. Despite facing numerous challenges (including DPRK military provocations), the government sought to adhere to this principle (D. J. Kim and Y. Chung 2022:11–13) and took significant steps to encourage civil society aid to the DPRK. This can be summarised by three key measures:

first, in March 1998 open fundraising by CSOs was legitimised; second, in 1999 channels were diversified to enable South Korean CSOs, other than the Red Cross, to directly contact and cooperate with the DPRK; and third, in 2000, financial assistance to CSOs through the Inter-Korean Cooperation Fund was provided (K. S. Lee 2000:4–6; D. J. Kim 2016:481; D. J. Kim 2019:195–196).

While the Roh Moo-hyun administration (February 2003 to February 2008) continued the reconciliation and cooperation approach of the Kim Dae-jung administration, throughout its tenure it faced challenges in balancing the goal of improving inter-Korean relations with the escalating DPRK nuclear issue, resulting in some inconsistencies (J.-M. Lee et al. 2009:107-108). According to Moon (K. Y. Moon 2011:386), the Roh administration attempted to use the IKEC aid/assistance programme as political leverage in response to the DPRK's military provocations. This was evident in a shift from emergency relief to development cooperation on a larger scale with a longer-term perspective; nonetheless, aid to the DPRK persisted throughout the Roh administration, which was notably more proactive than its predecessor in involving civil society in policy decisions about aid to the DPRK (K. Y. Moon 2011:312).

Also, during this period, legal and financial assistance systems for private organisations providing aid to the DPRK were reorganised. In terms of legal measures, in October 1999, the “Regulations on the Processing of Humanitarian Aid Projects to the DPRK” were enacted, institutionalising the ability of private organisations designated by the Ministry of Unification to

provide direct aid to the DPRK counterparts without the mediation of the Korean Red Cross.

In 2000, the Kim Dae-jung administration began providing funding through the Inter-Korean Cooperation Fund in line with its policy of strengthening inter-Korean relations and the desire to revitalise CSO efforts in assisting the DPRK. The legal basis for this assistance lay in the IKEC Act, the Inter-Korean Cooperation Fund Act and subordinate regulations, which outlined assistance standards and procedures. The 70% matching fund ratio for CSOs involved a two-stage deliberation process to determine eligibility: 1) the Fund Management Review Committee, which included the Ministry of Unification and the Export-Import Bank of Korea, and 2) the IKEC Promotion Council (CEC), a government-wide deliberative body. Additionally, the Ministry of Unification and the Export-Import Bank of Korea were responsible for operational consultations (C. H. Kim 2010:216-217).

Government methods of assisting CSOs became more diverse during this period. Firstly, individual project funding was made available, with the government providing matching funds for some projects undertaken by CSOs. Secondly, in 2005, joint projects were initiated, whereby three or more organisations could form consortia to provide assistance that supported the DPRK's self-reliance and sustainability. This included projects to improve residential environments, healthcare infrastructure, and groundwater development. Thirdly, there were policy-driven projects, which required continuous promotion, such as assistance for DPRK infants and children or large-scale development projects with significant impacts, such as forestation

and agricultural development. These projects received full financial assistance from the government, and this assistance contributed to revitalising CSO aid to the DPRK by maintaining project continuity, improving effectiveness, and expanding the scale of assistance (MOU 2006: 178-181).

During this period, with regard to government-CSO–CSO governance in the field of humanitarian assistance to the DPRK, a consultative body was established between the Ministry of Unification and the KNCCNK (Korea NGO Council for Cooperation with North Korea). In April 1999, approximately 20 humanitarian aid organisations for the DPRK formed the KNCCNK. In 2020, this was formally converted into a corporation. While promoting cooperation and information exchange between organisations and fostering collaboration with the government, international organisations, and INGOs, the KNCCNK improved the accountability and effectiveness of aid projects by establishing, in January 2009, a ‘Joint Code of Conduct’⁶. In 2013, the establishment of a ‘CSO-Government Cooperation Committee for the Implementation of Humanitarian Aid to the DPRK’ was proposed, based on the ‘Social Agreement on Humanitarian Aid to the DPRK’⁷ (KNCCNK

⁶ The Joint Code of Conduct serves as a unified guideline for CSOs involved in providing aid to the DPRK. Its aim is to mitigate inefficiencies arising from project duplication, while enhancing the monitoring of cooperation efforts and the distribution of aid materials. This code outlines the principles and standards for delivering aid to the DPRK, reinforcing the monitoring of aid material distribution, and promoting information sharing among organisations. The complete document is available at the following site: [<https://www.ncic.or.kr/jointnorm>]

⁷ This agreement was initiated by the KNCCNK to establish a social consensus on aid to the DPRK within the South Korean society. It attempted to define the scope of aid these following projects, such as emergency relief for various disasters, support for vulnerable groups in socioeconomically challenging situations, and development assistance aimed at improving the quality of life for DPRK residents. In this agreement approximately 500 participants from the religious community and civil society organisations, including the member organisations of the KNCCNK, were involved. Additionally, the key provisions include: the continued promotion of aid under principles of regularity and quantification, independent of the political and military situation between South Korea

2015:238–247). At the end of 2022, the KNCCNK included 66 member organisations, accounting for 44% of the total 150 organisations approved by the government, as designated private organisations for providing humanitarian aid to the DPRK. Between 1999 and 2022, when CSO-DPRK direct aid channels became possible, each organisation provided approximately 669 million dollars. Aid to the DPRK initially focused on one-time assistance, mainly food such as rice and corn, gradually expanding to include agricultural supplies, farm equipment, prescription drugs, and medical devices. It was subsequently diversified further into areas such as agricultural development, healthcare, and assistance for vulnerable populations (T.-K. Kim & K. Lee 2023:93).

Under the Roh Moo-hyun government, CSOs became more influential in policy-making as well as in the policy development process, and institutional and legal mechanisms were put in place to ensure their participation. (D. W. Kang 2008:308). Firstly, in 2004, the Council for the Civilian-Government Joint Policy Discussion for Aid to the DPRK (*Daebuk Jiwon Mingwan Jungchaek Hyupuihoi*, hereafter the Civilian-Government Council) was established in response to a long-standing call by CSOs for a government-CSO policy discussion body. This body included government ministries, including: the Ministry of Unification, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and the Ministry of Health and Welfare, with the Head of the

and the DPRK; the government's ongoing commitment to promoting and institutionalising food aid, with consideration of the humanitarian situation, including the right to survival of DPRK residents; the guarantee of independence and autonomy in civil society organisations' provision of aid to the DPRK; the enactment of laws to institutionally ensure humanitarian aid to the DPRK; and efforts to foster public recognition of the importance of social consensus on humanitarian aid and to secure public consent. (Source: Tongil News <http://www.tongilnews.com>)

Standing Operating Group of the KNCCNK and the Vice Minister of Unification serving as co-chairs, and the Civilian-Government Council operating as a regular meeting body (T.-K. Kim & K. Lee 2023:93–94).

In December 2005, the IKEC Act (Article 5, Paragraph 3) was amended to establish the ‘Council on IKEC’, a deliberative and decision-making body for all matters related to the IKEC. This amendment included, in addition to government members, the appointment of at least three civilian experts with relevant knowledge and experience (D. W. Kang 2008:308; T.-K. Kim & K. Lee 2023:69–70). The rationale for this decision was a recognition that food shortage in the DPRK was not just a temporary issue, but a chronic structural problem requiring a shift from short-term relief programmes to long-term, sustainable development policies that could be implemented at multiple levels. There was a shared understanding between the South Korean government and approved CSOs that cross-sector collaboration was essential to addressing this issue (S.-M. Han 2008:106-107; D. W. Kang 2008:308; Yang & Kang 2009:6-7).

Policies and Legal System for Socio-Cultural Exchange and Cooperation

In 1985, the first socio-cultural exchange and cooperation project between North and South Korea began with the reunion of separated families and a reciprocal performance by an art troupe. Subsequently, the Roh Tae-woo administration introduced the IKEC Act and the Inter-Korean Cooperation Fund Act, and in 1992, the ‘Agreement on Exchange and Cooperation between North and South Korea’ was implemented, and a joint committee for social and cultural exchange and cooperation was established, raising

significant expectations. However, during the Kim Young-sam administration, discussions ceased due to the first DPRK nuclear crisis, and inter-Korean exchanges were halted completely following the 1996 DPRK submarine infiltration (H. Park 2019:54–56).

The Kim Dae-jung administration brought substantial changes to the promotion of inter-Korean socio-cultural exchanges (S.-H. Lee 2017:50), with President Kim emphasising that inter-Korean relations would be based on reconciliation, cooperation, and peace. The 2000 inter-Korean summit marked a significant milestone in this area, with Article 4 of the June 15 Joint Declaration affirming,

“[that] South Korea and DPRK will develop the national economy in a balanced manner through economic cooperation and strengthen mutual trust by promoting cooperation and exchange in all fields, including society, culture, sports, health, and the environment” (Ministry of Unification 2001:25).

Ministerial talks were established as a communication channel between the two governments, and at the first ministerial meeting in July 2000, agreements were reached to advance socio-cultural exchanges. Although these exchanges grew both in quantity and quality, they were often interrupted according to the fluctuating state of inter-Korean relations (S.-H. Lee 2017:51)

The Roh Moo-hyun administration continued the Kim Dae-jung administration’s unification policy and further expanded the legal and

institutional mechanisms for promoting inter-Korean cooperation. In 2005, as inter-Korean relations progressed, the need for a legal foundation to facilitate the smooth implementation of DPRK policy became apparent. Ensuring the stability and continuity of inter-Korean relations via legal guarantees that supported existing agreements emerged as a key objective. Consequently, the Act on the Development of Inter-Korean Relations was introduced in December 2005, increasing transparency in policymaking and creating a framework for decision-making based on national consensus. In 2006, follow-up enforcement decrees and rules were introduced, further solidifying the legal framework for exchange and cooperation (H. Park 2019:57). By 2007, the South and DPRK had reached an agreement to establish a joint body for discussing cooperation in the socio-cultural sectors. At the first inter-Korean prime ministerial meeting, it was agreed to establish an 'Inter-Korean Social and Cultural Cooperation Promotion Committee' (requested by South Korea). Although this was a significant advancement, this agreement was not implemented following the inauguration of the Lee Myung-bak administration, as it was concluded only a few months before the end of Roh Moo-hyun's term (Y.-S. Jeon 2019:102–103).

Government-CSO Governance in the field of inter-Korean socio-cultural exchange and cooperation developed significantly following the June 15 Summit, driven by a sharp rise in travel across the DMZ and the corresponding materialisation of various social and cultural agendas. This requirement for expansion also saw the formation of a group of CSOs dedicated to socio-cultural exchange and cooperation. Accordingly, governance of socio-cultural exchange and cooperation, rather than being a

fixed and systematised structure, has exhibited a comprehensive nature, encompassing various social and cultural sectors. Consequently, the expansion and contraction of autonomy with respect to the operations of civil organisations have fluctuated in accordance with the broader dynamics of inter-Korean relations.

The following three organisations are frequently cited as exemplars of government-CSO governance bodies in the field of socio-cultural exchange and cooperation: 1) the Joint National Committee for Implementing the June 15 Joint Declaration (hereafter the June 15 Committee), 2) the Inter-Korean Historians Association, and 3) the joint board of the South and DPRK for the compilation of Gyeoremal-keunsajeon (the South and DPRK language dictionary).

These three organisations are identified as government–civil society governance bodies for two primary reasons. First, the June 15 Committee served as an umbrella organisation, encompassing civil organisations from all sectors of society, while simultaneously serving as a partner to the government, advising on socio-cultural initiatives. Second, although the Inter-Korean Historians Association and the Korean Dictionary Joint Compilation Project Conference display the characteristics of civil society organisations, both North and South Korean governments have either direct or indirect involvement in their activities and operations. As a result, these organisations cooperate closely with state objectives (T.-K. Kim & K. Lee 2023: 89).

4.2.2 The Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye Administrations

Policy and Legal System for Providing Aid to the DPRK

Seeing the DPRK's nuclear development as the most critical security threat, the conservative governments of Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye both adopted a policy approach that tied all initiatives related to the DPRK, including IKEC, to the goal of denuclearisation. While acknowledging the importance of IKEC, they maintained a fundamentally critical stance towards the DPRK regime, demanding 'mutual reciprocity' and moving away from unilateral South Korea-led actions. Both administrations significantly reduced IKEC activities (I. H. Park 2013:15; D. J. Kim 2016:484; H. Park 2019:67).

Following the sinking of the South Korean Navy ship *Cheonan* in March 2010, Inter-Korean relations further deteriorated. In response, the South Korean government implemented the 'May 24 Measures,' suspending all inter-Korean cooperation except for the Gaeseong Industrial Complex and limited humanitarian aid for vulnerable groups. Continued under both the Lee and Park administrations, the maintenance of sanctions became the fulcrum that severely restricted IKEC activities overall (W. Y. Lee 2016:13; D. J. Kim 2019:204–205).

With the 'May 24 Measures,' immediately halting all development aid projects, the government prioritised assistance in the medical and health sectors for vulnerable groups (H. J. Lee & Y.-H. Lee 2018:7; J. U. Lee 2019:416), and strengthened criteria for aid approval, limiting CSO assistance to the provision of items such as medicine, nutritional food, and

clothing, while ensuring maximum transparency and minimising risks of diversion (Ministry of Unification 2012:153–154; Ministry of Unification 2013:144).

In 2014, the ‘Dresden Initiative’ was launched by the Park Geun-hye administration. Drawing its inspiration from Germany's reunification process, this sought to promote peaceful Korean unification through humanitarian aid, economic cooperation, and cultural exchange. This extended DPRK aid policy, to enhance government assistance for the improvement of people's livelihoods, the environment, and culture within the DPRK. The administration also relaxed requirements for civil organisations to become ‘designated private organisations for providing aid to the DPRK,’ and encouraged wider participation.

In early 2016, however, the closure of the Gaeseong Industrial Complex following DPRK nuclear and missile provocations further disrupted inter-Korean exchange. Consequently, all aid, including humanitarian efforts by CSOs, was halted, effectively ending inter-Korean cooperation (K. S. Kim 2006:30–31; S. Lee 2015:56–62; D. J. Kim 2019:114–116; H. Park 2019:59).

Regarding the legal and institutional framework governing IKEC under conservative administrations, the announcement of the ‘24 May Measures’ in 2010 during the Lee Myung-bak presidency led to a revision of the “Regulations on Approving Items and Procedures for Import and Export to North Korea”. This revision, requiring the approval of the Minister of Unification for all goods, transaction types, and payment methods, imposed significantly stricter controls on the movement of materials across the border

(H. Park 2019:58–59). This restrictive environment persisted during the Park Geun-hye administration, as under the promotion of *Trustpolitik*, relations between the government and CSO reverted from a cooperative to a harder regulatory approach (Kudláčová 2014:39–40). Meanwhile, as the DPRK continued its nuclear and missile provocations, and the United Nations Security Council responded by imposing economic sanctions, further complicating the legal and institutional conditions for inter-Korean exchange and cooperation (H. Park 2019: 59).

During the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administrations, no new government-CSO governance organisations were established. Instead, an overall decline in IKEC negatively impacted the status and role of governance as a collaborative system between the government and CSOs. Notably, the Civilian-Government Council was not convened between 2011 and 2019. This exposed the limitations of governance in the context of aid to the DPRK, as it functioned only intermittently without a solid legal foundation, subject to the political whim of the government (T.-K. Kim & K. Lee 2023:93–94).

Policies and Legal System for Socio-Cultural Exchange and Cooperation

The Lee Myung-bak administration's approach to the DPRK was heavily impacted by a series of provocative incidents, which culminated in the fatal shooting of a South Korean tourist at Mt. Geumgang in August 2008 and the sinking of the *Cheonan* in March 2010. North Korea's refusal to offer an apology for these events prompted South Korea to introduce the 'May 24 Measures,' which marked a significant departure from the policies of

previous administrations. These measures severely constrained inter-Korean relations, and the Lee administration later amended its policy, introducing a limited flexibility to reduce tensions and stabilise relations on the Korean Peninsula. As a result, specific socio-cultural exchange projects, such as the joint compilation of a Korean language dictionary, were resumed (S.-H. Lee 2017:56)

Subsequently, the Park Geun-hye administration's *Trustpolitik* policy set forth a three-stage process aimed at building trust and fostering inter-Korean cooperation. The first stage focused on providing humanitarian aid to the DPRK, the second encouraged mutually beneficial economic, social, and cultural exchanges, while the third stage aimed to create a shared economic community across the Korean Peninsula. Flexibility embedded in stages 1 and 2 allowed for trust-building efforts to proceed independently of calls for North Korean denuclearisation. In 2014, Inter-Korean exchanges in academic and religious fields resumed under this framework, signalling potential progress in inter-Korean relations, especially when high-ranking North Korean officials attended the closing ceremony of the Incheon Asian Games. Inter-Korean exchanges were once again suspended, however, when the DPRK raised objections to South Korean human rights organisations sending leaflets into the North via balloons, claiming DPRK human rights violations. In 2015, the 70th anniversary of liberation, both Koreas symbolically expressed a renewed commitment to restoring relations by resuming sports exchanges, including a youth football tournament in Pyongyang (S.-H. Lee 2017:57–58).

Despite the positivity, in August 2015, military tensions escalated following accusations that the DPRK planted a mine in the DMZ (this exploded, maiming a South Korean soldier). The resulting political spat was eventually resolved with the August 25 Agreement, which outlined six key points of development, including: reducing tensions, holding government talks, reuniting separated families, and revitalising private exchanges (H.-B. Cho 2015:1). Following this agreement, in October 2015, the North-South workers' football tournament and the joint compilation meeting for the Korean Dictionary were held. However, in 2016, North Korea's ongoing nuclear tests and missile launches prompted further sanctions from South Korea, again significantly curtailing the scope for IKEC. In March and December, South Korea imposed independent sanctions twice, further constraining any engagement between the two countries (G. Lim 2015:65–66; S.-H. Lee 2017:57–58).

During the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administrations, government-CSO governance around inter-Korean socio-cultural exchange and cooperation was significantly weakened. Efforts became focused on a few select projects, such as historical and linguistic collaborations, while broader initiatives were curtailed. For example, from 2009 onward, large-scale joint events organised by the June 15 Committee were suspended. This followed a deterioration in inter-Korean relations driven by increasing military tensions. Sporadic sectoral meetings also indicated the declining influence of CSOs as key partners in socio-cultural governance (H. Park 2019:65-66; T.-K. Kim & K. Lee 2023:85-86)

Weak government-CSO governance was exemplified by the North-South Historian Association's joint excavation project at *Gaeseong Manwoldae* – the site of the capital of the Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392), currently situated within the DPRK. This project, which ran from 2007 to 2018, continued under both administrations but faced significant challenges, with work often progressing irregularly due to political constraints. Similarly, the North-South joint compilation of the Korean Dictionary, initiated in 2009, also progressed intermittently. Although joint writing sessions continued, with both sides cross-examining entries, the project was repeatedly delayed due to the prevention of planned pre-publication efforts by the May 24 Measures. These examples highlight the diminished role of CSOs in inter-Korean socio-cultural governance, as political tensions and inconsistent governmental assistance constrained activities and significantly limited the scope of meaningful cooperation (S.-H. Lee 2017:73–74; T.-K. Kim & K. Lee 2023:78–79).

4.2.3 The Moon Jae-in Administration

Policies and Legal System for Providing Aid to the DPRK

While the Moon Jae-in administration's policy towards the DPRK can be seen as a continuation of the policies implemented by the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations, it also pursued institutional stability in inter-Korean relations and emphasised the building of trust between the two Koreas militarily, while simultaneously promoting DPRK denuclearisation in parallel with the establishment of a peace regime. One of six key national objectives for North Korea policy was the development of inter-Korean

relations through a revitalised exchange scheme. This administration, however, prioritised high-level talks, where denuclearisation and the establishment of a peace regime were the core agenda. The Inter-Korean Joint Liaison Office was established as part of the 27 April '*Panmunjom* Declaration for Peace, Prosperity, and Unification of the Korean Peninsula' (hereafter *Panmunjom* Declaration), tasked with the function of 'assisting exchange and cooperation projects for private organisations.' However, North and South Korean authorities showed limited interest in promoting civil exchange between the two Koreas. Although sanctions against the DPRK had a significant impact, another reason for the lack of private exchanges was an expectation that relations would resume naturally once broader issues, such as the DPRK nuclear programme, were resolved within a larger framework of negotiations (G. Choi 2021; C. Kim 2023)

Following the Pyongyang Joint Declaration in September 2018, the US–South Korea Working Group was established. Launched on 1 November 2018, this body was intended to facilitate regular consultations between US and South Korean officials to narrow differences on issues related to inter-Korean exchange and cooperation, as well as the implementation of sanctions against North Korea. However, contrary to its original purpose, the Working Group became an obstacle to progress in inter-Korean relations, as the US adopted a stringent stance on sanctions exemptions. Consequently, the Working Group was criticised for subordinating inter-Korean relations to the US/South Korea alliance (C. Kim 2023:161). In January 2019, when South Korea sought to provide the antiviral medication Tamiflu to North Korea, the United Nations Command, which oversees the Military Demarcation Line

(MDL), blocked the delivery because the truck transporting the medicine was not granted a sanctions exemption, effectively preventing the crossing.⁸ Similarly, other initiatives, such as support for North Korean nurseries and the inter-Korean railway connection project, were delayed or rejected for exemptions during Working Group meetings, resulting in halted proceedings. Despite a strong commitment to improving inter-Korean relations and the holding of three summits, the failure of the US/DPRK summit in Hanoi in February 2019 exposed the stalemate in inter-Korean relations, which from 2019 onwards steadily deteriorated (C. Kim 2023:141–142). The demolition of the Inter-Korean Liaison Office by North Korea in June 2020 further signalled that Pyongyang perceived the Moon Jae-in administration as being either unable or unwilling to overcome the structural constraints of the conflict (D. J. Kim and Y. Chung 2022:20).

During the Moon Jae-in administration, regulations surrounding aid to the DPRK were significantly relaxed, and in September 2021, the framework for approving CSOs as designated private organisations to provide aid to the DPRK (in place since 1999) was restructured. This reform allowed local government offices to independently pursue aid projects for the DPRK without needing to collaborate with designated private organisations. As of March 2023, 17 metropolitan governments and 226 basic local governments, in addition to 150 CSOs, were approved as designated private organisations to provide aid to the DPRK. However, by March 2023, towards the end of Moon's administration, the approval/designation system was considered to

⁸ Source ling: <https://n.news.naver.com/mnews/article/214/0001275143?sid=100> (Assessed on 30 March 2025)

be no longer necessary, and it was abolished after having operated for 25 years. Nevertheless, the approval system for the export of materials and the continuance of ongoing projects remains intact (T.-K. Kim & K. Lee 2023:91).

In 2019, the Moon Jae-in administration reinstated the Government-CSO partnership. Its effectiveness remained limited, however, considering most IKEC projects had been stalled. Ultimately, the repeated suspension and resumption of the Civilian-Government Council exposed a lack of legal stability in the structure of government-CSO governance (D. W. Kang 2008; KNCCNK 2015:205; T.-K. Kim & K. Lee 2023:91–94).

Notwithstanding, efforts were made to strengthen collaboration with local governments in the sphere of IKEC. In December 2020, a partial revision of the IKEC Act designated local governments as key actors in these cooperation projects, thereby promoting inter-Korean exchange at the local government level while enhancing policy coordination. To assist these efforts, an IKEC Policy Council was established (Article 24-2 of the Act). Additionally, the number of members on the IKEC Council was expanded from 18 to 25, with private sector delegates increasing from 3 to 7, thus ensuring greater input from civil society representatives (Article 5, Paragraphs 1 and 3 of the same Act).

These events highlight the fact that the absence of a robust legal framework for the governance of aid to the DPRK prevented the establishment of sustainable governance structures. They also underscored the urgent need to secure legal stability to guarantee the minimum operational capacity of this governance system (T.-K. Kim & K. Lee 2023:98–99).

Policies and Legal System for Socio-Cultural Exchange and Cooperation

The ‘Berlin Initiative’ in July 2017, introduced by the Moon Jae-in administration, established the foundational framework for an initial policy directive towards DPRK engagement. This initiative not only addressed denuclearisation and the creation of a peace regime, but also identified IKEC projects in non-political areas as one of its five principal objectives. A pivotal moment for inter-Korean relations occurred during the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics, when North Korea participated by sending athletes and formed united teams with South Korea in selected sports. Furthermore, the presence of a large cheering squad and a commemorative performance by the DPRK’s Samjiyon Orchestra demonstrated Pyongyang’s clear intent to improve inter-Korean relations (Y.-S. Jeon 2019:95).

The *Panmunjom* Declaration, hailed as a ‘foundation for establishing peace on the Korean Peninsula,’ also contained important agreements regarding social and cultural exchange and cooperation. The two Koreas agreed to pursue ‘exchange and cooperation to promote mutual understanding and common interests.’ Professor Jeon (Y.-S. Jeon 2019: 101–103) highlights that a particularly notable aspect of the declaration was the agreement to establish and operate an Inter-Korean Joint Liaison Office. The purpose of this office, as outlined in the declaration, was to facilitate close consultations between authorities in the South and the DPRK and to ensure the smooth implementation of private exchanges and cooperation. This joint liaison office was expected to act as a vital channel for social and cultural exchanges between the two Koreas, a role the South Korean government had been

advocating for since the 1990s. However, as previously mentioned, the *Panmunjom* Declaration was effectively abandoned following the failure of the second US-DPRK summit in Hanoi (February 2019), and in 2020, the Inter-Korean Liaison Office in Gaeseong was destroyed by the DPRK.

Despite a partial resumption of IKEC projects during the Moon Jae-in administration, government-CSO governance in the socio-cultural sector struggled to function effectively amid the significant volatility of inter-Korean relations. However, certain projects pursued under government-CSO partnerships, such as the Inter-Korean Association of Historians and the joint Korean language dictionary compilation project, demonstrated characteristics less vulnerable to political influence and exhibited a degree of continuity. These initiatives demonstrated the potential for governance that is rooted in collaborative practice. In particular, *Gyeoremal-keunsajeon* (Korean Dictionary Joint Compilation Project), the establishment of a legal foundation played a crucial role in sustaining governance, despite domestic political conflict and strained inter-Korean relations. Legislative enactment and the revision of relevant National Assembly laws demonstrably provided a stable basis for project continuity, highlighting the importance of a legal framework in supporting public-private governance through challenging circumstances. (T.-K. Kim & K. Lee 2023:89).

4.3 South Korean CSOs' Activities: Aid Projects to the DPRK and Inter-Korean Socio-Cultural Exchange and Cooperation Projects

4.3.1 CSOs' Aid Projects to the DPRK

In the mid-1990s, influential CSO leaders in South Korea, particularly from religious groups, responded to reports from the United Nations regarding the crisis in the DPRK. Joining efforts to address the urgent need for humanitarian relief, emergency actions were predominantly led by CSOs, including the provision of food and medicine. However, following the success in 2000 of the inter-Korean summit and a subsequent improvement in inter-Korean relations, government-level aid to the DPRK increased significantly. This resulted in a broader range of aid projects, encompassing both emergency relief for DPRK residents and development assistance, with an attendant diversification in the scope and beneficiaries of these initiatives (S.-M. Han 2008:82–83; D. J. Kim 2016:480; D. J. Kim 2019:189–190).

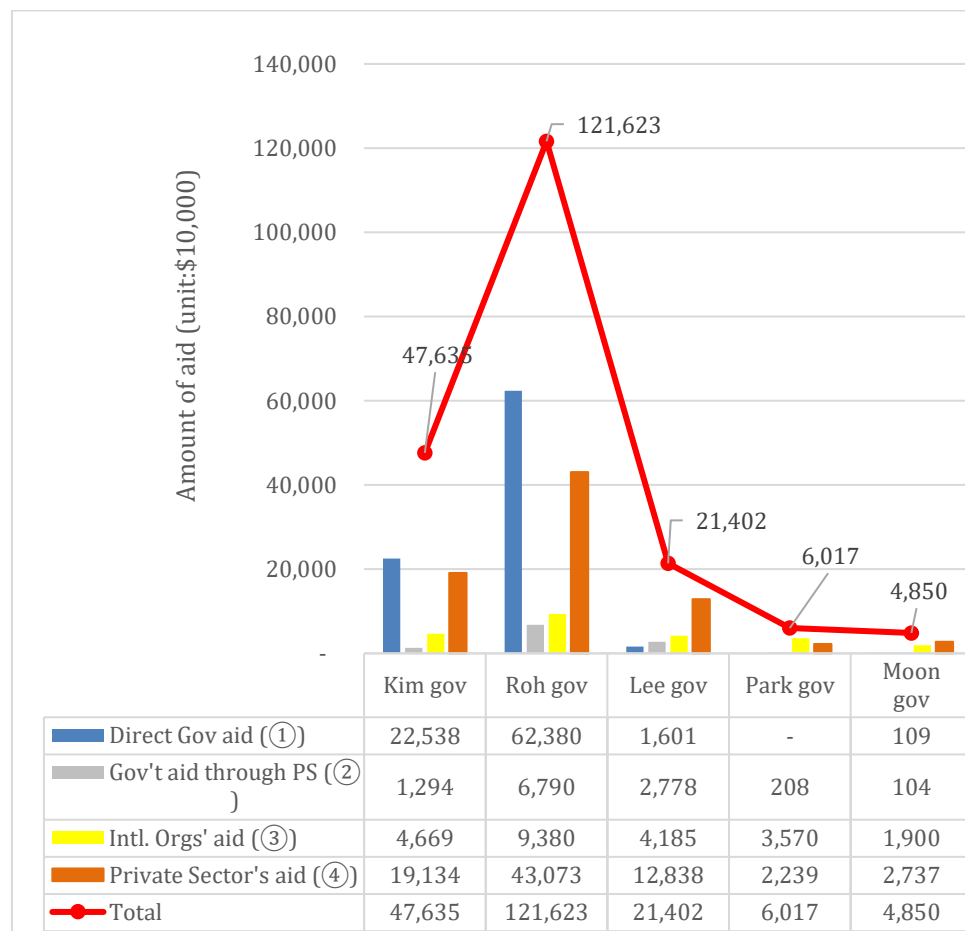
Amount of CSO's Aid to the DPRK

<Graph 4-1> below illustrates the scale of aid provided to the DPRK by each successive South Korean administration (from Kim Dae-jung to Moon Jae-in), excluding concessional loans. Over this period, the South Korean government provided a total of \$2.01 billion in aid to North Korea. Aid to the DPRK can be broadly classified into two categories: government assistance (see ①+②+③) and private sector assistance (see ④). Government assistance to the DPRK can be further subdivided into three channels: direct government assistance (①), governmental assistance

through the private sector (②), and assistance provided through international organisations (③) (K. Y. Moon et al. 2018: 107).

<Graph 4-1> Amount of Assistance to the DPRK by Governments

Grants

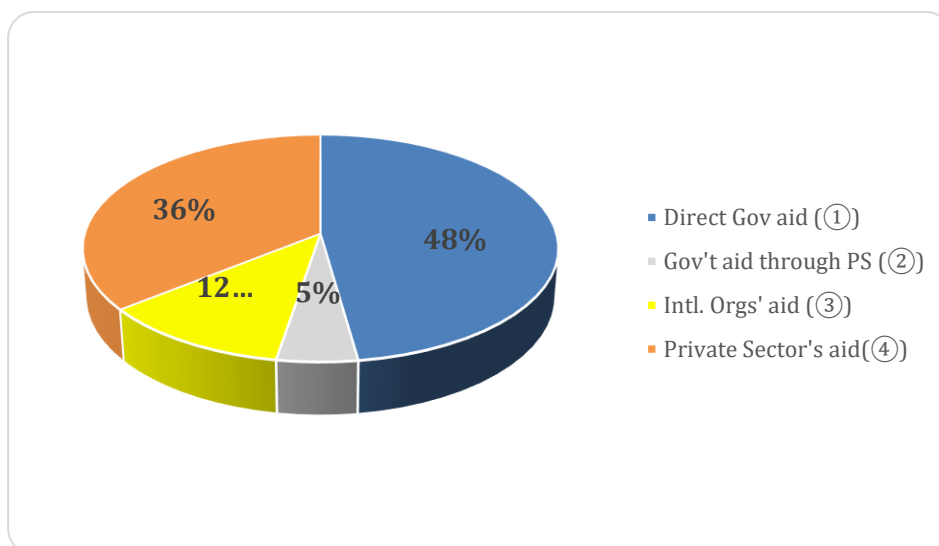


* Source: Compiled by the author based on data provided by the Ministry of Unification (2024.05.08) and the Export-Import Bank of Korea (<https://www.koreaexim.go.kr/sc/HPHFSE054M01>)

Starting with fertiliser aid in 1999, direct government assistance commenced in earnest under the Kim Dae-jung administration. In the 2000s, however, the scale of direct government aid expanded significantly, while aid via international organisations and private sector assistance also gradually

increased. During the Roh Moo-hyun administration, humanitarian assistance, such as food aid, simultaneously continued alongside mid to long term development projects, (including agricultural structural improvements), resulting in the highest level of assistance (H. J. Lee & Y.-H. Lee 2018: 2). However, when the Lee Myung-bak administration scaled back direct government aid, international organisations and the private sector became the primary channels of assistance to the DPRK. The Park Geun-hye administration, which began in 2013, also preferred indirect aid via international organisations, which effectively minimised the political burden of direct assistance to the DPRK (K. Y. Moon, J. Y. Park & Y. H. Song 2018: 107–108). As a result, the scale of aid to the DPRK significantly declined. Under the Moon Jae-in administration, aid was provided predominantly through private sector channels, while the overall volume of aid reached its lowest level

<Graph 4-2> Percentage of Assistance to the DPRK by Channel



* Source: Compiled by the author based on data provided by the Ministry of Unification (2024.05.08).

<Graph 4-2> illustrates the proportion of aid distributed via assistance channels. From the Kim Dae-jung administration to the Moon Jae-in administration, direct government aid accounted for the largest share at 48%. Although aid provided by the private sector represents 36% (USD 822.57 million), when including the portion of governmental aid channelled through the private sector (5%), this figure rises to 41%.

Referring to <Graph 4-1>, which shows trends in these proportions across different administrations, private sector aid peaked during the Roh Moo-hyun administration. While the absolute scale of private sector aid has declined since then, its proportion has increased. This shift is due to the substantial reduction in government-level assistance, leading to a higher relative share of private sector aid within South Korea's overall assistance to the DPRK.

Taking all these factors into account, it is clear that private sector support to the DPRK has been just as impactful as government-level assistance. Until 1999, aid raised by private organisations was channelled through the Korean Red Cross. However, with the inauguration of the Kim Dae-jung administration, efforts were made in 1998 to revitalise private-sector aid to the DPRK, while measures introduced in 1999 to diversify aid channels facilitated the rapid expansion of direct private sector assistance. Despite this, during the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administrations, private-sector aid to the DPRK sharply declined (K. Y. Moon et al. 2018: 112–113).

Nevertheless, in comparison to government agencies, local governments, and international organisations, where aid fluctuated in response to changes in inter-Korean relations, the support provided by South Korean CSOs

exhibited relatively flexible characteristics (KNCCNK 2015: 82), and from 1995, when assistance began, through to 2022, aid was provided continuously to the DPRK. Over this period, total contributions amounted to \$822.57 million, with an annual average of \$27.65 million in free goods (K. Y. Moon et al. 2018: 112).

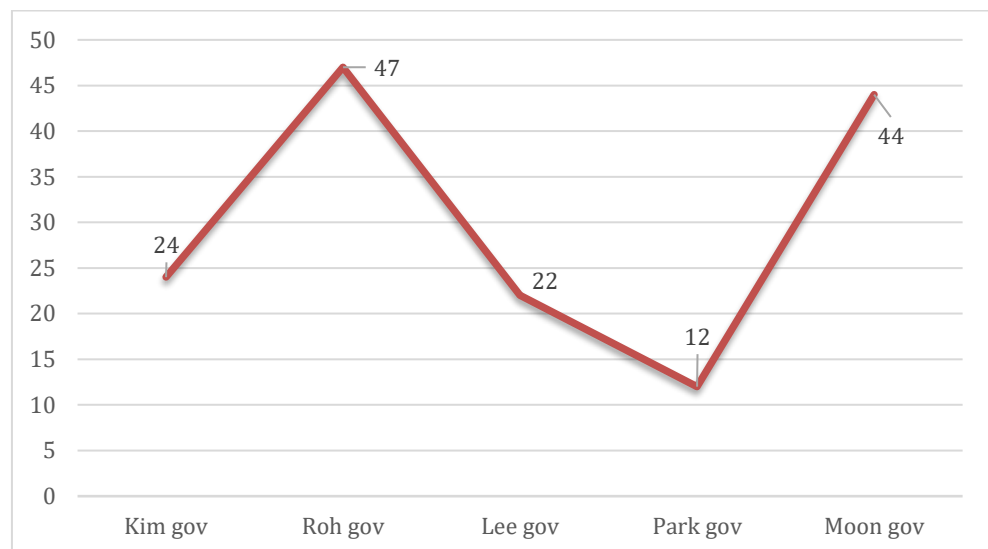
Trends in the Number of Designated Private Organisations for Providing Assistance to the DPRK

<Graph 4-3> below illustrates the number of private organisations designated by the government to provide assistance to the DPRK. With the inauguration of the Kim Dae-jung administration, the participation of CSOs providing aid to the DPRK expanded significantly (D. J. Kim 2016:481). Moreover, the scope of activities carried out by these organisations also increased. According to Moon et al. (2018:113), between 1999 and 2016, 14 private organisations provided over 10 billion won in aid to the DPRK (approximately \$9.09 million), with four contributing more than 50 billion won (around \$45.45 million). Collectively, these top 14 private organisations contributed approximately 630 billion KRW (about \$572.73 million), accounting for over 50% of the total aid from private entities.⁹ Provision of aid during this period contributed to the emergence of large-scale private organisations, the number of which peaked during the Roh Moo-hyun administration. With the start of the Lee Myung-bak administration,

⁹ Source: The average exchange rate by period was applied, with 1 USD = 1,100 KRW used for the period from 1 January 2000 to 9 May 2022. The start date marks the earliest available exchange rate data, while the end date corresponds to the end of the Moon Jae-in administration. The exact rate of 1 USD = 1,113.81 KRW was approximated to 1,100 KRW for simplicity. Source link: <https://spot.wooribank.com/pot/Dream?withyou=FXXRT0016> (Accessed on: 1 January 2024.)

however, their activities began to decline, and most projects were concluded by 2011. During the Park Geun-hye administration, most aid projects to the DPRK were discontinued after 2016, but some nutritional and healthcare support projects for vulnerable groups, including children, were maintained. The increased number of aid providers participating during the Moon Jae-in administration reflects heightened expectations generated by successive high-level talks. Nonetheless, the actual impact of these activities remained limited, evidenced by the fact that the scale of private aid to the DPRK during the Moon Jae-in administration was largely similar to that of the Park Geun-hye administration (S.-H. Park 2021:89).

<Graph 4-3> Trends in the Number of Designated Private Organisations for Providing Assistance to the DPRK per Administration



* Source: Compiled by the author based on data provided by the Ministry of Unification (2024.05.08).

Key Activities of CSOs in Providing Aid to the DPRK

In the early stages, South Korean CSOs providing aid to the DPRK primarily focused on emergency relief or one-time assistance. However, their activities gradually diversified into specialist development assistance projects in sectors such as agriculture and livestock, healthcare, vulnerable groups (such as infants and young children), and social infrastructure. Notably, some development aid projects led by organisations such as World Vision focused on technical education and guidance programs for North Korean workers, facilitating a shift from socialist subsistence farming to modern agricultural management techniques. By providing the DPRK with access to advanced technologies, the benefit of IKEC was therefore demonstrated through practical programmes that gained international recognition (K. Y. Moon, W. Y. Lee & S.-M. Jung 2017:63; K. Y. Moon et al. 2018:114).

In August 2005, North Korean authorities abruptly requested that UN agencies and international NGO offices in Pyongyang suspend their humanitarian aid projects and close their offices by the end of the year, while requiring the withdrawal of their staff (most organisations, except for a few NGOs from the European Union, were expelled from the DPRK). This eroded international public support for aid provision to the DPRK, and consequently, the scale of aid from the UN and national-level projects was significantly reduced (J.-M. Lee et al. 2009:143–144).

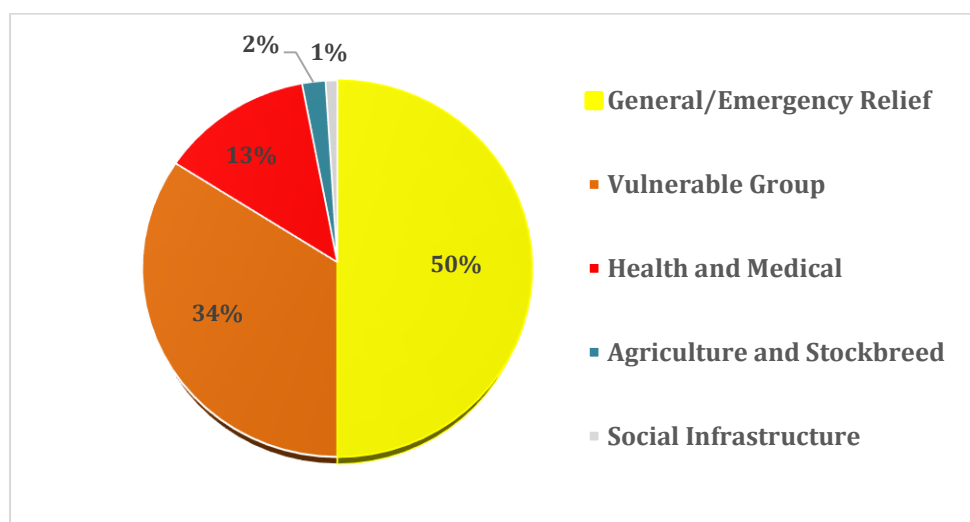
In contrast to the international community, whose focus was solely on emergency relief, South Korean CSO responses looked upon development assistance as an opportunity to maintain the momentum of inter-Korean relations, promote reconciliation, and prepare for future integration. While

international norms typically dictated that development aid should be tied to reforms in the DPRK's systems and policies, South Korean CSOs pursued pilot projects aimed at increasing the DPRK's understanding of development assistance, while encouraging subsequent policy and system reforms (J.-M. Lee et al. 2009:145–147).

When categorising the activities of CSOs providing aid to the DPRK, several classification criteria can be applied. This includes distinctions between general/emergency relief and development assistance, as well as sectoral and beneficiary-based categorisations. To effectively organise and illustrate 20 years of aid projects to the DPRK, from 1995 to 2016, the KNCCNK utilised a sectoral framework, which included: 1) general and emergency relief, 2) agriculture and livestock, 3) healthcare, 4) support for vulnerable groups, and 5) social infrastructure (KNCCNK 2015:79, 211–214).

<Graph 4-4> below compiles and analyses the sectoral activities of 34 major organisations affiliated with the KNCCNK. While it does not represent all organisations providing aid to the DPRK, it offers an in-depth data analysis gathered from key organisations that have been consistently active since the inception of aid to the DPRK. This analysis spans the 20 years from 1995 to 2015, a time when aid to the DPRK was at its peak. Given the significance of this data, we will now examine the activities of CSOs providing aid to the DPRK in each sector based on the information below.

<Graph 4-4 > Proportion of Key Activity Areas - CSOs Providing Aid to the DPRK



* Source: Moon et. al (2017: 45)

a) Support for Vulnerable Groups and General/Emergency Relief Activities:

The areas that accounted for the largest proportion of aid were: support for vulnerable groups (50%) and general/emergency relief (34%). This is attributed to the fact that, from 1995, private organisations supporting the DPRK (following its request for international support), focused on vulnerable groups such as infants, pregnant women, the elderly, and people with disabilities, who were most affected by the humanitarian disaster caused by the DPRK's economic difficulties. The significant proportion of aid directed to general/emergency relief, because of continued economic crises within the DPRK, and recurrent natural disasters, necessitated support for necessities such as food, further increasing the demand for emergency relief (K. Moon & A. S. Lee:90).

b) Healthcare Sector:

Healthcare was the third largest area of activity for South Korean CSOs. Accounting for 13% of aid, this sector provided support to improve health and medical conditions for North Korean residents, including the provision of medicines, medical supplies and equipment, hospital construction and upgrades, as well as projects to support and modernise pharmaceutical and medical equipment production factories (K. Y. Moon et al. 2017:39). South Korean CSO activities in this sector were acknowledged for demonstrating an extended role beyond simple relief efforts and the embodied elements of development assistance (KNCCNK 2015:81–82).

c) Agricultural and Livestock Sector:

Support for the agricultural and livestock sector accounted for 2% of provision, a relatively small proportion compared to other sectors, and was given lower priority than general/emergency relief and healthcare. Following the implementation of the May 24 Measures under the Lee Myung-bak administration, aid to the DPRK in this sector was significantly restricted. Initially focused on basic material support, such as fertilisers, aid provision in this sector gradually expanded to include the production of agricultural equipment and technical cooperation (KNCCNK 2015:82).

d) Social Infrastructure Sector:

This sector encompasses capacity building and infrastructure development projects in local communities. Key areas of focus include: water supply and sewage system improvements (including wastewater treatment facilities),

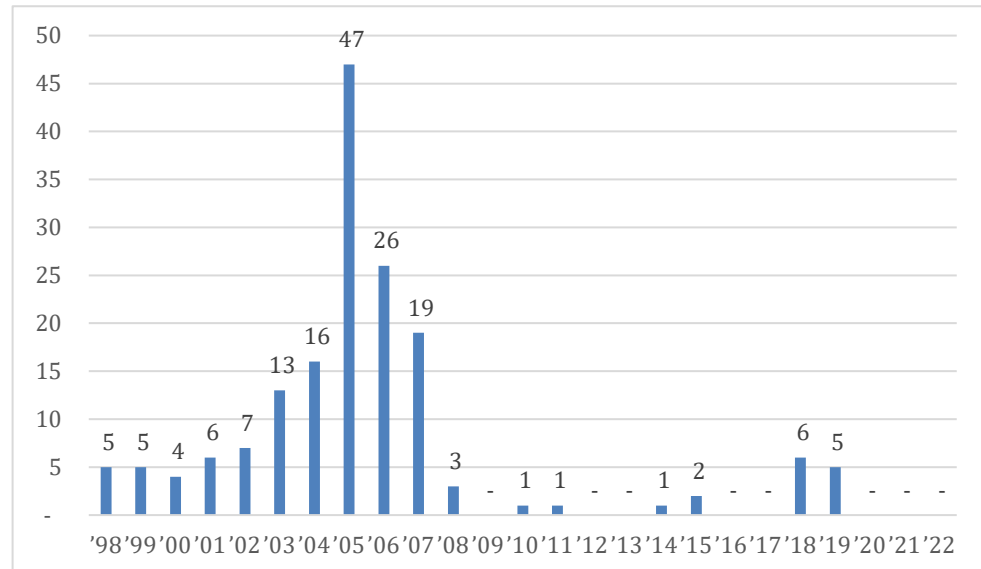
school construction and improvements (such as providing desks and chairs), the construction and renovation of community facilities, reforestation efforts, and environmental projects. Although small-scale development activities were initiated in the early phases of relief, this sector was halted entirely following the May 24 Measures, resulting in it being classified as the least prioritised sector, representing only 1% of total aid (K. Y. Moon et al. 2017:39–41).

4.3.2 CSOs' Inter-Korean Socio-Cultural Exchange and Cooperation projects

<Graph 4-5> below presents the trends in the number of approvals for socio-cultural exchange and cooperation projects. Following the enactment of the IKEC Act in September 1990, a total of 167 projects in the socio-cultural fields were approved by the Ministry of Unification between 1998 and 2022. Significantly, there was a marked increase in the number of approvals during the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations.

<Graph 4-5> Number of Approvals for Inter-Korean Socio-Cultural Cooperation projects by Year by the South Korean Government

(Unit: Number of Cases)



* Source: Compiled by the author based on data provided by the Ministry of Unification (2024.05.08).

Notably, before the Kim Dae-jung administration, only three socio-cultural cooperation projects were approved during the seven years from 1991 to 1997. However, this number increased to 27 between 1998 and 2002, and surged to 121 between 2003 and 2007. After 2008, the start of the Lee Myung-bak administration, the number of approvals plummeted, and from 2008 to 2022, only 16 socio-cultural cooperation projects were endorsed. While the latter half of the Park Geun-hye administration saw no recorded approvals, there was a resumption in the early days of the Moon Jae-in administration. However, from 2020 through to 2022, the number again fell to zero.

The Inter-Korean Cooperation Fund Act specifies that the purpose of the Inter-Korean Cooperation Fund (IKCF) is to "support all or part of the funds

necessary for cooperation projects in the fields of culture, academics, and sports" (Article 8 of the Inter-Korean Cooperation Fund Act). However, funding allocated for these areas is less than that for other sectors, such as economic exchange and cooperation. <Graph 4-6> below, based on data from the Ministry of Unification, shows the trend in financial support from the Inter-Korean Cooperation Fund (IKCF) for inter-Korean socio-cultural exchange and cooperation projects, amounting to a total of USD 736.6 million.¹⁰

Nevertheless, the proportion of funds allocated to socio-cultural exchange and cooperation projects from the IKCF has remained low. Even in 2018, which saw the highest level of support for socio-cultural exchange projects, only USD 68.06 million was directed towards these types of projects.¹¹

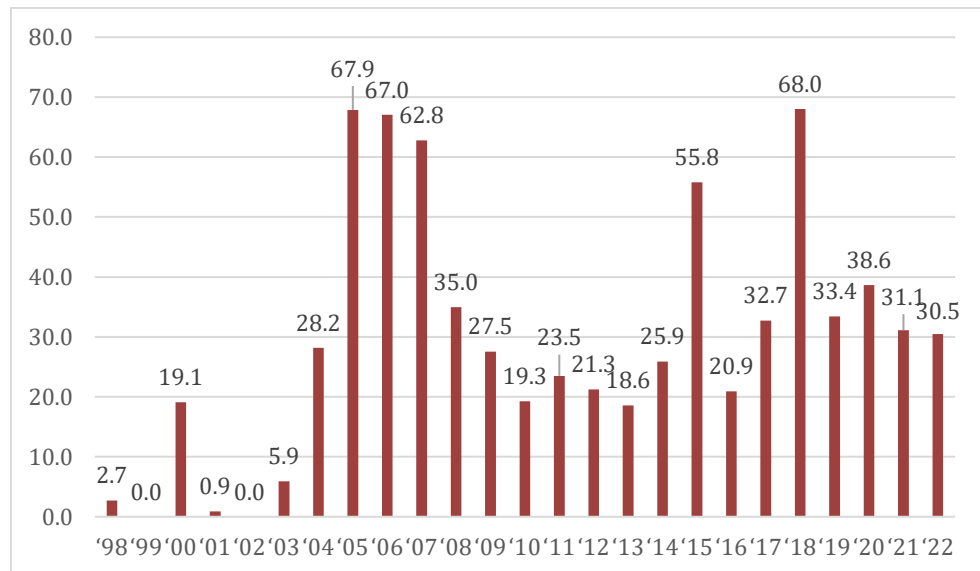
Despite this, one notable characteristic of socio-cultural exchange projects is their continuance regardless of fluctuations in inter-Korean relations. Unlike aid projects to the DPRK, initiatives such as the compilation of *Gyeoremal-keunsajeon* (South and North Korean language dictionary) and the joint inter-Korean excavation project at *Gaeseong Manwoldae* (the capital site of the Goryeo Dynasty - situated in North Korea), were supported by specific laws that ensured funding. This made them stable and effective, in that support through the cooperation fund was sustained.

¹⁰ For the KRW-to-US dollar exchange rate, an approximate rate of 1,100 KRW per USD is employed. This corresponds closely with the historical average rate of \$1 = 1,113.81 KRW calculated over the study period, spanning from January 1, 2000, to the conclusion of the Moon Jae-in administration. This data was obtained from Woori Bank's exchange rate statistics, available at <https://spib.wooribank.com/pib/Dream?withyou=PSFXD0126> (accessed on November 15, 2024)).

¹¹ Source: <https://unikorea.go.kr/unikorea/business/cooperation/interkoreanfund/intro/>

**<Graph 4-6> Amount of Support from the IKCF for Inter-Korean
Socio-Cultural Exchange Cooperation Projects**

(Unit: Million US\$)



* Source: Compiled by the author based on data provided by the Ministry of Unification (2024.05.08).

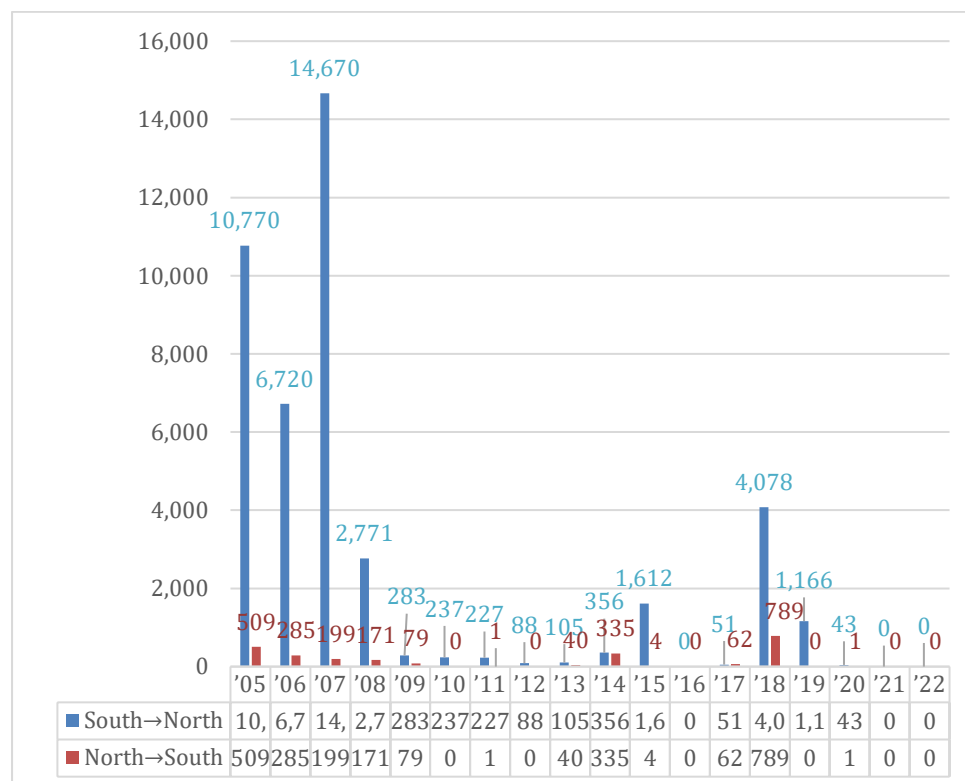
Socio-cultural exchange and cooperation projects inherently involve mutual travel between residents of both the North and South, providing many individuals from both regions the opportunity to visit each other's locales (the total number of visitors during the sample period being 45,652). As illustrated in <Graph 4-7> below, the number of these visits increased rapidly during the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations, when socio-cultural exchange and cooperation projects across various fields were actively promoted. This number decreased sharply, however, following the suspension of most socio-cultural projects due to the May 24 measures.

Significantly, South Korean residents travelling to the DPRK accounted for 99% of all inter-Korean travel (43,177 people), suggesting that future forms

of IKEC should evolve towards a more balanced, two-way interaction. Such an approach could potentially foster mutual understanding and acceptance of difference in terms of socio-cultural contexts, as well as contributing to the restoration of a shared cultural identity through the encouragement of attitudinal change among residents both North and South (G. C. Lee et al. 2018:276).

<Graph 4-7> Number of People Travelling Between South and North Korea for Socio-Cultural Exchange and Cooperation¹²

(Unit: Persons)



* Source: Compiled by the author based on data provided by the Ministry of Unification (2024.05.08).

¹² Statistics on inter-Korean travel have only been available since 2005, when the IKEC system was formalised.

Key Activities of CSOs in Socio-Cultural Exchange and Cooperation

Socio-cultural exchanges encompass a variety of fields, including academia and education, the environment, film, literature, sports, religion, and women's conferences. While a broad range of areas are involved, this section focuses on key fields commonly examined in existing studies related to socio-cultural exchanges, namely inter-Korean events, sports, culture and arts, history and language, religion, and women (S.-H. Lee 2017; H. J. Lee & Y.-H. Lee 2018; Y.-S. Jeon 2019).

a) Inter-Korean Events for the June 15 Joint Declaration and Liberation Day

Following the inter-Korean summits, a defining feature of inter-Korean socio-cultural exchange has been the emergence of jointly planned events between the two Korean jurisdictions. Of particular interest, from 2001 to 2008, were the June 15 Joint Declaration and August 15 Liberation Day events, held in Pyongyang and Seoul under the June 15 Committee (representing the South, DPRK, and Overseas Koreans). These were significant milestones in civilian-level exchange and cooperation. For the first time since the division of the Korean Peninsula, many South Koreans legally visited Pyongyang with government approval, thus allowing citizens from both Koreas to engage in direct exchanges across diverse sectors of society, consequently expanding IKEC across multiple fields.

For instance, in 2001, around 300 South Korean civilian delegates visited Mt. Geumgang in the DPRK. During this visit, social groups from both Koreas –

including representatives of labour, women, youth, education, literature, media, and science – gathered to discuss unification issues and held field-specific discussions. Similarly, in 2002, approximately 110 DPRK residents made a rare visit to Seoul to celebrate the August 15 Liberation Day. Notably, in 2005, despite a stalemate in official inter-Korean talks, a joint event took place attended by the South Korean Minister of Unification and Kim Jong-il, Chairman of the National Defence Commission of the DPRK, in a meeting that played a key role in restoring inter-Korean relations (J.-H. Kim 2001:10; S.-H. Lee 2017:95–101).

Despite their significance, contrarily, large-scale joint events between the two Koreas have also been a source of conflict within South Korean society. Unlike the DPRK, which presents a popular unified stance, South Korean society comprises groups with divergent views on the DPRK and differing opinions on unification. This has often resulted in heated debates concerning visits to DPRK propaganda sites, as well as rebuttals and responses to DPRK criticism of South Korea's domestic politics. Although these conflicting perspectives have created tensions surrounding planned events, a more critical challenge arose with the shift to a conservative administration, which refused to recognise the legitimacy of the South Korean June 15 Committee. As a result, large-scale joint events ceased after the 2008 June 15 Joint Event (S.-H. Lee 2017:101–102; H. H. Lee 2020:219).

b) Inter-Korean Sports Events

Unlike other fields of socio-cultural exchange and cooperation, sports have been an area where mutual visits between the DPRK and South Korea have

been most productive. Sports exchange projects between the two Koreas can be broadly divided into participation in international competitions, either as a unified team or via joint entry, and friendly events such as the North-South Unification Basketball Tournament and the Unification Soccer Tournament. Notable examples include: the joint entrance of North and South Korea at the opening ceremony of the 2000 Sydney Olympics, the participation of DPRK athletes with a cheering squad at the 2002 Busan Asian Games, and the 2002 Unification Soccer Match. Although sports exchanges, actively promoted from 2000 onwards, slowed down after 2008, they continued intermittently via international competitions and youth soccer matches. Significantly, the participation of DPRK athletes in the 2018 *PyeongChang* Winter Olympics marked a key opportunity for the restoration of inter-Korean relations. It is important to acknowledge that sports exchanges, due to their widespread popularity and public interest, have contributed to opening the door for wider inter-Korean relations.

That said, sports exchanges have also been criticised for being staged one-time events with strong political overtones. Many scholars have also highlighted the need for sports exchange projects to be promoted in a non-political manner, with more emphasis on expanded opportunities for people-to-people contact through the involvement of various civil society organisations (S. I. Bae & K. G. Lee 2003:287; Mitchell et al. 2016; G.-C. Lee 2018:83–85).

c) Inter-Korean Culture and Arts Projects

Performance exchange in Seoul and Pyongyang in 1985, following a visit by separated families to their hometowns, marked the beginning of socio-cultural exchange between the DPRK and South Korea. Notably, most cultural exchange projects in the arts have taken the form of reciprocal visits by art groups from both sides of the divide, with many performances occurring during events such as the Olympics, organised family reunions, Chuseok, August 15 Liberation Day, and the June 15 Joint Declaration anniversary. More recently, in February 2018, the *Samjiyon* Orchestra from the DPRK performed in Seoul and Gangneung, and in April 2018, South Korean artists performed in Pyongyang as part of the 2018 *PyeongChang* Winter Olympics. These events serve as representative examples of cultural exchange projects generating significant social and political capital in terms of Inter-Korean relations.

However, cultural exchange projects have not always been successful in restoring trust and improving relations between the two Koreas, and politically affiliated events conducted without sufficient trust-building activities can easily lead to misunderstandings and hinder relationship building (G.-C. Lee 2018:87–140).

d) Inter-Korean History and Language Programmes

By contrast, the fields of history and language have been characterised by relatively few ideological conflicts, and have continued up until recently. These include historical initiatives, such as the joint excavation of pre-

division historical sites, and linguistic projects, such as the compilation of a joint dictionary of North and South Korean languages. In the field of history, North and South Korean historians jointly established the Inter-Korean Historian Association in 2003, through which they have organised academic conferences and conducted joint research on cultural heritage, exemplified by the joint inter-Korean excavation project at Gaeseong *Manwoldae*, the capital site of the Goryeo Dynasty, situated in North Korea. Excavations, which began in 2007, continued even during periods of strained inter-Korean relations. In 2015, South and North Korea jointly held exhibitions showcasing the *Manwoldae* excavation site in Seoul and Gaeseong, which provided a tangible example of IKEC in situ. The *Manwoldae* excavation, which accommodated South Korean personnel in the DPRK for an extended period and involved the sharing of techniques and methodologies for cultural heritage excavation and preservation, represents a success story that demonstrated new possibilities for inter-Korean academic exchange (S.-H. Lee 2017:75–77; S.-K. Hong 2018).

In the field of language, the primary goal has been addressing the growing linguistic divergence caused by the division of Korea. In this regard, the compilation of Gyeoremal-keunsajeon, initiated in 2005, aimed at creating an integrated dictionary that consolidated both commonalities and differences between both North and South Korean languages, which evolved over the 70 years of division. Recognising the importance of this project, the South Korean government introduced relevant laws and provided full financial support. However, after the May 24 Measures, meetings between the two Koreas were suspended for several years, leading to repeated delays

in the project's completion. Unfortunately, following the last compilation meeting in May 2015, no further progress has been made, and the project is currently being conducted solely within South Korea (S.-H. Lee 2017:73–75; H. Yu 2021).

Despite the progress made in historical and language exchanges, critics have pointed out the superficial nature of these initiatives. Although history and language may appear to be less politically charged, making it seemingly easier to find common ground between the divided North and South, the reality of 70 years of division has implanted deeply ingrained differences in historical interpretation and linguistic culture. Consequently, there is a growing view that, beyond simple material support, exchange projects should prioritise deeper engagements that allow for discussions about values and ideologies (S.-H. Lee 2017:73–77; H. J. Lee & Y.-H. Lee 2018:4)

e) Inter-Korean Religious Affiliations

Religion has been one of the most consistent areas of socio-cultural exchange between the DPRK and South Korea, making it one of the fields with the highest frequency of exchanges between the two Koreas (H. J. Lee & Y.-H. Lee 2018:3). South Korea's religious community has actively participated in these exchanges, driven by both religious and humanitarian interests in supporting their counterparts in the North. Although the DPRK has traditionally held a negative view of religion, it has sought, partly in response to international scrutiny, to demonstrate religious tolerance and enable freedom of practice by supporting the activity of religious organisations. This led to the construction of *Jangchung* Cathedral in September 1988 and

Bongsu Church in November of the same year. Additionally, the protection and restoration of Buddhist historical sites began, creating a limited but notable space for religious exchange. From the start-up until the 1990s, inter-Korean religious exchanges focused on expanding contact and building mutual trust. Following the 2000 inter-Korean summit, more specific facilitation activities emerged, including the programming of joint religious events and the construction and restoration of religious facilities. Even after the implementation of the 'May 24 Measures' in 2010, religious exchanges continued purely at a congregational level. In September 2011, members of the Korean Conference of Religions for Peace (KCRP) visited Pyongyang, held a joint inter-Korean prayer meeting, and discussed the potential for further exchanges (S. I. Bae & K. G. Lee 2003:287; Jonsson 2006:213–214; S.-H. Lee 2017:91–81).

While inter-Korean religious exchange projects have played an important role in improving relations by expanding contact and providing humanitarian support, certain limitations are also evident. Firstly, the nature of the DPRK's system makes it difficult for any religious exchanges to occur in a purely non-political context. Secondly, it is the fact that a large number of South Korean religious groups seek to engage with a small number of DPRK organisations, and this has sometimes led to unnecessary competition and rivalry among South Korean counterparts (S.-H. Lee 2017: 90-91).

f) Inter-Korean Women's Activism

In 1991, the first inter-Korean women's exchange project occurred during the inaugural 'Peace in Asia and the Role of Women' seminar. This event marked

the first time a South Korean delegation crossed into North Korea via Panmunjom after the division of the Korean Peninsula. In the 1990s, a significant topic for the inter-Korean women's exchange project was the issue of 'sexual slavery by the Japanese military during World War II.' In the 2000s, these exchange projects expanded to various levels, including joint events, academic collaborations between North and South Korean women, and initiatives developed from within the women's peace movement. However, from 2008 to 2017, these exchange projects were suspended under conservative South Korean governments. Since the Moon Jae-in administration, they have only occurred twice, and after the US/DPRK summit in February 2019, have almost ceased altogether (S.-H. Lee 2017: 113-120; J. S. Kim 2020; 2021).

The women's peace movement, recognised as a non-violent, anti-militarist movement, holds significant collateral within peace processes, particularly within conflict-ridden societies. However, its importance in the peace process on the Korean Peninsula has yet to be fully acknowledged. Inter-Korean women's exchanges have faced additional challenges, such as limited participation. Primarily driven by a small number of female activists, there have been difficulties in generating common interests with a wider societal appeal (S.-H. Lee 2017:120–123; J. S. Kim 2020)

Since 1985, when inter-Korean exchanges began, CSO-led socio-cultural exchange and cooperation projects covered diverse fields, including joint events, sports, culture and arts, history and language, religion, and women. Inter-Korean events such as those for the June 15 Joint Declaration and Liberation Day became the first platforms for civilian-level inter-Korean

exchanges since the Armistice Agreement. These events were viewed as opportunities to build consensus on unification by allowing many citizens to directly participate in IKEC (S.-H. Lee 2017:62–63; G. C. Lee et al. 2018:138–140).

However, several issues and limitations have been identified. Firstly, many socio-cultural exchange projects remain event-based and thus are temporary in nature (Jeon 2010:36). Additionally, concerns have been raised about the risk of internal conflict within South Korea which might be sparked by such exchanges, the political influence of both governments leading to interruptions in exchange projects (S.-H. Lee 2017:65-66), the absence of institutional support for sustaining socio-cultural exchanges (Y.-S. Jeon 2019:109-111), and the overemphasis on government-led centralised governance (H. Park 2019:69–72), all of which have been highlighted as significant challenges.

4.4 Trends in South Korean Public Perceptions of the DPRK

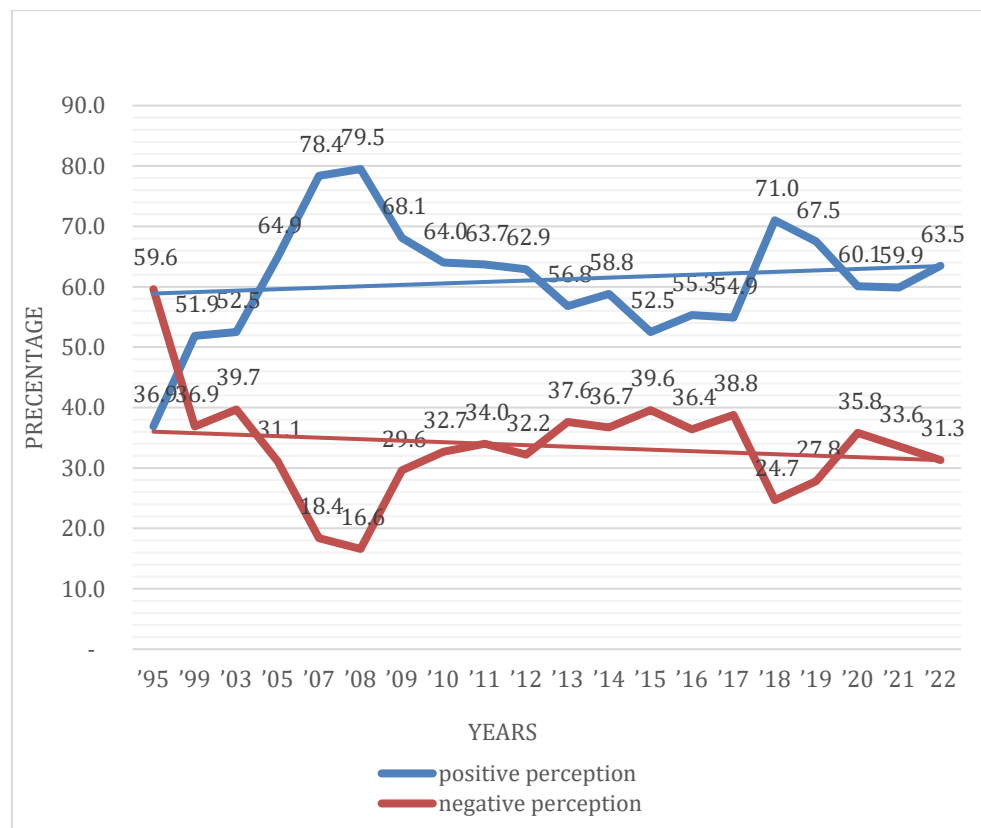
This section provides an overview of how South Korean residents' perceptions of the DPRK have evolved over the course of the period covered by this research thesis. These can be examined from various angles; however, this paper aims to simplify this question by presenting survey data from several research institutions that reflect how South Korean residents view the DPRK.

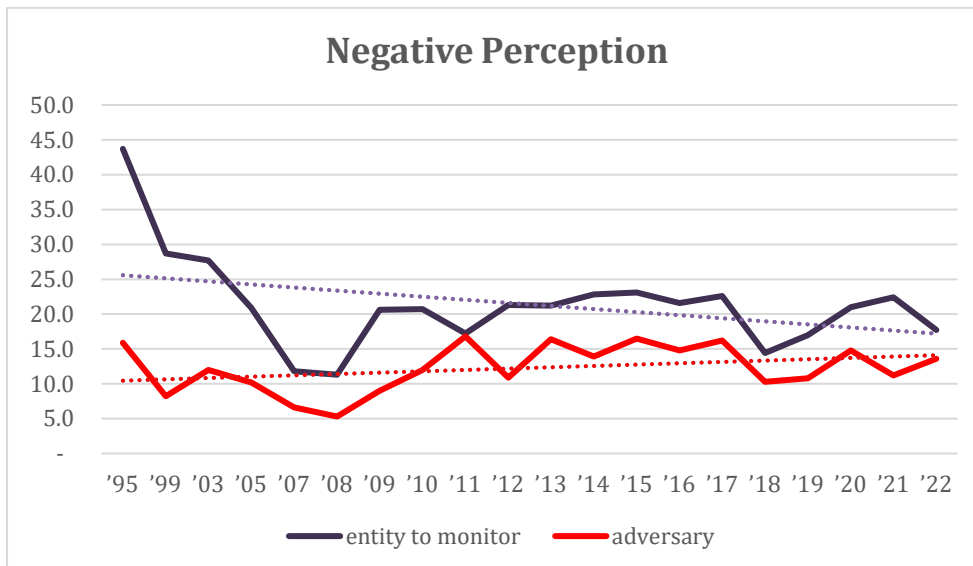
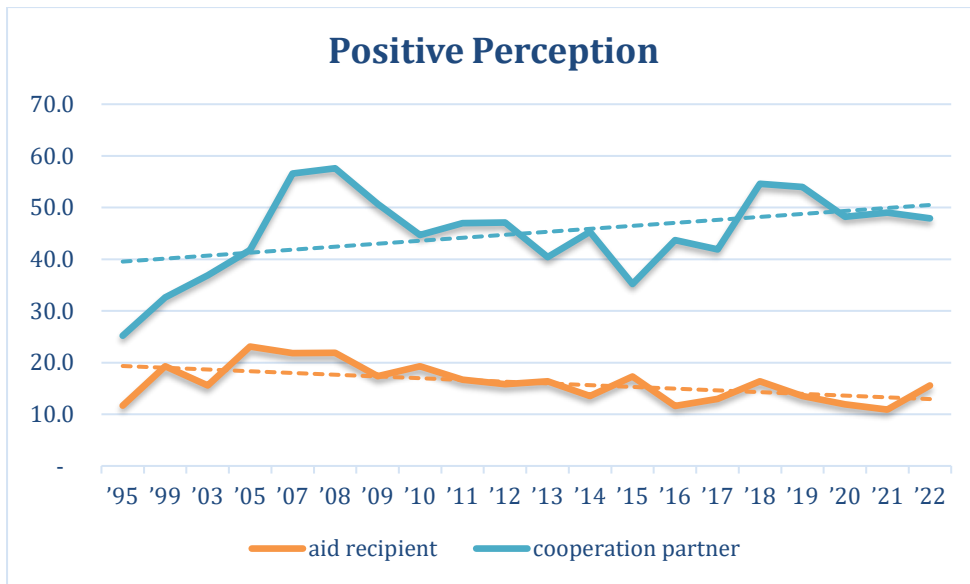
These surveys are considered by numerous existing studies as indicators reflecting the fundamental attitudes of South Korean society about unification and inter-Korean relations (S. Jeong & Y. Kim 2014:110; K.-S. Kim & J.-H Park 2021:1; J. H. Chae 2023:284–5). Notably, Jeong and Kim (S. Jeong & Y. Kim 2014:110–111) argue that this data serves as a more important benchmark for understanding South Korean perceptions of inter-Korean relations than other measures, such as tallies of support for unification or government policies. They argue that this is because they are less likely to be influenced by political biases related to temporal circumstances or party affiliations, and contend that perception surveys on North Korea reflect the basic identity-based view-points of the general public.

The data utilised for these surveys include the National Unification Survey, conducted intermittently from 1993 to 2005 by the Korea Institute for National Unification (hereafter KINU), and the annual Unification Consciousness Survey, conducted since 2007 by the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies at Seoul National University (hereafter IPUS). Both surveys presented respondents with five options profiling attitudes towards North Korea: *'aid recipient,' 'cooperation partner,' 'competitor,' 'entity to*

monitor,’ and *adversary.*’ In this research, ‘aid recipient’ and ‘cooperation partner’ are classified as positive perceptions, while ‘entity to monitor’ and ‘adversary’ are categorised as negative perceptions. The ‘competitor’ category, which is considered relatively neutral, is excluded to simplify the analysis of changing trends.

<Graph 4-8> Trends in South Koreans' perception of the DPRK





* Source: Public opinion survey data from 1995 to 2005 are drawn from the KINU National Unification Survey (<http://www.kinu.or.kr>), while data from 2007 to 2022 are compiled by the author from the annual Unification Consciousness Survey conducted by IPUS (<https://ipus.snu.ac.kr>).

<Graph 4-8> demonstrates that over the sample period, South Korean perceptions of North Korea did not dramatically shift in its overall trend. Nevertheless, several clear patterns of change can be identified:

First, since the Kim Dae-jung administration, negative perceptions about North Korea have been replaced by more favourable views. Whereas previously, hostile perceptions constituted a majority (59.6% in 1995) of respondent opinion, after the advent of the Kim Dae-jung government, positive perceptions surpassed the halfway mark (51.9% in 1999). Despite some fluctuations, these have consistently remained above 50%. In relation to this, K. Kim (2022:39) argues that the more amicable inter-Korean relations are, the more favourable public perceptions of North Korea become. K. S. Kim (2021) further suggests that experiences of contact with North Korea and its people appear to influence attitudes towards unification.

Second, perceptions of North Korea have also varied according to the political orientation of the administration in power. During progressive governments, positive perceptions of the DPRK tended to increase, whereas during conservative administrations, hostile perceptions prevailed, with negative perceptions exceeding 30% throughout the conservative government period. Notably, the highest level of negative perception was recorded in 2015 under the Park Geun-hye administration (39.6%).

Third, a closer examination of positive perceptions reveals a shift away from viewing North Korea as an object of support to a recognition of DPRK as a cooperation partner on an equal footing. Conversely, within the negative perception camp, the proportion viewing North Korea as an entity to monitor has declined, while those perceiving DPRK as an adversary have increased.

Fourth, generational differences in perceptions of North Korea have become more pronounced. According to the 2022 IPUS Unification Consciousness

Survey, the sense of North Korea as a cooperation partner among those in their twenties was the lowest among all age groups, and the proportion of positive responses regarding the necessity of unification was also in decline compared with other generations (B. Kim et al. 2022:78, 200). J. H. Chae (2023) attributes this to middle-aged generations perceiving North Korea as ‘us’ or as a ‘*neighbour*’, while younger generations view DPRK as ‘*them*’ or even as an ‘*imaginary entity*’. These generational differences are rooted in changes in South Korean policy towards the DPRK and broader socio-cultural gaps developed between the two Korean jurisdictions over time.

These findings indicate that perceptions of North Korea tend to demonstrate long-term continuity rather than short-term fluctuations (S. Jeong & Y. Kim 2014: 132). However, there have been distinct turning points within this overall continuity. The introduction of an engagement policy under the Kim Dae-jung administration, along with increased direct and indirect contact with North Korea, led to a rise in positive perceptions, establishing a sustained trend over time. Nevertheless, subsequent changes in government policy, reduced opportunities for contact, and the emergence of younger generations have brought about further changes in public attitudes.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter explored the historical background of IKEC and the development of South Korea's IKEC policy across different administrations, as well as the activities carried out by Korean CSOs in the areas of aid to the DPRK and socio-cultural exchange and cooperation.

Firstly, it must be noted that the context of conflict on the Korean Peninsula, like many other conflict-affected societies, cannot be explained by any single factor. The Korean War, fought on the front line of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as the ongoing competition between the United States and China, are among the great power dynamics that have shaped the Korean conflict. Additionally, multi-layered interactions between the DPRK and South Korea, which operate under different political and economic systems, are impacted by ideological and internal conflicts within each society.

Within this context, Inter-Korean relations developed out of an increased role for both governments after the collapse of the Cold War in the late 1980s. Although substantive changes in inter-Korean relations began to emerge during the Kim Dae-jung administration, policy shifts between progressive and conservative governments led to significant volatility in inter-Korean relations. Meanwhile, civil society, growing in confidence and capacity following South Korean democratisation, began to engage in inter-Korean relations under the framework of the unification and peace movement in the 1990s. Spurred by the impact of North Korea's food shortages, the provision of aid to the DPRK became more substantial after the 2000 inter-Korean summit, with CSOs from various sectors increasingly participating in socio-cultural exchange and cooperation.

Policy, legal frameworks, and public-private governance related to exchange and cooperation, as well as various institutional mechanisms and governance structures, were established during the progressive administrations of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, which encouraged and supported private

sector activities and operations. However, inter-Korean relations deteriorated due to the DPRK's nuclear developments and military provocations during conservative governments, and measures were taken to restrict private exchanges by CSOs; hence, public-private governance became insignificant. Although high-level talks resumed under the Moon Jae-in administration, raising hopes for the revival of private exchanges, after their breakdown, the space for exchange and cooperation diminished further.

Despite these challenges, CSOs continued exchange and cooperation efforts. Firstly, in the field of aid to the DPRK, where CSOs provided 41% of the total aid, comparable to the government share of 48%, with approximately 150 organisations actively shifting their focus from general/emergency relief to development assistance. Private-level aid has been provided consistently each year since 1995, even during the Moon Jae-in administration, and this assistance has been acknowledged as fostering understanding and trust between the two Koreas.

Secondly, around socio-cultural exchange and cooperation, a total of 167 projects were approved and promoted from the time of the Kim Dae-jung administration through the Moon Jae-in administration. During this period, approximately USD 736.6 million was allocated from the Inter-Korean Cooperation Fund over 24 years. However, support for other areas of economic cooperation remained limited.

Significantly, IKEC projects in the socio-cultural field facilitated the movement of residents between North and South Korea. From 2005, when the exchange and cooperation system was formalised, until 2022, 45,652

people participated in socio-cultural exchanges between the two Koreas. However, 99% (43,177 people) of this movement involved South Korean residents visiting the DPRK, indicating the one-way nature of the exchange. Active exchanges occurred in sports, culture and arts, history and language, religion, and women's issues, including joint events that provided a platform for large-scale civic exchanges.

As CSO-led inter-Korean exchange and cooperation (IKEC) activities became more robust, and as broader segments of the South Korean public participated in these initiatives, the long-standing hostile and negative perceptions of the DPRK, rooted in the history of division, began to diminish significantly. Expanded opportunities for IKEC were associated with more favourable attitudes toward North Korea, whereas periods of reduced engagement corresponded with a resurgence of negative perceptions.

Nonetheless, these shifts in public sentiment were less pronounced than the abrupt changes which have often been observed in the political relationship between the two Koreas. Even during the conservative administration and especially during the Moon Jae-in administration, when civic-led IKEC projects were at their weakest, data show that positive perceptions of the DPRK continued to outweigh negative views.

As shifts in government policy brought new challenges and reduced opportunities for direct and indirect contact, the growing influence of a younger generation with a distinct perspective has begun to complicate this overall trend.

The next chapter will provide an in-depth analysis of the role CSOs have played in ensuring the sustainability of exchange and cooperation between South and North Korea, while considering the historical context, policy frameworks, and their impact on activities.

Chapter 5. The Roles of CSOs in the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun Administrations (February 1998 – February 2008)

This chapter, grounded in interviews conducted with participants from both the South Korean government and civil society, scrutinises the role of South Korean CSOs in respect of IKEC during the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations. Interviewees were asked about specific roles undertaken by South Korean CSOs in the process of IKEC projects. During this period, civic-led IKEC was at its most active, and in terms of providing aid to the DPRK, emergency relief efforts developed into medium to long-term cooperation projects in areas such as agriculture and health. Concerning socio-cultural exchange and cooperation, previous one-off initiatives such as sporting or religious events were expanded into regular joint inter-Korean projects involving a wide range of ordinary citizens. Furthermore, the scope of these projects was broadened to encompass diverse related fields, including language, history, and gender issues.

5.1 The Roles of South Korean CSOs

The majority of contributors to this study considered inter-Korean cooperation to be the most active in terms of South Korean CSO involvement during this historical period. The following sections are organised thematically and refer to the role of CSOs as commented upon by interviewees.

a) Pioneering the Space for IKEC

Civil society contributors noted that in responding to North Korea's food crisis in the mid-1990s, CSOs took a leading role in pioneering the space for IKEC, primarily through emergency humanitarian assistance to the North, preceding similar governmental efforts. One of the leaders of the Protestant Churches in Korea commented on how the religious community was the first to reach out to the DPRK, even when relations between the authorities of North and South remained strained:

“Back then, our government was strongly against civilians getting involved in unification issues because they believed the North was aiming for communism. (...) At that time, our government criticised and suppressed CSOs trying to engage with the DPRK, calling them ‘foolish’ and accusing them of ‘falling for DPRK tactics’. Even churches faced quite heavy attacks under the National Security Law when they barely managed to meet with the North, but the NCKK was nevertheless actually the only agent in South Korean society that could contact the North on a civilian level”.¹³

A Catholic priest and relief worker recalled that in the 1990s, CSOs had informed the South Korean public about the famine situation in the DPRK, even before the South Korean government. He noted that this awareness campaign catalysed the establishment of various organisations to provide aid

¹³ Former President of the National Council of Churches in Korea, and current Chairman of a peace movement CSO, Interview 24, 17 January 2024.

to the DPRK, including the ‘Korean Sharing Movement’ – a coalition of the seven major religious groups and various aid NGOs.

“At that time, I had heard some news that the DPRK was in a very difficult situation, that they were going through the so-called ‘arduous march’, but there was not much news reported in the South, so I contacted the head of Caritas Hong Kong, who had already been involved with the DPRK and had been sending food aid to the DPRK. I got some videotapes and pictures of starving children from her, and I spread them to the station, and that's when the movement to help the DPRK started in South Korea, and it became a monumental moment of establishing some aid CSOs, including the Korean Sharing Movement”.¹⁴

Another CSO practitioner, involved in providing aid to the DPRK at the time, stressed that the aim of the aid campaign was not solely humanitarian, but also the improvement of inter-Korean relations. Correspondingly, the campaign's name was changed from its initial title, the ‘Movement to Help North Korean Compatriots’, to the ‘Korean Sharing Movement’.

Originally, this movement began under the name ‘Movement to Help North Korean Compatriots’, but it was later changed to ‘Korean Sharing Movement’. This change was made because I was concerned that, if we were perceived as a movement offering unilateral

¹⁴ Leader of a CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 20 years / Catholic Reverend, Interview 16, 12 December 2023.

assistance to the DPRK, it might damage the pride of those receiving the aid, while also fostering a sense of superiority among those providing it”.¹⁵

In summary, during the mid-1990s, hostility towards the DPRK persisted within South Korean society, making it difficult for the South Korean government to take any initiative. Within this climate of tension, South Korean CSOs played a crucial role in creating opportunities for exchange and cooperation by raising awareness of the real impact of famine in the DPRK and leading nationwide aid campaigns. Throughout, careful efforts were made to ensure that aid to the DPRK would contribute to the restoration of relations between the people of North and South Korea.

b) Perception Change through Relationship Building

The next theme identified by both government and civil society participants concerned how civil society contributed to building relationships and enabled individuals from both Koreas to meet in a positive context that reduced prejudice and hostility, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of each other’s realities, through people-to-people exchanges. Both civil society and government participants highlighted the attitudinal change of South Koreans who visited the DPRK via exchange and cooperation projects. One CSO representative noted that individuals who initially held a conservative or hostile view towards the DPRK "adopted a more tolerant attitude after witnessing the harsh realities of North Korea first-hand”.¹⁶ Similarly, a

¹⁵ Leader of a CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 20 years, Interview 15, 5 December 2023

¹⁶ Leader of a CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 20 years, Interview 15, 5 December 2023

former MOU minister described the process of changing perceptions among South Koreans who visited the DPRK during the Kim Dae-jung administration as follows:

“I once visited the DPRK with a group of corporate executives who had no prior knowledge of the country and held strong conservative biases. (...) When people visited the North and stayed there for about a week, I actually saw some of them take off the clothes they were wearing and give them away out of sympathy. The conditions were far worse than they had expected. Even though there were still differences and a sense of unfamiliarity, the fact that North Koreans spoke the same language and shared similarities in traditional culture meant that people seemed to feel a much stronger sense of human connection and national kinship—one that went beyond any political or ideological differences”.¹⁷

One expert explained how humanitarian aid to the DPRK contributed to fostering mutual understanding and even led to the development of trust-building measures:

"During the implementation of aid projects, we were able to gather a great deal of information about the reality of the DPRK that had previously been hidden or overlooked. For

¹⁷ Former minister of the Ministry of Unification, current a university professor, Interview 2, 15 February 2024.

example, through water-related assistance projects, we gained knowledge about the DPRK's water supply and drinking water conditions. In the field of medical assistance, we naturally collected extensive information about the DPRK's medical technology and broader healthcare conditions. The aid provided by CSOs to the DPRK not only directly helped its people but also contributed to improving South Korean society's understanding of the DPRK".¹⁸

Government officials echoed this perception. According to the Ministry of Unification,

"Unlike the early period when interactions were limited to one-off meetings, the projects carried out by private organisations between 2004 and 2006 represented a more advanced stage. These initiatives involved ongoing engagements with North Korean counterparts, expansion of project scopes, and the development of both human and material networks. Over time, this process helped to reduce misunderstandings and prejudices that had previously existed between the parties, while fostering greater mutual understanding. It was, in essence, a process of building genuine connections with one another".¹⁹

¹⁸ Government official previously in charge of assistance to the DPRK, interview 6, 2 November 2023.

¹⁹ Academic expert on inter-Korean relations, current executive of a CSO working on providing aid to the DPRK, interview 27, 24 Jan 2024

Additionally, the impact of civic sector exchanges was not confined to South Korean residents. One CSO representative noted that, although the number of DPRK residents experiencing South Korean society was significantly smaller than the number of South Koreans who experienced the DPRK, the contact effect was more profound on DPRK residents, to the extent that it could be described as a 'culture shock'.

"Officials from the Workers' Party's Unification Front Department or the National Security Agency (mostly counterparts to South Korean civil society organisations) appeared to have some knowledge of South Korean society. However, in reality, their understanding was largely based on what they had seen in newspapers or on the Internet, and they did not truly grasp what South Korean society was like. (...) However, coming into contact with South Korean CSOs—meeting people from the South and observing the way they interacted—really accelerated their understanding of the differences between the two societies, which they had previously only known vaguely”.²⁰

Similarly, a DPRK expert who served as a former minister of the MOU remarked:

"The best way to alleviate hostility towards South Korea, not only among DPRK authorities but also among the general

²⁰ Leader of a CSO providing aid to the DPRK and peace education, interview 18, 21 December 2023.

public, was a significant challenge. It was very important, from our perspective, that CSOs were able to meet ordinary DPRK residents, even if only to a limited extent, as this played a major role in shifting the perception of South Korea among both DPRK officials and ordinary citizens”.

He further emphasised:

"In a situation of confrontation and tension, people-to-people contact through goodwill gestures from civil society organisations, such as support for the DPRK, played a truly important role”.²¹

c) Addressing Psychological and Emotional Challenges

Another significant contribution of CSOs was their role in addressing and raising awareness of the unintended consequences of IKEC. As highlighted in an earlier interview, the reality faced by many South Korean CSOs in their interactions with the DPRK was that increased contact did not always yield positive outcomes. Finding ways to manage this was a key challenge. One practitioner with extensive experience in relief work and peace education noted that the psychological impact on South Koreans following contact with the DPRK could be quite profound. This often manifested as shock and depression after the encounter with a society, highly controlled and significantly underdeveloped in terms of political, economic, and social systems – an emotional/psychological response that has been referred to as

²¹ Former minister of the MOU and former chairman of the National Security Council (NSC), Interview 3, 22 February 2024.

the 'Pyongyang Blues.' An NGO representative explained that, from 2004 to 2008, before organising annual visits to the DPRK, where typically South Korean children would visit local schools and interact with North Korean children, the organisation strengthened its preparatory education programme to help the South Korean participants to prepare emotionally for the experience:

"We trained with the children for a month before we took them to DPRK, because there were some people who had been to the DPRK for the first time and came back very distressed - we call it the 'Pyongyang Blues', because they had some understanding of the DPRK, but when they saw the poor conditions there, they had a mixture of anger at the regime and the higher-ups who were living well as opposed to most of the suffering children, and compassion for the people who were trying to help the children in the DPRK also. Some of them had suffered for more than six months".²²

As a leader in the women's peace movement, this contributor mentioned that she discovered more differences in thoughts and actions while interacting with North Korean women than she had initially anticipated. She then developed peace education programs aimed at better recognising and accepting the differences between the North and South based on these

²² Leader of CSO providing aid to the DPRK and peace education for over 20 years, interview 12, 3 November 2023.

experiences, and worked to integrate these programs into the existing unification education modules:

"Women for Peace has helped to disseminate peace education programmes on conflict resolution in schools and communities. In the early 2000s, we were the pioneers with the Women's Coalition and some others in introducing the conflict resolution programme. So in the school community, 'peer mediation' and the concept of 'restorative justice' and 'non-violent communication', a kind of social consensus on how to resolve conflict in a peaceful and civilised way in Korea in a non-violent way, which later evolved into social dialogue, the Ministry of Unification also embraced that, but in that sense, I think we definitely played a role in spreading the peace culture, peace education, these kinds of activities in Korea by introducing methodologies in schools and in some communities".²³

Notably, CSO participants highlighted the potential negative impact of inter-Korean contact on peacebuilding and efforts to develop solutions, whereas government participants scarcely ever mentioned these issues. Before these problems were acknowledged at the governmental level, a number of CSOs had already played a role in identifying both the positive and negative aspects

²³ Former senior staff of a women's peace organisation, interview 21, 26 November 2023.

of various phenomena arising from inter-Korean exchange, while developing and applying diverse solutions to address these issues.

d) Fostering Multi-layered People-to-People Relationships

After the transition from the Kim Dae-jung administration to that of Roh Moo-hyun, CSOs played a leading role in steering expanded IKEC projects, which broadened opportunities for contact between residents of the two Koreas. Additionally, in terms of aid to the DPRK, there was a shift from general or emergency relief to larger-scale, medium and long-term development assistance projects. Importantly, it was CSOs who took the initiative, based on a recognition that this shift was more beneficial for fostering ‘relationship-building’ between North and South Korea. The following remarks from a practitioner involved in aid to the North illustrate this point well:

“Development assistance projects required much more frequent contact, negotiation, and collaboration with the North. Because these projects were centred around specific sites, over time, relationships were strengthened not only with members of the National Reconciliation Council—our main partners in the DPRK—but also with staff at hospitals, factory workers, and members of cooperative farms. From the perspective of reconciliation and improving relations between the peoples of the two Koreas, as well as considering the long-term impact of these projects, it was

clear that both sides increasingly preferred medium- to long-term development cooperation”.²⁴

Another civil society activist described an instance in which 150 to 200 donors visited North Korea simultaneously as part of a pharmaceutical factory modernisation project:

“The pharmaceutical factory modernisation project was such a large-scale initiative that, for the completion ceremony, we flew directly (without passing through China) on three separate occasions, each time bringing between 150 and 250 people from the South to the North. I believe we were able to bring such large groups because of the scale and significance of the project; the DPRK side also regarded it as extremely important, and so they were willing to accommodate large numbers of participants from the South. (...) In total, around 500 people visited just to see the pharmaceutical factory, and if you include the various technical experts who had visited previously, the number would be much higher”.²⁵

This progressive expansion was also evident in the sphere of socio-cultural exchange, a fact supported by an official responsible for socio-cultural exchange, who described efforts made to broaden opportunities for ordinary

²⁴ Government official who was in charge of assistance to the DPRK, interview 7, 06 December 2023.

²⁵ Director of a CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 15 years, interview 14, 30 November 2023.

citizens to participate in joint inter-Korean events. According to her, the fundamental aim of these joint events was to ensure that contact was not limited to exchanges between official partners from the North and South, but were organised in such a way that ordinary citizens from both sides could also participate. To this end, initiatives such as inter-Korean workers' football matches and cultural festivals were planned to engage large numbers of ordinary citizens:

“The pattern of exchanges conducted by the June 15 South Committee has typically involved either the Committee as a whole, or its sectoral organisations—such as labour, farmers’, or women’s groups—engaging with their respective DPRK counterparts. To encourage greater participation from ordinary citizens, we also designed special programmes in which the general public could be involved. For example, among the joint official events, we organised a football match between two labour football teams and cultural festivals that were open to ordinary citizens. (...) In this way, the exchange projects became multi-layered, encompassing not only those interested in peace and unification, but also broader people-to-people interactions”.²⁶

²⁶ Executive Director of an umbrella organisation for unification and peace movements, interview 22, 19 December 2023

A government official who, in 2006, during the Roh Moo-hyun administration, observed the June 15 inter-Korean joint event, remarked on the significance of this type of private sector engagement, commenting that:

“When the people of the DPRK and South Korea come together in social and cultural areas, it seems there is a strong sense of mutual consensus”.

He also recalled:

“At that time, politically, inter-Korean relations were tense due to missile launches and the DPRK nuclear issue, but it felt as though North and South Korea had already united”.²⁷

Engagements of this type, although largely limited to what has been termed the ‘progressive’ segment of South Korean civil society, gave the impression that civic sector bonds of consensus were being formed between the DPRK and South Korea.

e) Mediation as a Cultural Interpreter

In the process of expanding and advancing inter-Korean exchange and cooperation, a particularly noteworthy role played by CSOs was that of ‘cultural interpreter’. Acknowledging the substantial socio-economic and cultural differences between the two societies, both government officials and CSO interviewees explained that the experience and understanding attained by CSOs in respect of both North and South Korean societies was crucial in

²⁷ Former senior government official, currently a representative of an NGO providing aid to the DPRK, interview 5, 16 January 2024.

reducing misunderstandings and identifying areas for cooperation. One interviewee, with two decades of experience in the field of inter-Korean relations, described how, during the Roh Moo-hyun administration, CSOs acted as ‘cultural interpreters’ between North Korean officials and South Korean medical and construction experts involved in establishing a maternal and child health centre in Pyongyang.

"We participated in building a public maternal and child health clinic in a rural village in the DPRK. However, the village chief and doctors had no idea what kind of help was needed or how much assistance they could request from us. So, who could interpret this for us? In the DPRK, it is the officials from the National Reconciliation Council (the DPRK counterpart to most South Korean civic groups) who must coordinate with their own doctors and residents, while in South Korea, it is the members of civic groups who need to communicate with South Korean doctors. A good mediator acts as a bridge, interpreting the cultural differences between the two sides to smooth out any misunderstandings. This is the role of a cultural interpreter".²⁸

In a similar context, another local government official reporting in the South Korean media about the DPRK’s rural modernisation project in 2006,

²⁸ Executive Director of an umbrella organisation for unification and peace movements, interview 22, 19 December 2023.

explained how, in situations where differences of opinion emerged, an experienced civil society organisation was able to alleviate misunderstandings on both sides:

"To give a specific example, when I first visited the DPRK, a rural village modernisation project was underway. However, the media in South Korea described it as similar to the '*Saemaeul* Movement' (a symbolic project initiated during the Park Chung-hee regime in the 1970s, known as the New Rural Construction Movement). The DPRK strongly objected to this comparison and questioned why it was being likened to the '*Saemaeul* Movement'. (...) Personally, I found it difficult to understand why the DPRK raised such an objection, but officials from civil society organisations, who were more familiar with the DPRK, helped clarify the situation. They explained not only the role of the media in a democratic system but also sought to help the DPRK side understand why South Koreans express their views in the way they do, in an effort to foster understanding and mediation in such situations".²⁹

In sum, CSOs, in bridging the various socio-economic and cultural gaps that emerged as IKEC expanded, operated as cultural mediators. While increased contact between North and South Koreans inevitably gave rise to a range of cultural differences, the presence of CSOs with accumulated experience and

²⁹ Local Government official, interview 9, 11 January 2024.

understanding of North Korean society proved to be an essential instrument for mediating these differences.

f) Providing Inter-Korean Communication Channels

Another theme that emerged concerned the role of providing direct and indirect communication channels between the South and North Korean authorities. It was noted that CSOs sometimes facilitated communication on behalf of both authorities during aid or socio-cultural exchange and cooperation projects, and occasionally, some South Korean officials also became involved in these initiatives. A government official, responsible for DPRK aid, underscored the role played by CSOs in apprehending specific situations and intentions in relation to the DPRK, as well as communicating the South Korean government's intentions to the DPRK.

"I received a lot of help from civil society organisations during my work. (...) The government would tell the civil society organisations what its intentions and direction were (on certain projects), and these organisations would convey their views to the North based on that understanding. They were also well used as a channel for the North to relay what it wanted to talk about further".³⁰

Use of CSOs as indirect channels of communication was not unique to South Korea. One CSO official recalled that during a religious exchange visit to Pyongyang, the DPRK official in charge informed him of the DPRK

³⁰ Government official who was in charge of assistance to the DPRK, interview 6, 2 November 2023.

government's intention to accept a proposal for a separated families reunion event, before it was communicated through official channels:

“Around 2001, I recall an incident that strained relations between the authorities. While I was in Pyongyang, an official who was the chairman of both the Korean Red Cross and the Korean Catholic Association approached me. He said, 'Father, I'm going to Seoul next month, and I'm planning a reunion event for separated families.' (...) As soon as I returned to South Korea, I reported this to the relevant ministries and contacted the Blue House. (...) This advance notice gave our government time to prepare for the reunion”.³¹

Similarly, another case where civic sector communication channels served as indirect engagement occurred in the mid-2000s during ongoing dialogue between North and South Korean authorities. It is important to note that unexpected events, such as military provocations by North Korea or a large-scale influx of North Korean defectors into South Korea, served to heighten political sensitivity at that time. Nevertheless, as a former minister of the Ministry of Unification explained, the programmed inter-Korean activity for the June 15 Joint Event in 2005 was symbolic of civic socio-cultural exchange, which served as a platform to reopen intergovernmental dialogue:

³¹ Leader of a CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 20 years / Catholic Reverend, Interview 16, 12 December 2023.

“In 2004, the DPRK suspended inter-Korean dialogue when the South Korean government accepted a large number of defectors from Vietnam all at once. The subsequent year, during the June 15 Joint Event, civic exchanges were scheduled to be held. Given that the underlying reason for the breakdown in official dialogue remained unresolved, it was politically challenging to resume the inter-governmental talks. But I remembered we solved that problem through the participation of a government delegation at the inter-Korean event commemorating the June 15 Joint Declaration”.³²

Specific details of this case are described in the Uniform White Paper 2006 as follows:

"The first time a delegation of ministerial-level authorities from the two Koreas participated in the June 15 commemorative event, which had been held only at the civilian level, and on June 17, during the event, the Minister of Unification, Chung Dong-young, as a special envoy of President Roh Moo-hyun, met DPRK leader Kim Jong-il for a two-and-a-half-hour meeting, which marked a new era in inter-Korean relations" (Ministry of Unification 2006:43).

³² Former minister of the Ministry of Unification, current university professor, Interview 2, 15 February 2024.

It was also noted that the DPRK, following South Korea's example, demonstrated its willingness to restore inter-Korean relations by taking proactive steps. One such step was visiting the National Cemetery – a symbolic site commemorating the victims of the Korean War – during the August 15 joint commemorative event held at the civic level. Although it did not take the form of a formal apology, this subtle gesture dramatically demonstrated a DPRK attitudinal change,³³ and was cited by a civil society executive as a clear instance of civic exchanges influencing intergovernmental Korean relations:

"On 15 August 2005, DPRK government delegations participated in a joint event between civic groups of the two Koreas, visiting both the National Cemetery (in Seoul) and the May 18 Cemetery (in Gwangju). These were concrete examples of how the civil society sector has created the environment and conditions for the resumption of intergovernmental dialogue and for it to proceed smoothly".³⁴

A scholar well-versed in inter-Korean civic engagement noted that the inherent political sensitivity of inter-Korean relations renders the role of CSOs as a crucial adjunct to that of the government:

33 Source: <https://www.voakorea.com/a/a-35-2005-08-13-voa13-91170159/1290778.html> (accessed on 13 March 2024.)

34 Executive Director of an umbrella organisation for unification and peace movements, interview 22, 19 December 2023.

"I emphasised that while the government's role remains crucial, inter-Korean relations fundamentally require more than what the state alone can achieve. It's a classic narrative, yet the governance structure (between the government and civil society) is of paramount importance. This is because the inherently political state has to navigate constant political sensitivities and constraints that often result in restricted areas. Therefore, (in these areas) there are things that the civic sector can do that the state cannot do".³⁵

In short, CSO-led civic sector IKEC projects have been noted to occasionally serve as indirect channels of communication between authorities. Their role is particularly effective during inflexion points, when relations between North and South Korean authorities have become strained.

g) Initiating Policy Changes in IKEC

In the 1990s, despite the tensions between the North and South Korean authorities, civic groups continued humanitarian aid efforts to the DPRK. Moreover, civic groups were the first to initiate the campaign to *'help North Korean compatriots'*. CSO participants also asserted that the activities of these organisations contributed to the Kim Dae-jung administration's more proactive exchange and cooperation policy, exemplified by the government's shift to a more flexible approach in humanitarian aid to the DPRK. As detailed in Chapter 4, the government implemented three flexible measures:

³⁵ An academic expert on inter-Korean relations, current executive of CSO working on providing aid to the DPRK, interview 27, Jan 24th, 2024

1) allowing private fundraising, 2) diversifying support channels, and 3) increasing the government budget to subsidise support projects led by CSOs. Several participants noted that these actions were influenced by the proactive efforts of CSOs. The following remarks by a CSO representative clearly illustrate how the government responded to the policy demands of CSOs, particularly in relation to religious groups and support for the DPRK:

"At that time (during the Kim Young-sam administration), the 'Korean Church Humanitarian Aid Council for North Korea' was established as a unified channel for support. (...) Furthermore, Korean churches wanted to provide aid directly to the DPRK, rather than indirectly via the International Red Cross. After consistently requesting this of the government, the Kim Dae-jung administration finally allowed the church to provide assistance directly through a unified channel".³⁶

Additionally, some CSO-affiliated participants claimed that, in response to CSO demands, the government decided to allow public fundraising campaigns via the media, newspapers, and other channels, as well as provide funding for CSO-led aid projects³⁷. Another CSO practitioner highlighted that government support for active civil society participation, not only laid

³⁶ Leader of a humanitarian aid CSO for over 20 years, interview 13, 6 November 2023.

³⁷ Former leader of CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 20 years, interview 11, 31 October 2023; former senior government official, interview 4, 1 November 2023.

the foundation for robust CSO activities throughout the 2000s but also 'promoted a virtuous cycle in inter-Korean relations.'³⁸

A South Korean CSO activist explained that CSOs took the first step in engaging with the DPRK, despite the risk of punishment under the National Security Act. Later accepted at the policy level and formalised under government legislation – described as the process of '*legalisation*' – various CSO activities and proactive initiatives oriented towards the DPRK were acknowledged and supported under this governmental framework. This, in turn, created a virtuous cycle that further promoted deeper and more frequent engagement:

"It was a situation in which no one could openly oppose the religious community's call to provide humanitarian aid to the DPRK. (...) The Kim Young-sam government was hesitant but could not overtly prevent it. (...) As grassroots demands for aid to the DPRK increased, there was a risk that such activities might be deemed illegal. However, they became more active when the Kim Dae-jung administration partially legalised them".³⁹

CSO-led initiatives and activities over the past decade are believed to have influenced the South Korean government as it adopted a more flexible approach towards the DPRK. This was corroborated in an interview with a former government official who had been involved in aid policy during the

38 Director of a CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 15 years, interview 14, 30 November 2023.

39 Leader of a humanitarian aid CSO for over 20 years, interview 13, 6 November 2023

early stages of the Kim Dae-jung administration. According to him, the government implemented a policy known as the '*diversification of aid channels*' which recognised the fact that many CSOs were already side-stepping the Korean Red Cross and attempting to deliver aid directly to the DPRK, despite government restrictions. He noted, however, that government intentions were somewhat complex, and cited one of the primary reasons for this policy enactment as an attempt to bring civil society initiatives, which at the time operated outside government oversight, under supervision:

"At the time, many CSOs were not permitted to travel directly to the DPRK. As the government did not allow this, they often had to reach the DPRK through China. (..) However, the government recognised the need to bring these activities under its control. As a result, the previous unification policy, which only permitted aid through the Korean Red Cross, was replaced with a '*diversification of aid channels*' policy. This new approach allowed CSOs to directly provide aid to their DPRK counterparts, with the requirement that they report to the government in advance. These measures enabled humanitarian aid to be delivered more effectively to the DPRK, while also formalising CSO activities under government supervision".⁴⁰

One government official mentioned that the projects undertaken by CSOs were used as a test bed to assess the feasibility of government policies in

⁴⁰ Former senior government official of the MOU, interview 4, 1 November 2023.

advance, demonstrating that CSO activities had an increasing influence on government policy:

"From the perspective of overseeing a government project, when the government initiates a new project, it often views private organisation projects as a kind of test bed. It is relatively easier for private organisations to try new things compared to the government, and the DPRK also seems more willing to accept small-scale projects at the private level. Therefore, if a project is first implemented by a private organisation and produces successful results, the government can then scale it up into a larger initiative. I believed that if this division of roles between the civic sector and the government continued, inter-Korean relations could steadily advance".⁴¹

In summary, another aspect of the role of CSOs was the influence on the South Korean government's IKEC policies. Interviewees noted that the efforts of CSOs during this period actively led the South Korean government to adopt a more flexible approach towards the DPRK.

Demonstrably, CSOs were found to have played their most active role during the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations. The following section analyses the roles of CSOs during this period through the lens of Brewer's

⁴¹ Government official who was in charge of assistance to the DPRK, interview 7, 6 December 2023.

Strategic Social Spaces Theory, investigating their contribution to building inter-Korean relations through IKEC projects.

5.2 Strategic Social Spaces of CSOs

This period has been assessed as the phase during which CSOs exhibited the most diverse and active roles across intellectual, institutional, market, and political spaces. Inter-Korean relations during this era, frequently characterised from a state-centric perspective, emphasising the historic first inter-Korean summit, the activation of inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation, and the expansion of CSO involvement (K. S. Kim 2006:40; C. H. Kim 2010:109–110), owed much to the often-overlooked contributions of civil society. Occupying Brewer's four strategic social spaces, CSOs actively engaged in humanitarian assistance to the DPRK utilised IKEC projects to forge new relationships across the DMZ with erstwhile adversaries. This section, therefore, highlights the roles played by CSOs during their most active period.

Intellectual and Institutional Spaces

Three primary roles of CSOs, expressed during this period in activities undertaken within the intellectual and institutional spaces, can be attributed as follows: a) pioneering the space for IKEC; b) transforming perceptions through relationship-building; and c) addressing psychological and emotional challenges related to inter-Korean contact. The role of Korean CSOs during this period aligns with distinct spaces which Brewer (2022:503) identifies as intellectual (i.e., challenging and redefining the conflict) and institutional (i.e., breaking down barriers and stereotypes, fostering contact,

advocating for peace, and monitoring the conflict). The classification of activities into combined intellectual and institutional spaces reflects the fact that the alternative ideas pursued by CSOs in intellectual spaces were often intertwined with institutional spaces, where these ideas were enacted in practice, thus making it difficult to draw a strict division between the two.

A shift away from the prevailing perception of the DPRK as an ‘enemy’, and instead a re-imagining of the DPRK as a neighbour with whom peaceful coexistence at the civil society level was possible, enabled CSOs to initiate and promote a wider range of IKEC projects, although primarily focused on humanitarian assistance to the DPRK. While tensions between North and South Korean authorities remained high (see details in Chapter 4), CSO-led initiatives created unprecedented spaces for IKEC where government intervention was constrained and limited. Importantly, for the first time since their historic division, residents of North and South Korea met directly through CSO-led DPRK assistance projects.

Moreover, by encouraging ordinary citizens to participate in newly created spaces for IKEC, CSOs helped to change perceptions within South Korean society, reducing prejudice and hostility. These programmes offered participants the chance to visit the DPRK and interact with its citizens, demonstrating that despite painful memories of war and political strife, the shared language, culture and history, and sense of ethnic unity, exemplified how Allport’s contact hypothesis (Allport 1954) can be applied in the Korean context.

Notably, CSOs were the first to anticipate and address the psychological challenges arising from renewed inter-Korean contact. They coined the term 'Pyongyang Blues' to describe the sense of alienation experienced by South Korean participants in response to the DPRK's impoverished conditions and the negative emotions these conditions evoked. In response, CSOs developed and implemented peace education programmes to address these challenges. By engaging with the existential anxieties and emotional dynamics emphasised by Brewer (2010, 2022), South Korean CSOs substantially contributed to mitigating psychological and emotional barriers between the two societies, thus fostering meaningful contact and supporting the peace process.

Market Spaces

During this period, the roles of CSOs within market spaces may be categorised as fostering multi-layered people-to-people relationships across a range of sectors, while acting as mediators and cultural interpreters.

These roles are classified as market spaces, not only because CSOs mobilised financial resources, but also because they invested human and cultural resources (Brewer et al. 2011: 127), thereby extending activities beyond the typical boundaries of civil society. Over time, humanitarian aid to the DPRK, initially focused on material assistance, evolved into forms of development cooperation in areas such as agriculture, health, and community infrastructure projects. Similarly, socio-cultural exchange gradually shifted in focus from one-off cultural events to regular joint projects which widened participation for increasing numbers of ordinary citizens across a broader

range of fields, including: sports, culture and the arts, history and language, religion, and women's issues. Consequently, the scope of engagement expanded from a limited group of prominent CSO figures to include numerous South Korean technicians, professionals, and the wider public, all of whom established multi-layered relationships with DPRK counterparts.

Significantly, market spaces acknowledge the importance of CSO investment in human and cultural resources beyond mere financial contributions (Lederach 1997: 96–97; Brewer et al. 2011: 134). Frequently described by both government officials and civil society participants as that of a 'cultural interpreter', CSOs with extensive experience of engagement and a deeper understanding of the DPRK society played a vital bridging role between the two societies. Thus, IKEC became a space in which inter-Korean socio-cultural similarities and differences became recognised, a function that proved essential for the advancement of IKEC, as well as the establishment of sustainable inter-Korean relations.

Political Spaces

During this period, CSOs played an active role in influencing the political sphere, which included providing an informal communication channel between North and South Korean authorities as well as initiating IKEC policy changes.

CSOs provided informal channels of communication in two primary ways: 1) when inter-Korean dialogue was ongoing, these channels served as supplementary means of communication; conversely, 2) during periods of deadlock between the authorities, they often facilitated the resumption of

official talks. These CSO communication channels opened opportunities for conveying the underlying context and subtle nuance of situations that were often difficult to communicate via official channels. In instances where intergovernmental talks stalled, the participation of government officials in civic IKEC initiatives often helped ease the process of restarting dialogue (when accepted by the DPRK). Functionally, this role was analogous to back-channel communication exemplified by the role of church groups in the context of political dialogue in Northern Ireland (Brewer 2011: 134).

Notably, CSOs often played a leading role in shaping proactive government IKEC policies. During the Kim Dae-jung administration, for example, CSOs spearheaded policy shifts by initiating direct aid to North Korea without relying on the Korean Red Cross, advocating for public campaigns in support of humanitarian assistance to the DPRK, and encouraging the allocation of government funds to support civic IKEC projects. Similarly, under the Roh Moo-hyun administration, CSOs piloted new approaches that were subsequently incorporated into official IKEC policies. In this political sphere, CSOs contributed to the creation of an environment in which the space for IKEC could function as a platform for relationship-building, while receiving institutional support and government endorsement.

CSO Contributions to the Political and Social Peace Process

The potential influence of CSOs was practically demonstrated during the period of the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations, when they actively occupied all four strategic social spaces and contributed to

sustainable peacebuilding by navigating between political and social peace processes within civil society.

The political process, previously defined in this study as the formulation and implementation of policies, laws, and institutions related to IKEC, as well as the conduct of intergovernmental dialogue, enables an examination of how CSOs (categorised above into four distinct spaces) have influenced this political process. This examination reveals two particularly salient functions: Firstly, CSOs acted as initiators, taking actions that paved the way for subsequent developments in the realm of policy, law, and institutional development. Secondly, CSOs played a complementary role, supporting and supplementing official negotiations in terms of intergovernmental dialogue. While these functions clearly overlap with those performed within the political spaces, the specific processes involved also encompass the intellectual, institutional, and market spaces.

The CSO's 'initiator' role is clearly illustrated by policy shifts which occurred during the early Kim Dae-jung administration. In the context of inter-Korean relations (discussed in detail in Chapter 4), where, since the Korean War, even the most basic exchanges had been impossible, CSOs expanded the concept of humanitarian assistance to the DPRK through the initiation of direct contact (intellectual spaces). They subsequently implemented these ideas at the level of civil society (institutional spaces), while simultaneously exerting strong pressure on the government to adopt policy changes (political spaces). Correspondingly, the Kim Dae-jung administration adopted a proactive policy of exchange and cooperation, effectively '*legalising*' such activities. As Lederach observed (1997: 38–42), the significance of CSO

contributions to the political process lies in the inherent rigidity of top leadership. In the Korean context, this rigidity is further exacerbated by ‘*over-politicisation*’ (G.-C. Lee 2018:68), which makes it even more difficult for the government to take the initiative in politically sensitive areas. In such circumstances, the actions of CSOs have often been described as ‘*breaking the ice*’. Subsequent to this CSO ‘ice breaking’ activity, the expansion of humanitarian assistance to the North at the civil society level became a major agenda item in intergovernmental dialogue⁴², which retrospectively can be seen as a key factor enabling the historic 2000 inter-Korean summit.

The complementary role played by CSOs had a notable advantage because involvement was bounded by periods of amicable relations between the authorities; rather, this role often became even more critical during times of tension. For example, during the Roh Moo-hyun administration, when official dialogue was suspended, the 15 June Joint Inter-Korean Event, organised at the civil society level, served as a platform for the resumption of official talks. Direct participation by the South Korean Minister of Unification and a subsequent meeting with the North Korean leader provided the opportunity for a resumption of stalled discussions. As Brewer (2010: 29–30) has noted, CSO involvement in inherently fragile peace processes can enhance stability by providing essential support and flexibility.

Next, the contribution of CSOs to the ‘social peace process’ will be examined. As outlined in the analytical framework in Chapter 2, the ‘social

42 Following the inauguration of the Kim Dae-jung administration, the first inter-Korean dialogue occurred in the form of Red Cross talks between the two Koreas, concerning humanitarian aid issue (Source: website of the Ministry of Unification, see <https://dialogue.unikorea.go.kr/ukd/b/be/usrCmsStat/List.do?tab=1>, accessed 18 March 2025).

peace process' is defined not as an overall restoration of relations, but rather as a focus on changes in South Korean perceptions of the DPRK, its counterpart in IKEC. This approach was adopted in light of the fact that, according to the categorisation of Darby and Mac Ginty (2003:256), the Korean peace process remains at a pre-negotiation stage. In practice, due to the existence of the DMZ, any direct contact between the two Koreas remains highly restricted. Hence, the roles played by CSOs across the four strategic spaces during this period can be seen as fostering more favourable attitudes among South Koreans toward the DPRK.

Until the Kim Dae-jung administration, the proportion of South Koreans holding negative perceptions of the DPRK (59.6% in 1995) overwhelmingly exceeded those with positive perceptions (36.9% in 1995). However, following the Kim Dae-jung government's adoption of the 'Sunshine Policy' and the subsequent expansion of IKEC initiatives, the proportion of individuals viewing the DPRK positively began to rise, reaching 51.9% in 1999. During the Roh Moo-hyun administration, this trend intensified, with the majority of South Koreans ultimately adopting a more favourable perception of the DPRK.⁴³ This shift clearly demonstrates that in the right circumstances, expanded contact with an adversary can reduce feelings of threat and anxiety, a phenomenon distinctly observed within the sphere of IKEC (Pettigrew & Tropp 2006:766–767).

43 During the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations, the proportion of respondents expressing favourable perceptions of North Korea—regarding it as either a recipient of aid or a partner for cooperation—rose sharply from 51.9% in 1999 to 78.4% in 2007. However, this figure declined to a low of 52.5% during the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administrations. Under the Moon Jae-in administration, the proportion increased again to 71.0% in 2018, before falling to 59.9% in 2021

Evidently, given the gradual nature of the social peace process as a long-term undertaking (Brewer 2019:277), there are inherent limitations in attributing any changes to a handful of factors alone. Nevertheless, interviews reveal that the CSO role is certainly worthy of attention. Moreover, CSOs have proactively recognised and addressed the emotional issues arising from contact during IKEC, while acknowledging the significance of a wider range of impacting factors (Brewer 2010:33). W. Y. Lee (2014: 52–53) notes that ‘CSO-led humanitarian aids to the DPRK during this period generated layered arenas for inter-Korean engagement, enabling complex emotional connections among participants.’

Given the deeply embedded and institutionalised impact of inter-Korean conflict in South Korean society for nearly fifty years before the Kim Dae-jung administration, it is often characterised as an ‘intractable conflict’ (Bar-Tal 2013; J. Y. Heo 2021) or a ‘communal conflict’ (Brewer 2010:11–13). Arguably, CSOs have been the only actors to respond sensitively and actively to the actual social changes which developed over this time.

What is particularly noteworthy during this period is the manifestation of Brewer’s recursive relationship between the political and social peace processes (2010:203). A distinctive feature in the context of inter-Korean relations, contrary to Brewer’s assertion that the political peace process typically precedes the social peace process (2010:203–204), it was the CSO-led social peace process that pre-empted the political process. Subsequent government institutionalisation of CSO activities was followed by inter-Korean dialogue at a governmental level, while the first inter-Korean summit in 2000 resulted in an agreement to expand inter-Korean exchanges and

cooperation (K.-W. Koh 2010:9), further broadening opportunities for the CSO-led social peace process. This affirms Brewer's (2010:203) view that the relationship between the social and political peace processes is recursive, in that they mutually enable and facilitate one another.

The next section will examine how the role of CSOs was curtailed during the second phase of conservative government. It will also analyse how, despite these constraints, CSOs continued to pursue the building of sustainable relationships, and will discuss both opportunities and constraints that characterised the relationship between government and civil society during this period.

5.3 Conclusion

During the progressive administrations of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun (February 1998–February 2008), CSOs played an active role across all four spaces associated with IKEC projects. In doing so, they contributed to both political and social peace processes and demonstrated the potential for sustainable inter-Korean relations. In the intellectual and institutional spaces, the DPRK food crisis of the mid-1990s prompted CSOs to reconceptualise North Koreans as compatriots in need rather than solely as adversaries. This shift opened direct channels for CSO-led IKEC initiatives, expanded public participation, and began to address entrenched prejudice and hostility within South Korean society. In the market spaces, CSOs drove the development of IKEC projects to foster multilayered relationships across diverse sectors, acting as cultural interpreters who could navigate socio-cultural differences by leveraging their accumulated expertise. Finally, within political spaces,

despite the turbulence of inter-Korean relations, CSOs extended their influence beyond organisational boundaries, complementing intergovernmental dialogue and advancing proactive policies of engagement.

This period may be characterised as a defining moment in which civil society demonstrated its capacity to act as a primary agent of change. By breaking away from the "routinised" practices of division—a seventy-year vicious cycle of confrontation—CSOs illustrated Giddens' (1984:15) concept of agency as the capability to 'make a difference'. During this timeframe, the active occupation of four distinct 'spaces' by CSOs through IKEC projects resonated with the positive outcomes predicted by intergroup contact theory. Specifically, the role of CSOs achieved what high-level political negotiations often struggle to accomplish in isolation: the mitigation of deeply rooted hostility. Amidst systemic differences and cultural heterogeneity, these interactions expanded mutual knowledge and fostered empathy, ultimately leading to a general increase in interdependence, consistent with the predictions of the Contact Theory (Al Ramiah & Hewstone 2013:538).

Among the roles played across these four spaces, the 'intellectual spaces' parallel the concept of 'cognitive unfreezing' described by Bar-Tal and Halperin (2013:941–945) as a prerequisite for overcoming intractable conflict. This perspective suggests that the de-escalation of entrenched conflict commences with a segment of society—however small—adopting a new belief system, which serves as the initial step towards broader attitudinal change. By crossing borders to facilitate direct engagement with North Koreans, CSOs were effectively creating fissures in the conflict-oriented belief system that had solidified since the Korean War. Indeed, the active

occupation of these spaces by CSOs correlated with progress in political negotiations and a marked increase in public participation in IKEC projects. It was a moment that confirmed the potential of civil society to act as a catalyst for the advancement of both political and social peace processes.

However, these peacebuilding endeavours cannot be brought to fruition by civil society alone. As Brewer, Higgins, and Teeney (2011:123) argue, there must be a ‘mutually reinforcing’ relationship between the political and social dimensions of the peace process. Similarly, Bar-Tal and Halperin (2013:942) posit that ‘successful peacemaking requires substantial endorsement from political elites and established societal institutions’. The dramatic transformation in inter-Korean relations during the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations was rendered possible precisely because of government institutional backing, which guaranteed operational space for civil society and facilitated its role.

Nevertheless, this era of improved relations, often evaluated as having opened a new chapter in history, was short-lived. The following chapter examines how these spaces for CSOs were constrained under the subsequent conservative administrations, whilst simultaneously analysing how these actors adapted their roles with flexibility to navigate these challenges. The reasons for this reversal will be re-examined in Chapter 8, through an analysis of the factors that enabled and constrained the agency of CSOs.

Chapter 6. The Roles of CSOs in the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye Administrations (February 2008 to March 2017)

This chapter provides an analysis of comments made by government and CSO participants regarding the role of South Korean CSOs during the ‘conservative’ Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administrations. As discussed in Chapter 4, in 2010, under the Lee Myung-bak government, the introduction of the so-called ‘May 24 Measures’ meant the complete suspension of inter-Korean trade, a prohibition on South Korean nationals travelling to the North (except for the Kaesong Industrial Complex), and the principled suspension of aid projects to the DPRK, which significantly curtailed most civic-led IKEC projects. During both conservative administrations, inter-Korean projects were confined to humanitarian aid for vulnerable groups and a limited number of socio-cultural exchange and cooperation initiatives, exemplified by joint historical (archaeological) research and the compilation of language dictionaries

6.1 The Roles of South Korean CSOs

a) Facilitating Deeper Understanding of the DPRK

Interviewees have commented that IKEC projects, especially those carried over from the previous ‘progressive’ administrations, provided South Korea with a valuable conduit for better understanding realities in the DPRK. One CSO practitioner involved in the implementation of inter-Korean historical exchange programmes noted that these projects helped South Korean

historians to recognise and acknowledge differences in historical perspective between South Korea and the DPRK.

“I thought we should recognise the socialist slant in North Korea’s version of history for what it is. So, before the meeting with the North Korean side, the issues anticipated by South Korean historians regarding North Korean historical narratives were confined to modern and contemporary history—specifically, after Kim Il-sung’s rise to power and the formation of anti-imperialist alliances. Yet, in actual consultations, we discovered that the more complex challenges lay in ancient history, particularly in interpretations of *Gojoseon* [the earliest Korean kingdom], dating back to around 2333 BC. Although this issue of interpreting ancient history isn’t rooted in ideological differences, I realised that the disparity between the North and South is so profound that meaningful debate on these topics is nearly impossible

was echoed in remarks from a former high-ranking official, who also noted that the primary role of civic-led IKEC was to facilitate opportunities for the DPRK and South Korea to better understand one another:

“One of the most impactful roles of civic-led IKEC projects is the understanding fostered through consistent contact with DPRK residents. By regularly interacting, these projects enable both sides to gain insights into each other—whether

consciously or not, South Koreans come to understand the North more deeply, and North Koreans begin to see aspects of the South. This underscored for me the need for more civic IKEC initiatives. Rather than relying on one-off large food aid, I advocated for constructing a joint agricultural complex in the DPRK. This approach aimed to initiate long-term exchange projects where CSOs could establish a sustained presence in North Korea”.⁴⁴

Additionally, it was felt that civic IKEC projects offered opportunities to observe changes in the DPRK at an early stage, before policies were formalised and officially announced. One CSO representative involved in IKEC highlighted the fact that aspects of the DPRK’s ‘two Koreas’ policy, formalised in 2023, had been noticeably evident since the mid-to-late 2010s.

"I think I first noticed the changes in the DPRK during Kim Jong-un’s period. Around 2015, it became common for them to play music on their cell phones while working, despite being watched by personnel from the National Security Department. Starting in the late 2010s, they began referring to us as ‘South Korea’ instead of the usual term ‘the South’ or ‘Nam-Chosun’ (which means South Korea in the DPRK

44 Former minister of the MOU, current Professor of University, interview 1, 13 February 2024.

way). From then on, the ‘two Koreas’ policy that’s being talked about in the media recently was already in place”.⁴⁵

Another CSO representative working on providing assistance to the DPRK and involved in peace education, noted that she had thoroughly documented changes in the attitudes of DPRK partners towards proposed aid projects, and shared these findings with key members of the KNCCNK:

“I assessed the DPRK’s receptiveness to each proposed project by examining the statements and responses of our DPRK counterparts. I also sought to track changes in the partner organisations on the North side over different periods. The findings suggest that North Korea demonstrated a higher degree of receptiveness toward projects that were closely aligned with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are globally emphasised. I shared these findings with colleagues in the KNCCNK, who planned to utilise them in future project development”.⁴⁶

In summary, several interviewees observed that civic IKEC initiatives contributed to a deeper understanding of DPRK society, particularly in areas where IKEC projects were maintained despite instability in inter-Korean relations. Such initiatives serve as a window into the DPRK and,

45 CSO practitioner involved in the inter-Korean historian association for over 20 years, interview 26, 29 January 2024.

46 Leader of CSO providing aid to the DPRK and peace education for over 20, interview 12, 3 November 2023.

correspondingly, enhance understanding, which, along with knowledge and insights gained, can provide a foundation for maintaining relations and exploring future avenues for cooperation.

b) Enhancing Mutual Acceptance and Exploring Strategies for Conflict Resolution

Another theme that emerged with respect to CSO engagement in IKEC activities was their role in enhancing mutual acceptance and exploring strategies for conflict resolution. Many interviewees described how the increasing frequency and scope of IKEC interactions led to a gradual evolution of inter-Korean relations, characterised by a growing reciprocity and mutual acceptance. Demonstrably, this process of cooperation involved trial and error and stemmed from mutual compromises forged over time, rather than any simple concept of shared ethnicity. One interviewee involved in the joint North-South dictionary compilation described the process as follows:

“Another noteworthy aspect was that, as the meetings continued, the DPRK participants refrained from using specific names or direct references with political connotations. While they never fully abandon political language, it appeared they began to recognise that persisting with this approach would make it increasingly difficult to maintain a working relationship with us. In a sense, this could be seen as a form of concession. I referred to this process as an ‘inner exchange’. As we met repeatedly, both

sides gradually came to accept each other's cultures—not only through dialogue but also via the materials we shared for the dictionary project".⁴⁷

Additionally, in the case of cooperative projects requiring a process of long-term communication, there have been instances when efforts have extended beyond increased mutual acceptance and have evolved into the finding and implementation of conflict resolution methods. Two cases in particular exemplify differing approaches to conflict resolution: firstly, an approach to disagreement pursued by the inter-Korean Historian Association in their joint research on historical terminology yielded a juxtaposition of different positions rather than a forced consensus. After realising in the early stages of consultation that pushing for consensus could have undermined cooperation, it was decided that respect for each other's differences was important; hence, terms were decided that accommodated differing perspectives. One staff member who participated in this process recalled:

“When we were doing joint research on the historical terminology of the North and the South (thinking about how to deal with the differences in terminology between the two Koreas), at first, we tried to agree on the selection of terms and their interpretation. But during the discussions, we fought a lot and tried all sorts of bizarre ways to convince each other. In the meantime, the DPRK threatened us like

⁴⁷ Staff involved in the compilation of Gyeoremal-keunsajeon (South and North language dictionary), interview 23, 9 January 2024.

this, 'Don't set foot on the land of the Republic again!' But in the end, what we realised was that choosing different words is another way of showing reality as it is, with differences in perception. So, we decided to each pick 300 words that we thought were important in each era. As it turned out, the North and South chose the same words in the majority (290-295), but the other words were left as they were. We just thought that exposing something different (without consensus) was one way of solving the problem".⁴⁸

This conflict resolution method is significant in that it indicates that disagreement was neither endemic nor as far-reaching as supposed (more than 96.6 per cent of word choices were common to both North and South Korea). Importantly, this method demonstrated respect for opposing positions and avoided the imposition of one perspective upon the other. The second case, the joint compilation of the South and North language dictionary, showed an even more advanced approach to conflict resolution, which involved prior agreement on principles for the project direction, followed by a negotiation of detailed issues based on those principles. One agreed principle acknowledged the description of differences in commonly agreed terms. In accordance with this principle, all words selected by the North and South Koreans were mutually agreed upon and recorded in the dictionary. This included defining terminology so that neither side could

48 CSO practitioner involved in the inter-Korean historian association for over 20 years, interview 26, 29 January 2024.

unilaterally change the dictionary. As one official who was involved in the compilation of the dictionary from the beginning stated:

“In our case, we have a lot of agreements at the very early stages, and then we have sub-agreements that supplement those agreements, and then we had a compendium, and then we had detailed instructions, and then we did a lot of that at the very beginning. Among the principles agreed upon was that no word could be included without the consent of both parties, and that once included, it could not be arbitrarily changed. And the strict adherence to these principles by both parties is one of the greatest strengths of our dictionary business. (...) Thus, viewed from the perspective of the importance of consensus in our exchange project, one might say that our organisation serves as an exemplary model”.⁴⁹

While these cases are clearly exceptional examples of IKEC project continuance, it has been argued that ongoing civic sector engagement, at least at the civilian level, has continually explored and implemented a diverse range of conflict resolution methods.

c) Sustaining Relationships through the Continued IKEC Projects

The suspension of most IKEC projects under the Lee Myung-bak administration's May 24 measures left only some civic-led humanitarian aid and socio-cultural exchange and cooperation projects with the DPRK. One

⁴⁹ Staff involved in the compilation of Gyeoremal-keunsajeon (South-DPRK language dictionary), interview 23, 9 January 2024.

staff member involved in the June 15 joint events explained how they were held intermittently during the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administrations, despite a subsequent deterioration of inter-Korean relations.

"An inter-Korean event for the June 15 Joint Declaration held in Pyongyang in 2008, during the Lee Myung-bak administration, was the last of its kind. Under the Park Geun-hye administration, large-scale joint events were limited to the fields of labour and women's issues. In 2015, for instance, the Workers' Unification Football Tournament took place in Pyongyang, with approximately 250 South Koreans visiting the DPRK. In the women's sector, around 80 female representatives from South Korea visited Gaeseong for a joint event with DPRK women. That was the extent of the exchanges".⁵⁰

A CSO practitioner involved in the IKEC history initiative noted that, during this period, when inter-governmental dialogue was limited and numerous civic IKEC projects were curtailed, sustained projects in this field contributed to the resumption of initiatives in other areas:

"During the Lee Myung-bak administration, particularly after 2008, IKEC initiatives were limited to two areas: language and history. Historical IKEC efforts provided a very limited channel of communication between the DPRK

⁵⁰ Executive Director of an umbrella organisation for unification and peace movements, interview 22, 19 December 2023

and South Korea, operating at a symbolic level (...). However, with the advent of the Park Geun-hye administration, there was a stronger emphasis on the concept of 'Shared ethnic heritage,' and the importance of IKEC in historical fields was underscored. In Gaeseong, relics jointly excavated by both sides were exhibited. Various events were also planned to commemorate the 70th anniversary of liberation, and this project played a role in liaising with the DPRK on behalf of other government and civic organisations”.⁵¹

A government official in charge of civic exchange at the time reported that although many civic exchange programmes were suspended during this period, some programmes (undisclosed to the public) were maintained:

“Although most forms of civic exchange were not permitted during the Lee Myung-bak administration, it was still possible to carry out certain activities as long as there wasn’t any media coverage or publicity about these activities. For instance, when it came to providing tuberculosis medication to the DPRK, the government sometimes supported these efforts, but one of their conditions was that NGOs shouldn’t promote it in the press. Under the Park administration, there were still quiet, unofficial activities taking place—things

51 CSO practitioner involved in inter-Korean historian association for over 20 years, interview 26, 29 January 2024.

like meetings held in third countries or contacts at the expert level were allowed. In particular, the joint excavation project at Manwoldae in Gaeseong and the compilation of the South and North Language Dictionary were both led by professional scholars, and since there were no political motives involved, these projects were permitted to continue”.⁵²

Notably, a representative of a CSO, primarily comprised of overseas Koreans, providing ‘Assistance to the DPRK’, observed that civic IKEC engagement with the DPRK intensified, even as relations between the DPRK and South Korean authorities worsened. He attributed this to a DPRK shift in stance and suggested that the need to secure supplies from abroad (due to weakened direct support from South Korea, amidst strained inter-Korean relations), and an intent to maintain connections via CSOs, drove this DPRK adjustment.

"After the implementation of the May 24 Measures, our working conditions improved considerably. From the DPRK's perspective, with supplies no longer flowing in from the South, they had little choice but to engage with organisations like ours, which they had previously underestimated. Additionally, many individuals and civic groups in South Korea, unable to offer direct support to the DPRK, began channelling their assistance through us.

⁵² Former Government official in charge of civic IKEC, interview 8, 18 January 2024.

Naturally, the DPRK was aware of these dynamics, and as a result, we experienced a much friendlier atmosphere. From my personal experience, I can say that when relations with South Korea become strained, civic groups, especially those based overseas like ours, were received far more warmly”.⁵³

The manager of a quasi-governmental agency assessed the civic IKEC situation during this period as follows:

“Following the inauguration of the Lee Myung-bak administration and the Cheonan attack, measures were implemented to suspend inter-Korean trade, and the Gaeseong Industrial Complex was closed. While inter-Korean economic cooperation activities were entirely halted, IKEC at the private level continued, centred on Assistance to the DPRK”.⁵⁴

In summary, during the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administrations, even when a significant number of ‘Assistance to the DPRK’ and socio-cultural exchange projects were suspended, CSOs continually endeavoured to advance projects, contributing to the maintenance of relations with the DPRK.

⁵³ Representative of an overseas Korean CSO providing assistance to the DPRK for over 10 years, Interview 17, 18 December 2023.

⁵⁴ Manager of a government agency in charge of implementation of IKEC, Interview 10, 6 February 2024

d) Providing Indirect Communication Channels and Pressuring Policy Shift

It was noted that, during times when DPRK/South Korean official relations reached an impasse, continuing private-level exchanges played a significant role in facilitating the resolution of intergovernmental issues. One CSO representative highlighted the importance of these alternative communication channels, especially when official avenues became ineffective. A notable example occurred during the Lee Myung-bak administration, when civic channels facilitated a smooth resolution of the issue concerning South Korean workers who had been detained at the Gaeseong Industrial Complex. This emphatically illustrated how civic IKEC could enable dialogue and facilitate problem-solving even in the midst of strained formal relations.

"We also played a role in resolving the issue of the detained workers. This took place under the Lee Myung-bak administration in 2009, a time when inter-Korean relations were very strained. Another involved party, Hyundai Asan, was also facing challenges, but we had a channel that the DPRK could trust. It was not an issue that the government could easily address directly, but private channels helped contribute to its resolution. I believe that having multiple channels between the DPRK and South Korea was quite effective in resolving the issue".⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Leader of a CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 20 years, Interview 15, 5 December 2023

Some commentators held the view that CSOs influenced the administrative policy environment by supporting, defending, and critiquing the South Korean government's IKEC policies. A National Council for the Reconciliation of Koreans (NCRK) staff member noted that, under the conservative government, efforts were still made to secure space for civic IKEC within a collaborative framework with the government. This included leadership appointments within the organisation to promote effective liaison while pursuing and continuing a minimal level of IKEC, which did not contradict the government's 'principled stance' towards the DPRK.

"As DPRK policy shifted under the Lee Myung-bak administration, the NCRK adapted its strategy to align with the government's position. Despite growing tensions, the administration still relied on the NCRK as a communication channel with the DPRK. By appointing cooperative leaders like OOO, the NCRK maintained dialogue with North Korea while accommodating conservative perspectives. Although its role diminished under Lee and Park's administrations, it remained a key actor in sustaining IKEC through its close ties with the government".⁵⁶

Similarly, a government official described CSO activities as "maintaining a minimal link" across inter-Korean relations:

⁵⁶ Former senior staff of National Council for Reconciliation and Cooperation, interview 20, 29 June 2023.

“Even when (inter-governmental relations) were strained, I believe CSOs contributed by sustaining this minimal link between the two Koreas. In this respect, civic organisations played a significant role”.⁵⁷

Meanwhile, there were cases of CSOs actively pressuring the government to ease its hard-line IKEC policies. A female peace activist spoke about *Women Cross DMZ*, an initiative conceived during the Park Geun-hye administration, when inter-Korean relations were at a standstill. In response to the deteriorating state of relations, this organisation, she noted, collaborated with international women peace activists to organise annual walks across the DMZ, emphasising the need for peace.

“With the advent of a conservative government, inter-Korean exchanges among women were halted, and peace initiatives fell into stagnation. To address this, the *Women Cross DMZ* initiative was conceived in 2015. As direct IKEC became impossible, an international event was organised to promote peace on the Korean Peninsula, in collaboration with overseas Koreans in the United States. This initiative garnered participation from the United Nations, Nobel Peace Prize laureates, and prominent women peace activists. The event began in Pyongyang, traversed *Panmunjom*, and continued southward. South Korean women’s organisations awaited the participants south of

⁵⁷ Government official in charge of assistance to the DPRK, interview 7, 6 December 2023.

Panmunjom to march together. This women's peace movement persisted from 2015 until 2018".⁵⁸

It has also been noted that even during the Lee Myung-bak administration, when the implementation of specific policies like the May 24 Measures was designed to halt or limit civic IKEC, the KNCCNK consistently voiced criticism of such measures. According to the KNCCNK White Paper, numerous civil society organisations:

"issued statements urging the resumption of 'Assistance to the DPRK', offered policy recommendations, and actively organised international conferences and policy forums on humanitarian assistance to the DPRK in an effort to facilitate the resumption of aid".⁵⁹

In this way, CSOs have made considerable diverse efforts to influence government policy. These efforts ranged from the maintenance of cooperative relationships with government administrators, and sporadically, direct criticism of government policies to advocate for policy reform.

This section has demonstrated that, although the scope of activities of South Korean CSOs was significantly reduced under the conservative governments of Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye, CSOs nevertheless continued to play an active role (albeit within a narrower operational space), maintaining engagement, even when it meant divergence from the government's official

⁵⁸ Former senior staff of women's peace organisation, interview 21, 26 November 2023.

⁵⁹ KNCCNK (2015) The white paper on Aid to North Korea for 20 years, The Korean NGO Council for Cooperation with North Korea, p.61.

stance. In the following section, opportunities and constraints influencing the role of CSOs, particularly in relation to government–civil society dynamics, are explored via perspectives shared by interviewees.

6.2 Strategic Social Spaces of CSOs

The May 24 measures imposed during the Lee Myung-bak administration included: the complete suspension of inter-Korean trade, a ban on South Korean citizens visiting the DPRK, the suspension of aid to the DPRK and other measures to reduce IKEC (see Chapter 4 for details). This marked the beginning of the suspension of most development cooperation and socio-cultural exchange projects (with notable exceptions being specific historical and linguistic projects as well as critical humanitarian aid), occurring during the two consecutive conservative administrations.

Despite the scope of their roles becoming very narrow, CSOs continued to maintain relationships with their counterparts in the DPRK, albeit in limited arenas. This section examines how CSOs contributed to sustainable peacebuilding during the two conservative administrations.

Intellectual Spaces

In intellectual spaces, CSOs promoted a deeper understanding of the reality of impactful change in DPRK society when carrying out IKEC projects during the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administrations. During the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations, information was acquired through a diverse array of IKEC projects; by contrast, under Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye, the scope of such projects narrowed, yet continued engagement enabled a deeper mutual understanding through sustained

interactions. This was particularly evident in specific fields, such as history and language (highlighted in Chapter 6). As noted by several CSO participants⁶⁰, knowledge generated through these activities subsequently served as an essential foundation for formulating future strategies for cooperation with their DPRK counterparts.

Institutional Spaces

South Korean CSOs in the institutional spaces were able to enhance mutual acceptance and explore conflict strategies for conflict resolution through IKEC projects, exemplified in the field of history, where disputes over terminology in joint research led to multiple rounds of discussion and negotiation, navigated project continuance in the absence of consensus under an agreement to acknowledge and respect differences. Contrastingly, the joint dictionary compilation project carefully established principles regarding word selection, notation, and ordering from the outset to ensure the project's stability and acceptability to both parties.

Although joint research on historical terminology and dictionary compilation ultimately failed due to shifting intergovernmental relations, these initiatives nonetheless exemplify valuable attempts by both sides to devise indigenous modes of conflict resolution. As one CSO practitioner observed, these initiatives could serve as ‘one way for future cooperation between the two Koreas.’⁶¹

60 Leader of CSO providing aid to the DPRK and peace education for over 20 years, interview 12, 3 November 2023. and CSO practitioner involved in inter-Korean Historian association for over 20 years, interview 26, 29 January 2024.

61 Staff involved in the Compilation of Gyeoremal-keunsajeon (South-North language dictionary), interview 23, 9 January 2024.

Interestingly, this mirrors the institutional spaces concept described by Brewer in the context of Northern Ireland, where ecumenical churches and community groups developed new approaches to issues such as non-sectarianism, interfaith dialogue, and communal liturgies, initiatives that challenged traditional divides between Catholics and Protestants (Brewer, Higgins & Teeney 2011:141). Similarly, Korean CSOs formulated methods to bridge differences, fostering cooperative strategies to navigate disagreements effectively.

Market Spaces

Amid deteriorating inter-Korean relations, CSOs operating in the market spaces maintained relationships with DPRK partners by either aligning their projects with the conservative government's policy agenda or promoting projects indirectly through overseas Korean organisations, utilising their own resources. In the context of deteriorating intergovernmental relations, CSOs either adapted their projects to align with the policy orientations set forth by conservative administrations or pursued their activities indirectly via overseas Korean organisations. In particular, the use of overseas Korean organisations proved advantageous for sustaining continuous engagement, as these entities were less susceptible to political fluctuations, thereby mitigating the risk of interruption to civic exchange that typically accompanies broader diplomatic downturns.

In light of Lederach's (1997:93) perspective, which frames resource investment in peacebuilding as a 'strategic commitment to maximise the proactive elements of peacebuilding activities', CSOs demonstrated a level

of commitment that remained undiminished, in contrast to governmental actors. While governmental engagement became rigidly constrained by political and security confrontations (Lederach 1997:38–46), CSOs, endowed with greater flexibility, continued to invest financial, human, and cultural resources, thereby sustaining ongoing inter-Korean relations. Moreover, from the perspective of resource allocation, CSO contributions can be regarded as having grown significantly.⁶²

Political Spaces

During the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administrations, CSOs conspicuously occupied political spaces, both serving as indirect communication channels between governments and advocating for IKEC policy changes. With the collapse of intergovernmental dialogue, direct talks often became politically sensitive. In this environment, CSOs that had established mutual trust over time also provided a valuable channel to reduce political sensitivities and facilitate the exchange of opinions. When a South Korean worker was detained in the DPRK in 2008, for example, CSOs offered an alternative channel for communication, independent of official dialogue, which increased the likelihood of a resolution to the dispute. Significantly, in the Korean context, CSO partners in the DPRK were officials or quasi-officials, who therefore served as indirect, alternative back channels for dialogue (Brewer et al. 2011:121).

⁶² In the case of aid to the DPRK, from the Kim Dae-jung administration to the Moon Jae-in administration, the total amount of aid provided was only 21.402 million dollars (13.6% of the total). However, it is noteworthy that 65.9% of this amount was provided through CSO channels.

Subsequently, CSOs intensified pressure on the government to shift towards a more IKEC-friendly policy. In particular, performances crossing the DMZ utilising the domestic and international networks of women's organisations distinctively mobilised not only domestic but also international public opinion to put pressure on the South Korean government, which had prioritised political and security issues over IKEC. Focused on creating an environment in which exchange and cooperation could continue steadily as a platform for building relationships within civil society, these roles differed from those of CSOs during the previous progressive administration in that they were limited by political constraints.

Contributions to the Political and Social Peace Process

In terms of contributing to political peace, during the period of conservative administration, CSOs played a complementary role in intergovernmental relations, maintaining at least a minimal contact. As previously mentioned, the demand for DPRK denuclearisation by the Lee Myung-bak administration, as a prerequisite for the improvement of inter-Korean relations, provoked a DPRK backlash. This led to a rapid deterioration in inter-Korean relations (see Chapter 4). The detention of South Korean workers at the Gaeseong Industrial Complex during this period exacerbated the crisis and could have been catastrophic.⁶³ Although official dialogue was maintained throughout, it was ineffective because of mutual distrust. Consequently, CSO-level informal dialogue channels were utilised as multiple channels of communication were activated, including negotiations

⁶³ Source: <https://www.seoul.co.kr/news/newsView.php?id=20090523006010> (Accessed 10 May 2025).

by South Korean businesspeople visiting the DPRK. Although it remains unclear whether the CSO channel produced tangible outcomes, it was nevertheless significant in providing a means of communication during periods of crisis and breakdown in official dialogue.

Moreover, during the Park Geun-hye administration, CSO-led efforts to revitalise civic exchange became included in the policy agenda for the 70th anniversary of liberation in 2015, which galvanised momentum for civic exchange projects. Park Geun-hye administration's initiatives were primarily intended for domestic political purposes; hence, the virtual absence of inter-Korean exchange meant that these civic initiatives maintained a lifeline in terms of inter-Korean relations (S.-H. Lee 2017:xiii–xiv).

One notable CSO contribution during the era of conservative government was their resistance to the government's politically and security-focused agenda (Mac Ginty 2011; Richmond 2011). Sustained by such acts of resistance, civic exchanges endured despite worsening intergovernmental relations. During the Park Geun-hye administration, CSOs became a particularly significant vehicle for signalling Seoul's intent to improve ties with the DPRK. This was exemplified by proposals for history-related exchanges to mark the 70th anniversary of Liberation Day.⁶⁴

However, as Brewer et al. (2011:4) observe, this period also paradoxically reaffirmed the argument that 'the political peace process forms the foundation of the peace process' itself. As momentum for dialogue and negotiation at the governmental level diminished and a confrontation

⁶⁴ Former minister of the MOU, current professor at a university, interview 1, 13 February 2024.

intensified, the inter-Korean peace process contracted overall. Moreover, this fundamentally underscored the inherent fragility of peace processes in post-conflict societies that experience extreme violence (Brewer 2010:27).

Regarding CSO contributions to the social peace process, the aforementioned intellectual, institutional and market roles demonstrated the potential for socially transformative outcomes that extend beyond the mere cessation of violence (Brewer et al. 2011:32–36). Ongoing IKEC initiatives which served as a window through which each side could gain a deeper understanding of the other's circumstances (intellectual spaces), also provided a forum for exploring and practising methods of conflict resolution (institutional spaces), constituting spaces in which relationship continuity could be maintained through the mobilisation of material, human, and cultural resources (market spaces).

However, just as a political peace process is rendered fragile without the support of a social peace process, the scope of a social process is also limited in the absence of progress in the political process (Brewer 2010:202–204). Hence, in contrast to the previous era, during the conservative administrations, CSOs could only influence the internal dynamics of civil society; consequently, owing to the widespread suspension of exchange and cooperation initiatives, the majority of ordinary citizens experienced a marked reduction in opportunities to participate in IKEC, as the impact of CSOs on the social peace process was inevitably constrained.

6.3 Conclusion

During this period, the primary focus of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) was on sustaining relationships with their DPRK counterparts, thereby exercising what Mac Ginty and Richmond (2011) have termed 'critical agency'.

Inter-Korean relations, which had reached a historic watershed during the previous progressive administration, reverted to a 'vicious cycle' under the two subsequent conservative governments. Reflecting the tendency of conflict societies to apply a 'cognitive calculation of gain and loss' (Mac Ginty & du Toit 2007:16) towards the adversary, aid based on fraternity was denigrated during this era as '*Pujugi*' (unconditional, unilateral handouts). Consequently, the policy of engagement reverted to a hard-line approach.

Ostensibly, this suggests that civil society failed to effect structural change. However, Brewer (2011: 30, 35-36) argues that the legacy of violence renders post-conflict societies 'inherently insecure', with the peace process exacting 'psychological and ontological costs'. Accordingly, he underscores the need to bolster civil society's role in the social peace process, distinct from the purely political one. "During this period, CSOs persisted in their roles across all four spaces, despite the hostile Inter-Korean climate and the conservative government's unfavourable attitude. The orientation of these CSOs aligned with Lederach's (2001:842–845) 'relationship-centric approach'. Through limited but sustaining IKEC projects, they sought to enhance mutual understanding between the South and North, exploring conflict resolution methods that accounted for mutual perceptions and emotions. While the

South Korean government remained fixated on nuclear and political issues, civil society prioritised ‘ongoing relationships’ over the short-term termination of conflict, devising and practising new modes of engagement that did not rely on violence.

Admittedly, these efforts by CSOs could not reverse Inter-Korean relations, which had already reverted to a confrontational state. However, as Lederach (2001:847) emphasises, the role of CSOs extends beyond resolving specific issues; it involves establishing a framework that situates these issues within a broader systemic context and addresses the root causes underlying the symptomatic expression of conflict. From the perspective of a holistic approach that considers interdependence within the relational system—rather than focusing exclusively on visible phenomena—CSOs exercised ‘critical agency’ and fulfilled their mandates despite the oppressive environment. Consequently, the onus of responsibility lies more heavily with the government, which undermined policy consistency and remained preoccupied with political-military solutions.

The following chapter examines the role of CSOs during the third phase: the Moon Jae-in administration. This period is distinct as the role of CSOs appeared further diminished; while the framework of engagement policy was maintained, akin to the previous progressive administration, the specific approach toward CSOs differed significantly.

Chapter 7. The Roles of CSOs in the Moon Jae-in Administration (May 2017 – May 2022)

This chapter analyses statements from government and CSO participants regarding the role of South Korean CSOs during the ‘*progressive*’ Moon Jae-in administration (May 2017 – May 2022). During this period, civic exchange remained extremely limited, despite high-level dialogue between South Korea, the DPRK, and the United States. Additionally, aid to the DPRK was at its lowest level compared to any previous administration, and socio-cultural exchange and cooperation were restricted to a small number of projects (e.g. the excavation of historical sites, religious initiatives, and academic exchanges – which were discontinued after 2019). In the latter half of the Moon Jae-in presidency, at both governmental and civic levels, all direct exchanges were effectively suspended, to the extent that cross-border movement between North and South Korea ceased entirely.

7.1 The Roles of South Korean CSOs

This section analyses participant remarks on the role of South Korean CSOs, who carried out activities on a limited basis under increasingly challenging conditions, impacted by the general breakdown of inter-Korean relations during the antecedent conservative administrations and also the unprecedented tightening of international sanctions against the DPRK in response to the advancement of its WMD programme.

a) Advancing IKEC with a Universal Peace Perspective

Some CSOs noted that over the course of the Moon Jae-in government and the two preceding conservative administrations, they moved beyond the traditional framework of inter-Korean relations based on notions of shared ethnicity and compatriot ties. Instead, CSOs began to explore avenues for engagement and cooperation with North Korea from a wider, peace-oriented perspective, which accepted the North as a counterpart in conflict resolution. A CSO representative, involved in both humanitarian assistance and socio-cultural exchange projects with North Korea, stated that during suspensions in inter-Korean relations, engagement with overseas peace organisations and encounters with other peace processes were actively pursued. She explained that her organisation sought to depart from a conventional Korea-centric approach to pursue a universal direction in peacebuilding, integrating the lessons of relevant case studies (e.g. Northern Ireland) into Korean peace education initiatives and narratives:

“Our organisation has been actively engaging with peacebuilding groups in Northern Ireland. Through these exchanges, we came to realise the importance of viewing inter-Korean issues not merely as matters between the two Koreas, but as broader questions of peace and integration. This led us to consider how peace education has been implemented in other conflict-affected countries, and to reflect on how such approaches could inform our own context. From that point onwards, we began referring to our unification education as ‘peace education for the Korean

Peninsula’, and we studied educational programmes from Northern Ireland and elsewhere, adapting them to suit the particular circumstances of Korea”.⁶⁵

Similarly, another NGO representative indicated that traditional approaches to DPRK humanitarian assistance were also reconsidered. Insisting that aid should not be confined solely to immediate humanitarian objectives, he suggested that engagement should be pursued in a manner that seeks to harmonise the combined values of economic development, peace, and human rights:

“At present, the international community and the United Nations are adopting what is known as the nexus approach. This approach seeks to create a virtuous cycle by integrating the following three categories: economic development, humanitarian assistance and development cooperation, and the promotion of peace, human rights and democracy. Within this model, economic development is primarily led by the private sector, peace-related political initiatives are driven by governments, and civil society organisations take the lead in humanitarian assistance and development cooperation. This nexus approach—linking humanitarian aid, economic development, and peace and human rights—was already taking shape at the UN level by the mid-2000s.

⁶⁵ Leader of CSO providing aid to the DPRK and peace education for over 20 years, interview 12, 3 November 2023.

I believe there is a need to attempt this kind of virtuous cycle within inter-Korean relations as well”.⁶⁶

In this way, during the Moon Jae-in administration, CSOs re-evaluated the feasibility of traditional modes of exchange and cooperation while simultaneously seeking new alternatives.

b) Sustaining Relationships through International Networks

In a context where relations between the North and South Korean authorities were repeatedly resumed and then severed, interview participants described how South Korean CSOs worked to create opportunities for contact and exchange with the DPRK by maintaining relations through international cooperation.

A representative of the Women's Peace Movement (WPM) noted that, in situations where direct exchanges between North and South Korea became difficult, efforts were made to establish contact with the DPRK through participation in Track 1.5 dialogues (a form of multi-track diplomacy that brings in official and unofficial actors) and international networking. She stressed that this type of activity was not exclusive to the Moon Jae-in administration but became particularly pronounced during that period, as direct exchanges became limited even at the CSO level.

“Since 2015, we’ve been taking part in the International Conference on Northeast Asian Security, known as the ‘Ulaanbaatar Dialogue,’ a Track 1.5 dialogue led by GPPAC

⁶⁶ Leader of a CSO providing aid to the DPRK and peace education, interview 18, 21 December 2023.

[Global Partnership for the Prevention on the Armed Conflict] that involves government and civil society figures from the DPRK, South Korea, the United States, China, Japan, Russia, and Mongolia. (...) On the North Korean side, the Korean National Peace Committee (KNPC), linked to the Workers' Party of Korea but presents itself as a civil society group, attended; on the South Korean side, our organisation has participated".⁶⁷

She also stated that, through collaborative networks with the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS), based in Siem Reap, Cambodia and Myanmar, WPM maintains indirect relations with North Korean counterparts. She assessed that, in the absence of direct meetings between the two Koreas, such forms of partnership are significant in that they enable both Koreas to be connected through global, multilateral civil society peace networks, thereby facilitating an indirect yet meaningful linkage within the sphere of peacebuilding.

Similarly, a CSO director involved in 'Assistance to the DPRK' noted that conditions for aid projects had already deteriorated during the preceding conservative administrations. He expressed frustration that, under the Moon Jae-in administration, aid projects to the DPRK were unfeasible due to the administration's government-first approach. Instead, CSOs had to focus on

⁶⁷ Former senior staff of women's peace organisation, interview 21, 26 November 2023.

indirect methods to create an environment conducive to inter-Korean cooperation.

“During the previous conservative administrations, humanitarian aid projects for North Korea were scarcely implemented due to the government’s hardline stance and international sanctions. In this context, our organisation began to shift its focus towards peace initiatives and to creating an environment in which IKEC projects could be revitalised within the international network. Since 2009, the annual international conference held by various domestic and international organisations to discuss humanitarian aid and development cooperation projects in North Korea has been part of this effort”.⁶⁸

The KNCCNK's 20th anniversary conference white paper highlighted the achievements of the ‘Joint Declaration for Supporting the DPRK and Ensuring Peace on the Korean Peninsula’. It was further noted that the conference:

‘served as an opportunity to expand networks and strengthen solidarity among domestic and international organisations

⁶⁸ Director of an CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 15 years, interview 14, 30 November 2023.

working on assistance to the DPRK and cooperation projects'.⁶⁹

After the breakdown of the U.S./DPRK talks in Hanoi and the DPRK demolition of the inter-Korean liaison office, official inter-Korean communication channels were effectively severed. However, at the civic level, communication continued, albeit intermittently, via overseas organisations. An Executive Director of the June 15th South Committee commented on the nature of these communication channels:

"The June 15th South Committee works in coordination with the June 15th North Committee. In May 2023, even though official dialogue between the two sides was suspended, a joint appeal was adopted, and a press release was issued. The June 15th Overseas Committee acts as a kind of liaison office for both sides, facilitating communication between them. This exchange has continued through these channels".⁷⁰

In summary, CSO practitioners asserted that, during the Moon Jae-in administration, while direct exchanges between the DPRK and South Korea were constrained, CSOs played a role in finding alternative means to build relationships with the DPRK. This included efforts to maintain relations via international networks, which could facilitate such connections.

69 KNCCNK (2015) The white paper on Aid to North Korea for 20 years, The Korean NGO Council for Cooperation with North Korea, p.66.

70 Executive Director of an umbrella organisation for unification and peace movements, interview 22, 19 December 2023

c) Collaboration in Government Policy Responses

It was also noted that this sustained CSO engagement contributed to the government's ability to formulate policy responses amid changing circumstances. An OKEC (Overseas Korean Agency) practitioner involved in the field of history remarked that CSO-led projects served as pilot initiatives, which provided an indicator which could gauge the effectiveness mechanisms of the level of the international community's strengthened sanctions against the DPRK. At a time when most other forms of IKEC had come to a standstill as a result of the sanctions regime, historical exchange projects between the two Koreas were virtually the only projects continuing. Hence, with government acknowledgement and cooperation, these projects became a means to test the extent to which the provision of necessary materials for such projects as would be permitted by the UN Security Council Sanctions Committee on North Korea.

“With the advent of the Moon Jae-in administration, the improvement of US– DPRK relations became closely intertwined with the resumption of IKEC, and our project effectively became a test case—a kind of ‘guinea pig’—for assessing the prospects of renewed engagement. At that time, no other IKEC project had resumed. Ours was the only IKEC project in the field of history that was partially underway. The government was therefore able to use it to determine, via the UN Security Council Sanctions Committee, whether materials could be provided for our activities and to assess the level of sanctions in place. (...)

Anyway, we felt as though we were being used as experimental subjects”.⁷¹

Participants noted that despite the intensification of sanctions against North Korea during the latter part of the Moon Jae-in administration, the efforts of South Korean CSOs to sustain inter-Korean exchange and cooperation nonetheless played an indirect role in supporting the government’s policy responses.

d) Advancing Civil Diplomacy and Peace Campaigns

One CSO participant further noted that during the Moon Jae-in administration, when security-related issues were an increasingly dominant concern on the Korean Peninsula, CSO efforts were focused on peace advocacy via international networks:

"During the Moon Jae-in administration, as someone invested in the situation on the Korean Peninsula, I felt that everything was becoming very politicised and militarised, with the influence of major powers growing stronger. Civil society's access was really limited. (...) To make our case to the international community, we visited places like Washington, Brussels, and the United Nations Headquarters. We argued against focusing only on deterrence from a security standpoint and pushed for a

⁷¹ CSO practitioner involved in inter-Korean Historian association for over 20 years, interview 26, 29 January 2024.

declaration to end the Korean War, saying, “Seventy years is enough to end the Korean War”.⁷²

Officials from other social organisations also noted the continued engagement in activities such as advocacy campaigns to lobby for the improvement of inter-Korean relations.

“Our organisation focuses on civic IKEC between South Korea and the DPRK whenever possible and works to create an environment for civic sector IKEC, especially during times when these exchanges are difficult. For example, we’ve been involved in activities to improve inter-Korean relations and set the stage for civic IKEC, like running peace campaigns or advocating for the resumption of tourism to Gaeseong and Mt. Geumgang”.⁷³

To summarise, during the Moon Jae-in administration, strengthened sanctions against the DPRK and shifts in inter-Korean relations negatively impacted the operating conditions for CSOs. However, CSOs continued to play an effective role despite these challenges. Where direct contact and exchange between the DPRK and South Korea became limited, CSOs managed to maintain relations with the DPRK via the international community, utilising Track 1.5 dialogues and building international networks. Additionally, they campaigned to advocate and communicate the

⁷² Former senior staff of women’s peace organisation, interview 21, 26 November 2023.

⁷³ Executive Director of an umbrella organisation for unification and peace movements, interview 22, 19 December 2023

need for peace on the Korean Peninsula, while representing the voices of ordinary citizens both domestically and internationally.

7.2 Strategic Social Spaces of CSOs

Following a decade of conservative administrations, the election of the progressive Moon Jae-in administration renewed hopes for the broad resumption of IKEC, with particular emphasis on reviving civic sector IKEC, which had been suspended under the Park Geun-hye administration. A series of early inter-Korean and DPRK-US summits, marked by the DPRK's decision to participate in the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics, further heightened expectations. However, in practice, civic sector IKEC remained at their lowest levels throughout the period examined in this study. Aside from government-level dialogue, direct inter-Korean exchanges virtually ceased following the breakdown of the 2019 Hanoi summit, adding further constraints to IKEC activity.

Intellectual and Institutional spaces

During the Moon Jae-in administration, CSOs sought to explore peace-centred IKEC by implementing select initiatives from a universal peace perspective. As the concept of a unified Korean nation weakened and the identities of the two countries strengthened, discussions based on existing concepts such as compatriots (K.-W. Koo 2008:117–118) and ethnicity lost momentum.⁷⁴ Against this backdrop, South Korean CSOs sought to reassess

⁷⁴ According to a survey on unification awareness conducted by the Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU), the proportion of South Koreans with a positive perception of the necessity for unification between North and South Korea declined from approximately 70% in 2014 to around 58% in 2017 (G.-C. Lee 2018:37). Regarding the reasons for unification, in 2014, the most frequently cited reason was "because we are of the same ethnicity," accounting for approximately

the conditions of conflict and to propose alternative frameworks for engagement (Brewer et al. 2011: 133). One peace education organisation⁷⁵, for instance, moved away from existing approaches that focused on the inter-Korean relationship under the banner of 'unification', and embraced exchanges with peace organisations in Northern Ireland and Cambodia to seek out exchange and cooperation plans that took into account parties to the conflict from a more universal perspective. They then incorporated these plans into their own peace education programmes, widening the discourse of inter-Korean relations to include international agents and neighbouring interests. Together with the role of market spaces, which will be examined later, these intellectual and institutional roles contributed to maintaining continuous relations with partners in the DPRK amid the suspension of direct IKEC during the latter half of the Moon Jae-in administration.

Market Spaces

In market spaces, CSO activities were characterised by the strategic utilisation of international networks to sustain engagement with their DPRK partners. This approach was informed by the peace-oriented frameworks developed within the intellectual and institutional spaces. Moving beyond agendas confined solely to inter-Korean relations, South Korean CSOs began to address broader issues such as denuclearisation at a Northeast Asian level and focus on development cooperation with the DPRK in partnership with

37%. However, by 2017, this had decreased to around 30%, becoming the second most cited reason after "the elimination of the threat of war," which was identified by approximately 42% of respondents (J.-H. Park 2017:51)

⁷⁵ Leader of CSO providing aid to the DPRK and peace education for over 20 years, interview 12, 3 November 2023.

the international community. Significantly, through active participation in these international networks, South Korean CSOs were able to foster indirect forms of engagement with the DPRK.

When considered in light of contact theory, which posits that indirect contact, alongside direct interaction, can yield comparable reductions in prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp 2006:766; Lytle 2018:9–10), this method of CSO engagement becomes an important consideration. Furthermore, as Brewer (2010: 47) argues, efforts to build regional peace are often more readily mobilised when they are linked to global civil society networks, a dynamic that has become increasingly relevant in the context of inter-Korean cooperation. While this approach was initially driven by constraints on direct exchange during the Moon Jae-in administration, it laid the groundwork for the sustainable development of inter-Korean relations that potentially could be facilitated by future collaborations with a global civil society.

Political Spaces

In the face of intensified international sanctions against the DPRK, in the political spaces, the role of CSOs has been twofold. On the one hand, CSOs have collaborated with governmental policy responses, while on the other, they have utilised international networks to advocate for peace on the Korean Peninsula through civil society-led campaigns, thereby exerting indirect pressure on government policy.

Under the tightened sanctions regime, it was often challenging to ascertain the precise scope of enforcement by the UN Security Council Sanctions Committee on the DPRK. In this context, CSOs took the initiative to consult

the Committee regarding the permissibility of supplying materials necessary for their projects. In doing so, they not only clarified the UN guidelines, establishing greater possibilities for their own activities, but also assisted the government in determining appropriate courses of action for future exchange and cooperation with the DPRK.

Concerning security concerns (e.g. the DPRK nuclear programme), which came to dominate the agenda, particularly as the prospects for all forms of IKEC became increasingly contingent on the outcome of government-led negotiations, CSOs sought to influence the policy orientation of the Moon Jae-in administration through a variety of civil society peace campaigns. These were primarily aimed at challenging a policy framework that prioritised security issues to the detriment of exchange and cooperation initiatives.

The following section will examine how CSO roles contributed to the political and social peace processes associated with IKEC during the Moon Jae-in administration.

Contributions to the Political and Social Peace Process

During the Moon Jae-in administration, CSO contributions to both the political and social peace processes were limited, and the recursive dynamics between these two processes failed to materialise.

Firstly, in terms of the political peace process, the Moon Jae-in administration placed too heavy a reliance on government-led, high-level negotiations focused upon denuclearisation. Conversely, it treated CSO-led civic exchanges, which had barely been maintained under the previous two

conservative administrations, as secondary considerations. As revealed in numerous interviews with CSO representatives, the government's attitude was that 'civic exchanges will naturally follow if political negotiations progress.'⁷⁶ That said, constraints on CSO involvement were arguably also due to external factors, such as the DPRK's advancement of a nuclear weapons programme and the strengthened international sanctions imposed in response. Many civil society participants, however, argued that the government's short-sighted political approach, which prioritised intergovernmental dialogue to the exclusion of other forms of engagement, was fundamentally problematic, regardless of external circumstances.⁷⁷ They claimed that this prioritisation overlooked the unique domain of CSO activity in respect of relations with the DPRK.⁷⁸

Consequently, indirect communication channels, which had been established and maintained by CSOs and had previously contributed to breaking the deadlock in inter-Korean dialogue, became redundant. Instead, civil society organisations confined themselves to either supporting government policies or criticising governmental approaches from the sidelines. This had little

⁷⁶ Former Government official in charge of civic IKEC, interview 8, 18 January 2024., Former leader of CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 20 years, interview 11, 31 October 2023., Director of an CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 15 years, interview 14, 30 November 2023, and Leader of a CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 20 years / Catholic Rev. interview 16, 12 December 2023.

⁷⁷ Former leader of CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 20 years, interview 11, 31 October 2023; Director of an CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 15 years; Director of a CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 15 years, interview 14, 30 November 2023; Leader of a CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 20 years / Catholic Rev. interview 16, 12 December 2023; Former senior staff of women's peace organisation, interview 21, 26 November 2023; Staff involved in the Compilation of Gyeoremal-keunsajeon (South-North language dictionary), interview 23, 9 January 2024.

⁷⁸ Former senior government official, interview 4, 1 November 2023; Former Government official in charge of civic IKEC, interview 8, 18 January 2024.

substantive impact, however, on the Moon administration's overly government-centric political process.

Subsequently, notable changes were observed in South Korean perceptions of the DPRK. In particular, the younger generation was unconcerned about connecting with the DPRK, simply as part of the same ethnic group (K.-W. Koo 2008:117–118). Consequently, the normative sense of unification as a necessity, held onto by older generations, has also declined (see Chapter 4 for further details). Significantly, faced with such phenomena, CSOs took on a role which the government was deemed incapable of fulfilling, and sought alternative forms of IKEC from a universal peace perspective, while advancing inter-Korean relations via collaborations with the international community.

Having become severely restricted under two consecutive conservative administrations and with the erosion of their civic support base, it was difficult for CSOs to maintain a societal impact. Hence, their role was relegated to maintaining relationships, albeit tenuous, with their DPRK counterparts while seeking ways to survive as organisations, rather than actively contributing to the peace process.

Public opinion data reflects these realities: while the proportion of South Koreans with a positive perception of the DPRK increased abruptly at the start of the Moon Jae-in administration (peaking at 71% in 2018), afterwards it plummeted (falling to 59.9% in 2021), reverting to levels similar to those observed under previous conservative administrations (averaging around 60%).

The following section will examine the factors that brought about changes in the roles of CSOs across the three discussed phases within the framework of government–CSO relations.

7.3. Conclusion

When scrutinised through the lens of civil society engagement, the Moon Jae-in administration offers significant, cautionary lessons. While the ideological orientation of the South Korean government—whether progressive or conservative—has traditionally been treated as a critical variable in Inter-Korean relations, this correlation was not substantiated in the context of CSO roles. The Moon administration’s approach to the DPRK exemplified a typical ‘top-down approach’ (Hancock 2008: 205), focusing primarily on political structures, institutions, and negotiations. Citing factors such as intensified international sanctions and the DPRK’s reticence towards IKEC, the administration sought to independently engineer a breakthrough in Inter-Korean relations. Consequently, it adopted a generally passive stance towards diverse civic sector initiatives, fearing that such engagement might generate unnecessary ‘noise’ during the delicate diplomatic process.

However, the impact of political leadership in South Korea largely mirrored Hancock’s (2008: 210) findings in Northern Ireland: political leaders held far less power than certain scholars and the media typically suggest. In the context of Inter-Korean relations, the limitations of ‘top leadership’ identified by Lederach (1997:38–41) became particularly evident. These leaders tended to focus on short-term issues and, in their pursuit of a ‘high public profile’, faced greater constraints rather than flexibility. This dynamic weakened the

interdependence between state and civil society actors, thereby widening the gap between them.

Three of the five strategic pitfalls outlined by Brewer (2010: 30) severely undermined the viability of the peace process during this era. These included the destabilising impact of continuing violence (namely the nuclear issue and war legacies); the ‘absence of civil society’, worsened by the government’s marginalisation of non-state actors; and a fixation on governance issues like political negotiations and sanctions. Consequently, the initiative collapsed into a comprehensive severance of Inter-Korean relations, a sharp regression from the achievements of previous progressive administrations.

Even amidst these circumstances, South Korean CSOs utilised their inherent flexibility to maintain indirect connectivity through international networks, despite the severance of inter-governmental relations. Viewed through the prism of Lederach’s (2001:843) relationship-centric perspective, wherein a peace process is conceptualised not as sequential steps taken by a singular entity but as a ‘dynamic process built on interdependence’ among various levels of leadership within a ‘web of relationships’, it can be argued that civil society fulfilled a meaningful role by sustaining inter-Korean connections, despite being afforded only minimal operational space. Nevertheless, this period unequivocally demonstrated that an approach exclusively reliant on top-level leadership—in which a government representing a single societal stratum marginalises civil society—is insufficient for the attainment and sustenance of a peace process.

The reasons why the Moon administration, despite sharing the progressive lineage of the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun governments, encountered such divergent outcomes in Inter-Korean relations will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 8.

Meanwhile, Table 7-1 (below) outlines these roles (discussed in Chapters 5 to 7), classifying them according to Brewer's 'Strategic Social Spaces Theory' (as adapted for the Korean context).

Table 7-1. Categorisation of the roles of Korean CSOs during the three researched political periods according to Brewer's theoretical framework of spaces

	Phase I: Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun Administrations (Feb.1998 – Feb.2008)	Phase II: Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye Administrations (Feb.2008–Mar 2017)	Phase III: Moon Jae-in Administration (May 2017 – May 2022)
Intellectual Spaces	a) Pioneering the Space for IKEC b) Perception Change through Relationship Building	a) Facilitating Deeper Understanding of the DPRK b) Enhancing Mutual Acceptance and Exploring Strategies for Conflict Resolution	a) Advancing IKEC with a Universal Peace Perspective
Institutional Spaces	c) Addressing Psychological and Emotional Challenges		
Market Spaces	d) Fostering Multi-layered People-to-People Relationships e) Mediation as a Cultural Interpreter	c) Sustaining Relationships through the Continued IKEC Projects	b) Sustaining Relationships through International Networks

Political Spaces	f) Providing Inter-Korean Communication Channels g) Initiating Policy Changes in IKEC	d) Providing Indirect Communication Channels and Pressuring IKEC Policy Shift	c) Collaboration in Government Policy Responses d) Advancing Civil Diplomacy and Peace Campaigns

Chapter 8. Enabling Factors and Constraints for CSO Peacebuilding in Inter-Korean Relations

This chapter investigates the contextual dynamics of government-CSO relations that have significantly influenced the peacebuilding efforts of CSOs. Through this analysis, it elucidates the specific factors that have either enabled or constrained the agency of these actors, offering critical insights into the evolution of civil society within South Korea's unique socio-political context. Crucially, this examination seeks to transcend the limitations of existing International Relations scholarship, which has predominantly attributed the challenges regarding the sustainability of South Korean peacebuilding to external geopolitical variables. Instead, this chapter aims to deepen the understanding of the internal dynamics governing the Korean peace process

8.1 Enabling Factors and Constraints for CSO's Roles

This section provides a chronological review of the enabling factors and constraints for CSO peacebuilding across five successive administrations. Following an examination of the primary factors highlighted in the interviews, the subsequent section will identify and analyse the overarching factors within the framework of IKEC. This analysis seeks to determine the variables that constrained the operational space for CSOs, despite their role as pivotal actors in advancing inter-Korean relations.

8.1.1 Enabling factors

a) A Policy Framework Friendly to the Civic Sector IKEC (*Sonmin Hukwan*)

One of the most frequently mentioned contributions to CSO-led IKEC initiatives was the '*Sonmin Hukwan*' ('civilians first, government later') principle. Established as a key DPRK-oriented policy framework during the Kim Dae-jung administration and continued under Roh Moo-hyun, this principle integrated government policy with autonomous civil movements, thereby contributing to broader stability in inter-Korean relations.⁷⁹

The formalisation of this framework led to a significant upsurge in engagement, manifested through an increase in aid projects and a rise in public participation, such as NGO sponsorships and visits to the DPRK.⁸⁰ Crucially, the maintenance of this policy—even amidst North Korean provocations—ensured that the civilian sector remained a prioritised and revitalised actor in inter-Korean affairs.

b) Legal and Institutional Guarantees for Civic Sector IKEC

Another major theme, cited as contributing to the revitalisation of the civic sector IKEC, was the enactment of legal and institutional guarantees. Two main types of guarantees were mentioned, with the first type including laws such as the IKEC Act and the IKCF Act. These applied to most IKEC projects

⁷⁹ Former leader of an NGO providing aid to the DPRK for over 20 years, interview 11, 31 October 2023.

⁸⁰ Chairman of an NGO providing aid to the DPRK and peace education, interview 18, 21 December 2023.

and enabled financial support for CSOs.⁸¹ Meanwhile, from a governmental perspective, these Acts also served as a protective framework for CSOs.⁸² This was particularly crucial in ensuring that IKEC activities did not leave organisations vulnerable to prosecution under the National Security Act.

The second type of legal and institutional guarantee for civic IKEC involved specific CSO projects facilitated by inter-Korean agreements or the enactment of domestic supporting mechanisms. While such instances were limited in number, they represented a significant evolution into a more ‘institutionalised form’ of state-supported civic cooperation.⁸³ A prominent example was the joint cultural heritage excavation project, which ensured its viability and continuity by securing formal commitments from relevant ministries and being integrated into ministerial-level agreements between North and South Korean authorities.⁸⁴ This shift demonstrated a strategic transition where projects, initially intended for inter-governmental channels, were successfully maintained through a civic cooperation framework underpinned by official state-level guarantees.

Even amid an overall deterioration in inter-Korean relations during the period under conservative governments, certain institutionalised forms of civic IKEC attracted legislative support and government funding, and continued over the longer term. A former official in charge of ‘Assistance to the DPRK’

81 An academic expert on inter-Korean relations, interview 27, 24 Jan 2024.

82 Government official who was in charge of assistance to the DPRK, interview 6, 2 November 2023.

83 An academic expert on inter-Korean relations, interview 27, 24 Jan 2024.

84 CSO practitioner involved in the inter-Korean Historian association for over 20 years, interview 26, 29 January 2024.

at the Ministry of Unification noted that under the Park Geun-hye administration, ‘Assistance to the DPRK’ was effectively maintained, albeit with alterations, compared with previous approaches.⁸⁵

c) Establishment and Operation of Government-Civic Sector Consultative Bodies

The establishment and operation of Government-Civic Sector Consultative Bodies, cited as providing opportunities for the role of CSOs, can be considered as a third thematic category, with the ‘Civilian-Government Council’, established during the Roh Moo-hyun administration as a policy consultative body in the area of aid to the DPRK (see Chapter 4 for details), being the most prominent example. This model of government-CSO governance received high praise from both government and civil society participants, with one CSO representative describing it as an important model for inter-Korean cooperation.⁸⁶ From a governmental perspective, it emerged that the Civilian-Government Council facilitated a deeper understanding among relevant departments regarding the diverse activities of CSOs, while also assisting in the development and proposal of improved frameworks for cooperation.⁸⁷

The establishment of umbrella organisations, such as *Minwhahyup* (the National Council for the Reconciliation of Koreans, NCRK), the KNCCNK, and the June 15 South Committee, acted as a crucial catalyst for

⁸⁵ Government official in charge of assistance to the DPRK, interview 7, 6 December 2023.

⁸⁶ Leader of a CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 20 years, interview 15, 5 December 2023.

⁸⁷ Government official who was in charge of assistance to the DPRK, interview 7, 06 December 2023.

strengthening partnerships between civil society and the state. These overarching bodies, often formed with government cooperation, served as institutional platforms to integrate diverse civic perspectives into national North Korea policy. By encompassing a broad spectrum of political and religious groups and achieving formal legal status, these organisations not only solidified collaboration with relevant ministries but also played a pivotal role in maintaining stable, long-term cooperative relationships within the field of inter-Korean exchange and cooperation.⁸⁸

d) Financial Support Through the IKCF and Local Government Partnerships

In terms of tangible resources, the IKCF emerged as the primary facilitator, proving indispensable for sustaining socio-cultural exchanges and overcoming fundraising challenges.⁸⁹ This mechanism was mutually beneficial: the state utilised CSOs as intermediaries for politically sensitive projects, while CSOs gained the financial scale and legitimacy necessary for North Korean acceptance.⁹⁰

Beyond central funding, strategic partnerships with local governments provided stability that often transcended partisan shifts in national leadership. These collaborations allowed CSOs to leverage technical expertise and

⁸⁸ Former senior staff of National Council for Reconciliation and Cooperation, interview 20, 29 June 2023; Leader of NGO providing aid to the DPRK and peace education for over 20 years, interview 12, 3 November 2023; Executive Director of an umbrella organisation for unification and peace movements, interview 22, 19 December 2023.

⁸⁹ Manager of a government agency in charge of implementation of IKEC, Interview 10, 6 February 2024.

⁹⁰ Director of an CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 15 years, interview 14, 30 November 2023; ⁹⁰ Executive director of an umbrella organisation for unification and peace movements, interview 22, 19 December 2023.

administrative resources, effectively bridging the gap between local officials and North Korean partners.⁹¹

However, while these enabling factors were predominantly concentrated within the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations, the constraints discussed hereafter persisted throughout all five governments. Given that these restrictive elements remained constant despite fluctuations in inter-Korean relations and shifts in South Korean political leadership, they acted as a decisive factor in the critical contraction of the operational space for CSOs.

8.1.2 Constraints

a) A Policy Framework Prioritising Politics and Security Issues

The most significant contraction of the space for civil society was driven by a policy framework that prioritised political and military imperatives—a stance epitomised by the 24 May Measures. Regarding the justification for this contraction, government officials and CSO representatives offered sharply contrasting interpretations. Officials primarily justified the suspension of engagement—including the closure of the Gaeseong Industrial Complex—as a necessary strategic response to the DPRK’s development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). They maintained that a firm resolve was essential to address security threats.

91 A director of an NGO providing aid to the DPRK for over 15 years, interview 14, November 30th 2023; Local Government official, interview 9, 11 January 2024.

Conversely, CSO practitioners contended that these severances were not merely reactive but stemmed from a pre-existing, inherently negative policy stance, arguing that external provocations—such as the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island—were utilised as opportunistic pretexts to dismantle engagement initiatives that the administration had already intended to discontinue.⁹² This deliberate severance was underpinned by deep-seated ideological prejudice, where CSOs were frequently categorised as ‘pro-DPRK leftists’, fostering a domestic environment designed to restrict civic autonomy under the guise of principled security.⁹³ This is corroborated by the KNCCNK’s *20-Year White Paper*⁹⁴, which critiques the instrumentalisation of aid as a political tool.

b) Predominance of a Government-First Approach

In contrast to the conservative era, the primary impediment identified during the progressive period—specifically under the Moon Jae-in administration—was the state-centric policy known as *'Sonkwan Humin'*, meaning 'government first, civilians later'. While officials often externalised responsibility by citing stringent international sanctions and DPRK passivity as the primary barriers,⁹⁵ CSO participants argued that the administration’s excessive emphasis on government-to-government relations marginalised the civic sector.⁹⁶ By monopolising engagement, the government dismantled the

92 Former minister of the MOU, current professor of university, interview 1, 13 February 2024.

93 Leader of a humanitarian aid CSO for over 20 years, interview 13, 6 November 2023.

94 KNCCNK (2015) The white paper on Aid to North Korea for 20 years, The Korean NGO Council for Cooperation with North Korea, p.63.

95 Former minister of the MOU, current university professor, Interview 2, 15 February 2024.

96 Former leader of CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 20 years, interview 11, 31 October 2023.

vital buffer zone where civil society could act as a mediator during diplomatic stalemates.⁹⁷

Ironically, this approach was often spearheaded by officials with backgrounds in civil society, who opted to centralise authority within state bureaucracies to achieve visible political results, occasionally treating civic involvement as a political privilege rather than a fundamental partnership.⁹⁸

Moreover, critics point out that this government-centred approach has been the consistent strategy of nearly all administrations throughout the history of inter-Korean relations. One CSO representative observed that, although conservative and progressive governments diverged in the extent to which they emphasised government-CSO partnerships, they shared one commonality – a government-led approach.⁹⁹

c) Insufficient Institutional Framework for Guaranteeing Civic Sector IKEC

A major persistent constraint was the failure to institutionalise civic participation across five consecutive administrations. Even during progressive eras, the lack of formal legal recognition and systemic support

97 Former President of the National Council of Churches in Korea, and current Chairman of a peace movement CSO, Interview 24, 17 January 2024; Former Government official in charge of civic IKEC, interview 8, 18 January 2024.

98 Former senior government official, interview 4, 1 November 2023.

99 Leader of a CSO providing aid to the DPRK and peace education, interview 18, 21 December 2023.

left the sector dependent on political channels rather than institutional guarantees.¹⁰⁰

Specifically, the failure to enact laws supporting mutual coexistence—a key tenet of the Inter-Korean Basic Agreement—left CSOs vulnerable to ideological shifts.¹⁰¹ This insufficient institutionalisation, combined with a growing fiscal reliance on the IKCF, altered the power dynamics, allowing the state to exert disproportionate influence over civic initiatives and stifle activity through the withdrawal of financial support.¹⁰²

d) The Control-Oriented Legal System Governing IKEC and Its Arbitrary Application

The control-oriented nature of the statutory system, particularly the **'reporting system'** under the IKEC Act, remains a structural barrier. While framed as a notification process, it functions as a *de facto* prior approval system where the Ministry of Unification can withhold authorisation without transparent justification.¹⁰³

Examples related to the arbitrary application of the current IKEC Act include the following: differing decisions on identical humanitarian items for the

100 Former leader of CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 20 years, interview 11, 31 October 2023

101 Chairman of an NGO providing aid to the DPRK and peace education, interview 18, 21 December 2023.

102 Academic expert on inter-Korean relations, current executive of a CSO working on providing aid to the DPRK, interview 27, 24 Jan 2024

103 Executive Director of an umbrella organisation for unification and peace movements, interview 22, 19 December 2023

DPRK (depending on the administration in power)¹⁰⁴; prohibiting meetings in the DPRK while directing them to be held in a third country¹⁰⁵; and arbitrarily determining the approval and timing of exports of assistance to the DPRK according to the state of inter-Korean relations¹⁰⁶. Arbitrary application of the law by each administration has been a major obstacle to the stable implementation of IKEC projects and to building trust with DPRK counterparts.

A former official corroborated this, noting that CSOs often disparage the law as the 'IKEC Obstruction Act'.¹⁰⁷ This legislative void leaves organisations acutely vulnerable to punitive measures under the National Security Act, institutionalising constraints that stifle grassroots creativity.

e) Weak Civic Support Base and Excessive Internal Competition

Finally, internal constraints within civil society, such as the lack of a robust domestic foundation and excessive competition, undermined the sector's resilience. Experts argue that CSOs focus disproportionately on outward-facing projects directed at the DPRK while neglecting the essential task of fostering a supportive mindset among South Korean citizens.¹⁰⁸

104 Former senior government official, current a representative of NGO providing aid to the DPRK, interview 5, 16 January 2024.

105 Staff involved in the Compilation of Gyeoremal-keunsajeon (South-DPRK language dictionary), interview 23, 9 January 2024.

106 Leader of a CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 20 years / Catholic Rev. interview 16, 12 December 2023.

107 Former Government official in charge of civic IKEC, interview 8, 18 January 2024.

108 Leader of a CSO providing aid to the DPRK and peace education for over 20 years, interview 12, 3 November 2023.

This failure to communicate the significance of their work was compounded by a pervasive culture of competition driven by visible performance indicators rather than coordination.¹⁰⁹ Consequently, inter-group rivalries often stymied collaborative efforts and joint projects, highlighting a persistent structural weakness that fragmented the sector's collective impact.

8.2 Enabling Factors and Constraints for CSOs Peacebuilding

This section discusses factors that facilitated or constrained the role of CSOs within the context of inter-Korean relations. While much of the existing literature identifies the nature of the government as a decisive factor, arguing that a South Korean administration's approach to North Korea is shaped by its progressive or conservative characteristics, consequently affecting the development of inter-Korean relations (K.-W. Koh 2010:6–7; I. Heo 2012; G. Choi 2020), a simple dichotomy is insufficient to fully explain the varied aspects of CSO involvement. As this paper highlights, even among administrations classified as progressive — specifically the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun governments (phase 1) and the Moon Jae-in government (phase 3) — there were both differences and overlaps in the roles played by CSOs.

Classifying enabling factors and constraints affecting the role of CSOs reveals two key points:

Firstly, even within the context of IKEC, the factors that facilitated or constrained the role of CSOs were inherently contextual, stemming directly

¹⁰⁹ An academic expert on inter-Korean relations, current executive of a CSO working on providing aid to the DPRK, interview 27, 24 Jan 2024

from the nature of government–CSO relations. These factors are termed 'contextual' because, although the modes of interaction between the state and civil society varied—ranging from policies, laws, and institutions to public–private governance and financial support—the extent to which these elements functioned as opportunities or constraints depended on the specific relational dynamics established and maintained between the government and CSOs.

This perspective affords a more dynamic analysis than the functionalist approach advocated by scholars such as Paffenholz (2010: 405), who highlight the predominance of factors such as the level of violence or government behaviour as being determinative. The limitations of relying exclusively on a functional approach to civil society are further illuminated by the previously examined case of the Israeli–Palestinian peace process. Critics (e.g. Çuhadar & Hanafi 2010; Browne & Bradley 2021) contend that when such an approach is divorced from the context of the peace process and power dynamics, it risks producing counterproductive consequences, potentially reinforcing or legitimising the nature of settler colonialism.

In contrast, Brewer's theoretical framework (2010: 1030) demonstrates that individual factors can serve as either an opportunity or a constraint for CSOs, contingent upon the context of government–CSO interactions under diverse administrations. For instance, while a policy framework prioritising civil exchange could provide CSOs with various engagement opportunities, increased government funding might simultaneously undermine their autonomy. Building on this, Steen-Johnsen's revised framework affords a more robust analytical lens for interrogating the power relations between the

state and civil society, thereby addressing the limitations of Brewer's model in adequately illuminating these issues.

Secondly, although opportunity and constraint factors affecting CSOs are acknowledged as largely stemming from the government–CSO relationship, the balance of influence decidedly favours the government. These findings indicate that the refined analytical framework put forward by Steen-Johnsen (2017) provides a more robust evaluative instrument for analysing the dynamics of government–CSO interactions. These findings mirror the patterns observed in the aforementioned international case studies, particularly within the Rwandan peace process. Characterised by a 'strong state–weak civil society' dynamic, the Rwandan context demonstrated a scenario in which the operational space for NGOs was strictly constrained by the state (Ingelaere 2008; Megwalu & Loizides 2010)

Finally, while certain inherent CSO weaknesses are acknowledged, these factors were not found to have played a decisive role in shaping their roles. Interview findings suggest that, despite CSO weaknesses, government–CSO relations have had a greater impact.

Based on this analysis, the following section distinguishes between opportunity and constraint factors affecting the role of CSOs in terms of policy and legal–institutional domains. It also examines the mechanisms through which these factors influence CSO engagement.

8.2.1 A Supportive Policy Framework for Government-CSO Partnerships

One of the most significant factors influencing the role of South Korean CSOs engaged in IKEC was whether or not the incumbent government recognised their distinctive role and acknowledged them as key partners in the IKEC process. From a policy perspective, each of the five administrations across the three distinct phases can be distinguished by their ideological orientation (i.e., progressive or conservative) and their fundamental stance towards the DPRK (K. Han & Y. Jang 2012:72–82). However, these distinctions do not necessarily determine the presence of a policy framework supporting government/CSO partnership.

To illustrate, while the ‘progressive’ Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations endorsed a partnership-supportive policy framework – *Sonmin Hukwan* (Civilian first, government second), the Moon Jae-in administration, despite also being progressive, adopted an inverse government-led policy framework – *Sonkwan Humin* (Government first, civilian second). Conservative administrations have also been broadly classified under this *Sonkwan Humin* approach, for exhibiting a more explicit government-first orientation. This section will examine how the policy frameworks of the *Sonmin Hukwan* and *Sonkwan Humin* in each period have specifically influenced the role of CSOs.

Firstly, the ‘civilians first, government second’ (*Sonmin Hukwan*) policy framework under the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations implicitly incorporated several key elements. These elements included: an

awareness of the limitations of government as the primary actor in inter-Korean relations, a recognition of the advantages held by civil society actors (i.e., flexibility and reduced political sensitivity), and an emphasis on partnership between government and civil society (Kang & Jung 2010:29–31; I. Heo 2012:175; D. J. Kim and Y. Chung 2022:11–12).

Specifically, the Kim Dae-jung administration's policy orientation, acknowledging the value of government/civil society partnership, enacted a series of official measures that either relaxed or promoted the constraints on CSO activities imposed by the IKEC Act. The measures included the provision of direct financial assistance for CSO initiatives and the strengthening of partnerships between local governments and CSOs. Through these actions, the administration engendered an enabling environment for CSO involvement in inter-Korean relations, reflecting a deliberate strategy to harness the distinctive strengths of non-governmental actors within the broader policy framework. Concurrently, this approach served as an effective strategy for circumventing the inherent rigidity of top-level leadership in conflict-affected societies (Lederach 1997: 41–42). In the hyper-politicised context of inter-Korean relations, the government faced significant constraints in taking the initiative or responding flexibly to highly contentious issues.

Consequently, an initial emphasis on short-term, goods-based assistance to the DPRK underwent a gradual evolution, transitioning towards development cooperation projects. This evolution factored medium- and long-term initiatives, including agricultural development, healthcare cooperation, and the enhancement of community infrastructure. In the socio-cultural sphere,

the government also actively promoted the CSO activity¹¹⁰. This support facilitated the transformation of one-off projects, often led by prominent figures from civil society, into more regular and diverse initiatives promoting wider participation. As time progressed, the scope of these activities was expanded to encompass joint North–South events, sports, culture and the arts, history and language, religion, and women's issues. This expansion enabled broader and more sustained participation from ordinary citizens across a wider range of fields.

Additionally, the "citizens first, government second" approach, coupled with financial support, contributed to the revitalisation of collaboration between local government and CSOs. This collaboration presented a valuable opportunity to effectively combine the strengths of both actors. Local governments were able to leverage financial resources and specialised institutional capacity, while CSOs contributed valuable knowledge and expertise on engaging with the DPRK.

As posited in Brewer's theoretical framework (Brewer 2010; Brewer et al. 2011), this marked the first instance in the post-division era where the potential for social and political peace processes to develop in a mutually reinforcing manner was identified. It demonstrated that when the operational space for civil society is guaranteed and facilitated, exchange and

¹¹⁰ During this period, approximately 34.6% of the total aid provided by the Kim Dae-jung and Moon Jae-in administrations was given, and 88.6% of all sociocultural exchange projects approved throughout the entire period were carried out (source: Ministry of Unification).

cooperation can bridge even the strictly severed context of inter-Korean relations across the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ)

Conversely, under conservative administrations, the shift towards a policy framework that prioritised political and security concerns demonstrated the constraining impact of such an orientation on the role of CSOs. As a result of the transition from the previous engagement policy framework, which emphasised inclusive involvement, to an approach based on ‘strict reciprocity’¹¹¹ and a combination of incentives and coercive measures, IKEC was relegated to a secondary status. Furthermore, CSOs engaged in IKEC initiatives were at times portrayed as opposing the consistent implementation of the government's principled stance on the DPRK.

Within the parameters of this particular policy framework, the application of legal IKEC governance functioned primarily as an instrument of control over CSO activities. Moreover, while support for CSOs via the IKCF was drastically reduced, government-CSO governance modes that were established by previous progressive administrations were rarely convened; indeed, these mechanisms became merely symbolic.

Notwithstanding constraints, CSOs persisted in pursuing humanitarian assistance and socio-cultural exchange projects, albeit on a minimal basis, thereby sustaining a modicum of interdependence with the DPRK, while on occasion exerting pressure for policy change. The overall scope of their

111 The North Korea policy of the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations was criticised by conservative governments as *pujugi*—that is, unconditional largesse towards the DPRK without reciprocal concessions—while conservatives characterised their own approach as one of ‘strict reciprocity’ (D. Jo 2022:49). However, scholars critical of this conservative stance have referred to it, more bluntly, as a ‘hard-line policy’ (S. Lee 2015:65)

activities was, however, significantly limited by the reluctance of the 'conservative' administrations to acknowledge CSOs as a genuine partner. During this period, a previously positive cycle, whereby governmental dialogue and negotiations at the official level reinforced CSO-led exchange and cooperation, was reversed, resulting instead in a negative cycle in which deteriorating inter-governmental relations further undermined the activities and influence of CSOs.

A salient feature, in this regard, is the manner in which conservative governments have augmented their control over CSOs. As Steen-Johnsen (2017:95) has observed, within the South Korean context, there existed 'subtle forms of control.' During periods of conservative leadership, there were allegations that South Korean CSOs had diverted soybean oil for military use by the DPRK regime, and that humanitarian aid from the South had contributed to the DPRK's nuclear programme. These claims were widely disseminated and served as a justification for increased governmental oversight of CSO activity. As Steen-Johnsen (2017:95) points out, the logic of securitisation, ranging from broad assertions about funding the DPRK's nuclear development to more specific concerns regarding the safety of South Korean citizens, emerged as a principal rationale for the restriction of CSO activities. While the significance and gravity of security issues in inter-Korean relations are irrefutable, the fact that such arguments were often interpreted arbitrarily by successive governments and employed as tools to suppress and control the activities of CSOs is both problematic and controversial.

This mirrors the dynamics observed in the Israeli–Palestinian context (Zorob & Paluszek 2025), where the application of restrictive legal frameworks—such as the 2016 Counter-Terrorism Law—has engendered deepened chilling effects. Here, securitisation acted to curtail the capabilities of NGOs, effectively delegitimising them as partners and leading to a significant contraction of their activism space.

Lastly, and paradoxically, the Moon Jae-in administration—notwithstanding its self-identification as a ‘progressive’ government—was responsible for the most significant contraction of civil society space. By diverging from the established ‘civilians first, government later’ (*Sonmin Hukwan*) model, it embraced the diametrically opposed ‘government first, citizens later’ (*Sonkwan Humin*) approach. The Moon administration served as a compelling case study illustrating Lederach’s observations (1997:40-41) regarding the inherent constraints on top-level leadership in conflict-affected societies. Furthermore, it starkly demonstrated why peacebuilding efforts are destined to fail when they prioritise an exclusive, government-led political process at the expense of the social peace process (Brewer 2019:276).

While the influence of international sanctions on inter-Korean relations was undoubtedly significant during this period¹¹², even when accounting for the unprecedentedly stringent sanctions imposed by the international community and the uncompromising stance of the DPRK, it would be inaccurate to claim that there was no distinct domestic dimension at play. A former senior official

¹¹² Former minister of the Ministry of Unification, current a university professor, Interview 2, 15 February 2024; Former senior government official, currently a representative of an NGO providing aid to the DPRK, interview 5, 16 January 2024; Journalist specializing in inter-Korean relations issues, with experience in inter-Korean broadcasting exchanges, interview 25, 23 January 2024.

observed that in areas such as inter-Korean forestry cooperation, fields in which NGOs had previously been active and demonstrated considerable capacity, the government nonetheless favoured direct implementation by state actors.¹¹³ Similarly, numerous high-ranking government officials and CSO representatives remarked on the extent to which the administration was entrenched in a top-down approach.¹¹⁴ Heavily reliant on high-level negotiation as a strategy for engagement, the government was reluctant to give CSOs meaningful room for manoeuvre, maintaining government–CSO governance only superficially. The administration’s excessive state-centric approach, which marginalised CSOs, ultimately undermined the sustainability of inter-Korean relations. This reflects Brewer’s (2019: 276) observation in Northern Ireland: that the prioritisation of political governance structures frequently occurs at the expense of the social peace process.

Similarly, in a Korean context, the three summits between North and South Korea were predominantly preoccupied with government-level issues such as redefining intergovernmental relations, denuclearisation, and the reduction of military tensions. Consequently, the establishment of complex, community-based networks and the broader inclusion of civil society were dismissed as a secondary concern. This meant that responsibility for the

113 Former senior government official, interview 4, 1 November 2023.

114 Former minister of the MOU, and former chairman of the National Security Council (NSC), Interview 3, 22 February 2024; Former senior government official, interview 4, 1 November 2023; Former Government official in charge of civic IKEC, interview 8, 18 January 2024.; Former leader of CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 20 years, interview 11; Director of a CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 15 years, interview 14, 30 November 2023; Leader of a CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 20 years, Interview 15, 5 December 2023; Leader of a CSO providing aid to the DPRK for over 20 years / Catholic Rev. interview 16, 12 December 2023, Former senior staff of women’s peace organisation, interview 21, 26 November 2023.

peace process was placed exclusively in the hands of political leaders, leaving the majority of other actors, including CSOs, marginalised (Brewer 2019: 276–277).

In addition to the impact of policy frameworks, the extent to which institutionalisation ensures civic sector IKEC has emerged as a pivotal factor in determining the role of CSOs. Subsequently, this aspect will be examined in greater detail.

8.2.2 The Level of Institutionalisation of Civic Sector IKEC

Although the civic sector was encouraged within a policy framework that supported government–CSO partnerships, the absence of institutional guarantees made it vulnerable to potential government intervention. Even though institutionalisation remained at a low level, the establishment and operation of a basic legal and institutional framework for IKEC (including government–CSO governance) enabled CSOs to occupy all four strategic spaces, albeit within a limited scope. This was facilitated by sustained, targeted support for established forms of institutionalised IKEC. However, owing to the low level of institutionalisation, shifts in government resulted in abrupt policy changes, and the legal framework governing IKEC was applied inconsistently, while a control-oriented legal approach persisted. Hence, the scope for CSO engagement has concomitantly diminished as government/CSO partnerships have become increasingly tenuous.

The IKEC Act, enacted in 1990, constitutes the foundational legislative framework for civic engagement in IKEC, providing the institutional guarantees that underpin these interactions (H. Park 2019). However, despite

its stated purpose of 'promoting' exchange and cooperation between the two Koreas, the fundamental provisions of this Act have remained largely unchanged for more than thirty years since its inception in the early 1990s (T.-K. Kim & K. Lee 2023). Additionally, the Act has consistently maintained a 'control-oriented' character, whereby all movement of people and exchange of goods between two Koreas is, in principle, prohibited and permitted only as an exception to government authorisation (S.-H. Lee 2017:8). Although this legal framework has afforded the government considerable discretion in its application, it notably failed to ensure the stability of civic sector IKEC engagement.

Hence, the ambit and extent of the Act and its subordinate regulations have been subject to fluctuations in accordance with the changes of government. To elaborate, the example of goods that were permitted under one administration, but prohibited by its successor, or similarly, the reporting system required for contact with DPRK residents, under conservative governments, which was frequently implemented in practice as a de facto approval system, are open to consideration. As previously observed, the manner in which the IKCF was utilised by the government to support civil organisations varied between different administrations, both with respect to the eligibility criteria and the level of financial assistance provided. Consequently, the civic sector IKEC has remained subject to constraints which are contingent upon the government and its policies.

Government-CSO governance structures were found to face similar challenges. Following the Kim Dae-jung administration, bodies were established with the aim of facilitating governance between the government

and CSOs. However, as these bodies were not statutory, their operation varied depending on which government wielded power. In the hands of progressive administrations, these bodies have historically exhibited a high degree of functionality, while under the oversight of conservative administrations, they have effectively become inoperable. More fundamentally, since these governance bodies were informal structures without legal or institutional foundations, they did not provide South Korean CSOs with genuine authority, nor did they serve as a neutral space which could enable the political role of CSOs, regardless of the administration's orientation. These governance bodies primarily functioned as formal channels for the sharing of information or the formulation of policy recommendations, without playing a substantial role in supporting government-CSO partnerships.

In the context of structure-agency theory, the persistence of a control-oriented legal framework for IKEC can be considered a significant structural constraint. According to Giddens (1984:25), structure is defined as the combination of rules and resources embedded within social systems. While it is important to acknowledge that both CSOs and the government, as agents, are capable of overcoming such constraints (D. J. Kim and Y. Chung 2022:6), it is notable that even under successive progressive administrations, there was a marked incapacity or unwillingness to reform the legal and institutional frameworks to guarantee support for civil exchange. While embedded factors such as the existence of the DMZ are commonly presented as structural constraints that impede everyday interaction (Hughes et al. 2007:630; D. J. Kim and Y. Chung 2022:10), from the perspective of South Korean CSOs,

the continued existence of legal and institutional arrangements restricting autonomous CSO activity constitutes an even more significant structural impediment.

In summary, low-level institutionalisation has not provided a guarantee for the civic sector. IKEC has been one of the most critical factors constraining the roles of CSOs. Even when CSOs were encouraged at the policy level, the absence of legal and institutional guarantees meant that such roles could not be sustained over time. The enactment of specific legislation to protect individual projects, such as the joint publication of inter-Korean dictionaries during the Roh Moo-hyun administration, allowed these initiatives to continue despite changes in government, thereby illustrating the importance of institutional guarantees for the civic sector. IKEC. Nevertheless, the overall legal framework governing IKEC has, for over thirty years since its introduction, remained fundamentally control-oriented. This persistent lack of robust legal protection for the civic sector IKEC has rendered the space for CSO activity highly susceptible to political shifts, and, in the long term, that has been a principal factor in undermining the potential of CSOs involved in IKEC.

8.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, the specific variables that have shaped the shifting roles of CSOs across successive administrations have been identified. Within the context of inter-Korean relations, the positioning of CSOs within the government–civil society nexus has been influenced less by internal civil society dynamics and more by government policy choices and legal–

institutional constraints. As Steen-Johnsen (2017) similarly observed in authoritarian and semi-authoritarian contexts, these external factors have played a decisive role in determining the scope and nature of CSO activity.

The first critical variable was the adoption of a policy framework institutionalising the principle of ‘civilians first, government later’. Such an approach facilitated multifaceted CSO engagement, allowing initiatives within the Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation (IKEC) framework to evolve across all four identified domains. Notably, however, the adoption of this framework did not align neatly with the conventional progressive–conservative divide. For instance, the top-down strategy employed by the ‘progressive’ Moon Jae-in administration resulted in a more precipitous decline in CSO participation than that observed under certain conservative governments.

Secondly, a key legal–institutional determinant was the absence of mechanisms guaranteeing the civil sector's role within IKEC. Indeed, South Korean legislation regarding IKEC, introduced in the early 1990s, has remained largely declaratory or regulatory in nature (T.-K. Kim & K. Lee 2023), thereby granting the state considerable discretion. This framework has persisted for nearly three decades without substantive reform (Y. H. Kwon 2000: 10; K. S. Lee 2023). In this context, the arbitrary application of law following policy shifts, coupled with the formation of ad hoc relationships between the government and CSOs, has significantly undermined institutional protections for civil society activity. Moreover, these structural deficiencies have endured even under progressive administrations.

In summary, as explored in Chapters 5 through 7, applying the prism of Brewer's theory of strategic social spaces demonstrates that South Korean CSOs possess the potential to contribute to sustainable peacebuilding via IKEC projects, even amidst political transitions. Once the space for CSO activity is secured, their role is neither constrained (Paffenholz & Spurk 2006: 34–35) nor confined to 'niche' activities (D. J. Kim and Y. Chung 2022); rather, they have demonstrated the capacity to function as “agents of social and political change in every kind of transformation” (Brewer 2010: 46). Despite the constraints imposed by the absence of substantive peace negotiations (Brewer 2010: 201–202), CSOs have significantly influenced government policies, intergovernmental dialogue, and broader social processes, including the shaping of South Korean public perceptions of the DPRK. However, concurrently, geopolitical pressures and the historical competition for legitimacy between the two Koreas have led governments to prioritise state authority while marginalising CSOs. By invoking security logic to withhold legal guarantees for civil society operation, the state has effectively constrained the operational space for CSOs, acting as a primary factor in undermining the stability of the peace process on the Korean Peninsula.

Chapter 9. Conclusion

9.1 Research Overview

This study is motivated by a core concern: why, despite the 667 official meetings, 258 agreements, and five inter-Korean summits that have taken place since the 1953 Armistice Agreement, do inter-Korean relations continue to be characterised by volatility under successive administrations, rather than moving towards sustainable peace?

Much of the existing literature on inter-Korean relations has focused on the structural legacy of the Cold War, the geopolitical significance of the Korean Peninsula, and the predominance of realist, state-centric approaches to security, particularly concerning the DPRK's nuclear issue and the influence of major powers such as the United States and China (Armstrong 2005; H. Kwon 2010; S. Lee 2015; K.-W. Koo 2018; B. C. Park & I. S. Joo 2019). In contrast, this thesis draws attention to an area that has received insufficient scholarly consideration: i.e., the role of civil society. This approach is informed by the notion of '*sustainable relationship-building*', a concept foregrounded in the discourse of '*peace studies*'. Several scholars (Lederach 1997; Lederach 1999; Lederach & Appleby 2010; Richmond 2010; Mac Ginty & Richmond 2013) have posited that sustainable peace is not merely the result of narrowly defined political processes/actors, but is rather founded upon relationships between individuals and communities. As Lederach (2001:854) succinctly puts it:

"Ultimately, peace is sustained on the shoulders of relationships of people and communities that go beyond a narrow definition of politics and political actors".

Furthermore, as Richmond (2010:28) asserts, "Peace cannot be brought by others," nor "foisted on others", underscoring the pivotal role of local actors and civil society (Mac Ginty & Richmond 2013). From this perspective, the establishment of interpersonal connections is identified as both a primary catalyst for conflict resolution and the basis for the development of enduring solutions. It follows that achieving sustainable, stable peace necessitates the cultivation of broad and enduring relationships that extend beyond the cessation of violence or the signing of peace agreements (Lederach 1997:12; Lederach & Appleby 2010:23). Hence, the association of civil society as a key actor involved with relationally oriented peacebuilding (Lederach 1997:39; Paffenholz & Spurk 2006).

In light of this assertion, this study examines the role of CSOs in the context of Inter-Korean Exchange and Cooperation (IKEC). The legal framework for IKEC, established with the enactment of the IKEC Act in 1990, created the only legitimate space since the 1953 Armistice Agreement for engagement between the two competing jurisdictions of North and South Korea. However, this legislation in itself did not immediately initiate inter-Korean cooperation. Instead, exchange and cooperation became substantive only under the Kim Dae-jung administration, with the involvement of CSOs, identified as pivotal actors in this domain by the 1990 Act.

This study examined five theoretical frameworks, including Brewer et al.'s (2011) Strategic Social Spaces Theory. Firstly, Giddens' *Structure–Agency Theory* was employed to examine whether CSOs could act as meaningful agents within the entrenched 'division system' of the Korean Peninsula. Secondly, *Contact Theory* was used to clarify how CSO-led IKEC projects could contribute to relationship-building. To analyse the role of civil society more specifically, this thesis drew on three additional approaches: Paffenholz and Spurk's (2006) *Functional Approach*; Lederach's (1997) *Middle-out Approach*; and Brewer et al.'s (2011) *Strategic Social Spaces Theory*. Brewer's framework was adopted as the central analytical framework among these, as it addressed the tendency of the functional model to marginalise CSOs and resolved ambiguities associated with the middle-out perspective. In doing so, it offered a more nuanced understanding of the multifaceted and dynamic roles performed by CSOs in peacebuilding.

The analytical framework of this thesis, which considers enabling and constraining factors related to CSO activity within the government/civil society nexus, offers important insights for the Korean context and sheds light on the conditions under which CSOs can more effectively drive change across both political and societal peace processes. Furthermore, this study indicates which factors need to be addressed if CSOs are to fulfil their transformative potential.

The principal contents of each chapter are as follows:

Chapter 1 defined sustainable peacebuilding in the context of inter-Korean relations as 'relationship-building through sustained IKEC'. This definition

acknowledges the unique context of the divided Korean Peninsula, where interaction between residents on both sides of the DMZ has been significantly restricted. Consequently, the assurance of ongoing IKEC, which can transcend imposed boundaries and divisions, has been identified as a fundamental and indispensable condition for achieving sustainable peacebuilding. The scope of this thesis has focused on Korean CSOs involved in civic sector IKEC projects, particularly via ‘Assistance to the DPRK’ and socio-cultural inter-Korean exchange and cooperation. Temporally, it spans a period from the Kim Dae-jung administration, when CSOs began to engage actively in IKEC initiatives, through to the Moon Jae-in administration, under which direct exchanges effectively ceased.

Chapter 2 established the theoretical framework for an examination of the role of civil society. It begins by using Giddens’ ‘Structure–Agency Theory’ to examine the potential agency of civil society within entrenched structures of division. In relation to IKEC peacebuilding, the chapter employed ‘Contact Theory’ as a prism to elucidate relevant dynamics. Following a critical review of the significance and limitations of mainstream theories (namely Lederach’s ‘middle-out approach’) and the functionalist perspectives of Paffenholz and Spurk, Brewer’s ‘Theory of Strategic Social Spaces’ was introduced as the preferred primary analytical framework.

Chapter 3 outlined the methodological approach of this study, which adopts a qualitative analysis research design. This approach was chosen because it is particularly well-suited to examining the role and contributions of CSOs through the IKEC projects, an area that is complex, context-specific, and difficult to quantify through numerical data alone. Correspondingly, a

literature review covered the historical development of inter-Korean relations, government policies regarding civil society, as well as the evolution of civil society engagement in this domain. The primary empirical method employed was semi-structured interviews, with two targeted sample groups selected: (1) former and current senior government officials involved in IKEC policy, and (2) CSO representatives with more than ten years of experience in the civic sector IKEC. Furthermore, interview participants from the CSO sector were divided evenly across two main fields of activity: ‘Assistance to the DPRK’ projects, and ‘Socio-cultural Exchange and Cooperation’ Projects. A non-probability purposive sampling method was employed, with snowball sampling used as a tool to identify additional relevant participants. Interview data were then collated and analysed using a ‘Thematic Analysis’ model to identify key patterns, themes, and insights. Additionally, this study utilised survey data from the Korean Institute for National Unification (KINU) and the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies (IPUS) to assess South Korean public perceptions in relation to the DPRK.

Chapter 4 presented the historical context of the Korean conflict and mapped civil society involvement in inter-Korean relations. This covered shifts in government policy relating to ‘Assistance to the DPRK’ and social and cultural exchange with a focus on CSO activities.

Chapters 5 through 7 examine the role of CSOs across three major political eras in South Korea: the progressive administrations of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, the conservative administrations of Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye, and the progressive administration of Moon Jae-in. Drawing

on interviews with CSOs and government officials, each chapter analyses how their roles can be conceptualised and categorised within the IKEC projects during these different political periods, drawing on Brewer's strategic social spaces theory.

Finally, Chapter 8 provided an analysis based on Brewer's Strategic Social Spaces theory and Steen-Johnsen's revised framework. In particular, this chapter examines the contextual factors and enabling conditions that either facilitated or constrained CSO involvement in IKEC and peacebuilding, specifically within the contexts of government-CSO relations.

9.2 Summary of Answers to Research Questions

The principal research question guiding this study concerns how South Korean CSOs have contributed to sustainable peacebuilding in the context of inter-Korean relations. Subsidiary questions are as follows:

1. What roles have CSOs played in inter-Korean relations via inter-Korean exchange and cooperation projects from the period of the Kim Dae-jung administration to the Moon Jae-in administration, and how have their roles changed under each administration?
2. How have CSOs contributed to the development of political and social peace processes of South Korea?
3. What factors have promoted or constrained the role of CSOs within the context of government–CSO relations?

Initially, this study examines the role of CSOs in building sustainable peace on the Korean Peninsula and how this has varied across different administrations. One of the most significant findings of this research is that

CSOs have consistently maintained relationships with their DPRK counterparts through engagement with various IKEC initiatives, while intergovernmental relations fluctuated (at times advancing rapidly and then experiencing complete breakdowns). Notably, CSOs maintained consistent engagement throughout shifting progressive and conservative South Korean government administrations.

This was achieved by utilising IKEC projects as platforms to forge sustained ties, while drawing on both domestic and international networks, even amidst the most volatile periods of inter-Korean relations. During periods of favourable intergovernmental relations, CSOs encouraged broader public participation in cross-border initiatives, thereby increasing the quality and frequency of contact with a diverse range of North Korean collaborators, and contributing to the formation of multi-layered relationships. Conversely, during times of diplomatic stagnation when direct engagement was constrained, CSOs pursued alternative channels of communication through international networks to sustain dialogue in innovative ways.

During Phase 1 (February 1998 – February 2008), under the progressive administrations of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, CSOs actively engaged in IKEC projects across what Brewer categorised as four strategic social spaces. In terms of intellectual and institutional spaces, the mid-1990s food crisis in North Korea prompted South Korean CSOs to reframe perceptions of the North, from that of ‘hostile adversary’ to ‘fellow Koreans in need’. This reframing led to widespread public campaigns promoting aid for ‘North Korean compatriots’, and marked the first time that ordinary citizens participated directly in IKEC initiatives since the division of the

Korean Peninsula. By involving grassroots in these newly established initiatives, CSOs played a pivotal role in overcoming entrenched prejudices and hostilities, thereby fostering a more realistic understanding of the DPRK within South Korean society. CSOs were also among the first to recognise the psychological and emotional challenges experienced by South Koreans, such as the phenomenon known as the 'Pyongyang Blues', stemming from the harsh realities and systemic differences of the North, and to incorporate these insights into peace education and related programmes. In market spaces, CSOs expanded their activities beyond humanitarian aid to encompass a broad spectrum of socio-cultural exchange and cooperation projects. These initiatives increased the quantity and quality of inter-Korean contact, enabling experts, academics and ordinary citizens to develop multi-layered relationships, where CSOs served as cultural interpreters, mediating the socio-cultural differences between the two oppositional societies. In political spaces, CSOs complemented intergovernmental dialogue by acting as test beds for IKEC projects, paving the way for more proactive policy shifts. In this way, through multifaceted efforts, CSOs made significant contributions to sustainable peacebuilding during this period.

During Phase 2 (February 2008 – March 2017), under the conservative administrations of Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye, following the imposition of the May 24 Measures in 2010, most IKEC projects came to a halt. These sanctions, introduced in response to heightened tensions with Pyongyang, impacted various aid projects, many of which were reduced to small-scale programmes targeted solely at vulnerable residents of the DPRK. Additionally, socio-cultural exchanges were limited largely to less politically

sensitive projects such as language and history. Despite these constraints, however, South Korean CSOs continued to operate within limited yet meaningful spaces. Within intellectual spaces, they sought to preserve institutional memory by collecting information on the realities of life in the North and shifts in North Korean attitudes towards the South, by building on projects that had been sustained from previous administrations. Within institutional spaces, particularly through socio-cultural exchange projects in the arena of history and language, CSOs worked to enhance mutual receptiveness and experimented with civil society-based approaches to conflict resolution. Despite a significant reduction in government funding, CSOs mobilised their own resources to maintain engagement with DPRK counterparts and to independently sustain cooperation efforts. In political spaces, CSOs initially functioned as informal or indirect channels of dialogue; however, following the implementation of the 24 May Measures, their roles diverged. While some CSOs partially complied with the demands of the conservative government, others openly voiced opposition, advocating for a shift towards a more proactive inter-Korean engagement, albeit within the constraints of the government's restrictive policy environment.

Finally, during Phase 3, under the 'progressive' administration of Moon Jae-in (May 2017 – May 2022), despite heightened expectations, the space for CSO engagement became paradoxically more constrained. A series of high-level inter-Korean and US/DPRK summits that took place during the initial phase of Moon's administration, fostered optimism for a resurgence of IKEC initiatives marginalised under preceding conservative governments. However, following the collapse of the US/DPRK Hanoi summit in February

2019, inter-Korean relations effectively stalled. Tensions were further exacerbated in 2020 by Pyongyang's demolition of the inter-Korean liaison office, after which all direct contacts between the two Koreas were halted.

In this challenging context, South Korean CSOs sought to adapt strategically within both the intellectual and institutional spaces. Notably, as notions of shared ethnic kinship and compatriot relations diminished within South Korean society, CSOs transitioned to the pursuit of IKEC from a universalist peace perspective and sought opportunities for engagement via international solidarity. Despite the absence of direct inter-Korean contact, CSOs identified and utilised various international networks in which their DPRK counterpart participated, thereby maintaining channels of engagement in 'market spaces'. Meanwhile, in the political spaces, while CSOs expressed support for the government's policy responses in the face of intensified sanctions against the DPRK, they simultaneously exerted pressure for policy change via domestic and international peace campaigns. In particular, they advocated for a shift away from excessive reliance on high-level diplomatic dialogue and urged the Moon administration to adopt a more diversified approach to inter-Korean engagement.

Several salient features emerge when the evolving roles of CSOs under successive administrations are categorised and examined under Brewer's four spaces approach. Firstly, within the intellectual and institutional spaces, CSOs played a pivotal role in fostering mutual understanding and re-conceptualisation, collecting data and seeking and implementing alternative approaches in an environment marked by deep-seated misunderstanding and prejudice resulting from prolonged division. During active periods of the

civic sector IKEC, CSOs were able to gather a wealth of data that proved necessary for developing understanding and reinterpreting the distinct cultures of North and South Korea. In periods of restricted civic sector IKEC, these actors pursued a deeper understanding across a limited number of fields. During periods of complete suspension, however, they sought creative means of maintaining engagement through third-party actors. These aspects, which are intrinsic to civil society, cannot be fully captured by functionalist approaches (Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006). However, processes such as mutual re-conceptualisation and the addressing of emotional issues were found to be crucial in establishing the foundations for relationship-building (Lederach, 2001:842).

Secondly, across market spaces, CSOs mobilised not only financial resources but also human and cultural capital derived from their understanding and experience of the DPRK (Brewer, Higgins & Teeney 2010:1024–1025). In taking such actions, they effectively fostered widespread engagement that transcended the bonds of civil society, thereby facilitating the establishment and advancement of relationships between residents of both Koreas. This endeavour encompassed a diverse array of initiatives, including IKEC projects, which contributed to the preservation and enhancement of these relationships. In the context of favourable intergovernmental relations, these endeavours materialised in the form of an augmentation and sophistication of multifarious exchanges across a plethora of domains. Conversely, during periods of strained relations, CSOs demonstrated flexibility by leveraging international networks to sustain engagement with their North Korean counterparts.

Within political spaces, CSOs have been observed to offer a complement to the constraints of top-level leadership marked by rigidity and lack of adaptability (Lederach 1997:38–43), by fostering government-led dialogue and exerting influence over policy and legal frameworks (Brewer et al. 2010:1024–1025). While CSOs did not typically serve as principal actors in political negotiations, they played a vital role in providing platforms for intergovernmental contact, initiating activities in sensitive areas where governmental action was constrained by high visibility, rigid positioning, or the vested interests of political actors. In this manner, CSOs contributed to the establishment of conditions that fostered the development of more proactive policies.

The second research question considers the contribution of CSOs to political and social peace processes under successive South Korean administrations, as their roles evolved under different administrations.

During the progressive administrations of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, CSOs functioned as pioneers, establishing channels for intergovernmental dialogue through the provision of humanitarian assistance to the DPRK. In advocating for and securing direct aid to the North, CSOs encouraged the government to adopt more proactive engagement policies. This facilitated intergovernmental talks where the issue of aid provision was a central agenda. Against this backdrop, the first inter-Korean summit was convened, resulting in agreements on cooperation across various sectors, including social, cultural, and health fields. This expansion of opportunity enabled ordinary people to participate in CSO-led IKEC projects, significantly increasing contact with North Koreans at various levels. Consequently, for

the first time since the division, negative perceptions of the DPRK began to shift towards more positive attitudes. During this period, the role of CSOs was found to be instrumental in fostering favourable conditions for changing perceptions of the DPRK within South Korean society, thereby creating an environment conducive to the activation of political processes. This facilitated the emergence of extensive social processes within the context of intergovernmental negotiations, thereby establishing a virtuous cycle (Brewer 2010:203).

Conversely, Brewer's assertion that 'peace is inherently fragile' in societies characterised by conflict (Brewer 2010:29–30) became manifest during the conservative administrations of Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye, in inter-Korean relations. The hard-line approach of these governments, compounded by the worsening of the DPRK nuclear issue, led to a rapid contraction of previously expanding IKEC, with civic sector IKEC projects largely being suspended, except for a few small-scale humanitarian aid programmes. In the context of severely restricted activity, CSO contributions to both political and social processes were inevitably diminished in comparison to previous administrations. Notwithstanding the conservative governments' consistent policy of prioritising the DPRK nuclear issue, and the trend in public perception of the DPRK became more negative, positive views nevertheless continued to outnumber negative ones.

Significantly, the Moon Jae-in administration demonstrated that vulnerabilities were inherent in government-led political processes that excluded civil society (Brewer 2010:37–41). This period is widely regarded as representing the most constrained environment for CSO activity. While it

is true that external factors, such as stringent international sanctions and North Korea's reluctance to engage in inter-Korean cooperation, played an important role, the restriction of civil society operational space cannot be attributed solely to these external circumstances (Mac Ginty & Richmond 2013:770). The excessive reliance on a succession of high-level summits between South Korea, North Korea, and the United States, to the exclusion of civil society involvement and the broader social peace process, by the Moon administration, spoke to a more fundamental issue. Consequently, the peace process became precariously dependent on intergovernmental dialogue, and when the high-level summits failed to yield substantive outcomes, nearly all IKEC contacts came to a halt.

As Hancock (2008:233) has observed, the process of peacebuilding is shaped by a multiplicity of narratives, events, and actors, which renders it extremely difficult to assess the direct impact of CSO engagement on government-level negotiations or grassroots social peace processes. Nevertheless, the Moon administration's prioritisation of a political peace process devoid of CSO participation revealed a heightened vulnerability, particularly in its failure to allocate a complementary role to CSOs, which could have offset the limitations of government-led efforts.

The third research question concerned factors that have either promoted or constrained the role of CSOs in the context of government-civil society relations. As previously discussed, CSO roles shifted according to changes in administration and, as Brewer et al. (2010:1022–1023) have argued, this variability can be attributed to changes in government/civil society relations. Within an IKEC context, however, it was found that the government exerted

a more pronounced influence on CSOs than civil society itself, a point suggested by Steen-Johnsen's amended framework (2017). Two principal factors were identified as underlying this dynamic: first, the existence of a policy framework supportive of government/CSO partnerships; and second, the level of institutionalisation of civic sector IKEC.

Concerning government policy frameworks, it was generally acknowledged that 'progressive' administrations were more favourable towards such partnerships than 'conservative' administrations (although this was not uniformly so). During Phase 1, when the *Sonmin Hukwan* (civilian first, government second) approach was initiated under the Kim Dae-jung administration and continued by the Roh Moo-hyun government, a policy environment was created that recognised and encouraged the multifaceted roles of CSOs. This framework facilitated dynamic engagement across the four identified spaces (i.e., intellectual, institutional, market, and political) and contributed to an environment that was conducive to intergovernmental dialogue and negotiation. This initiative has been identified as a key factor in the fostering of sustainable IKEC development.

Conversely, during the tenure of 'conservative' administrations, policy orientation was marked by an emphasis on security concerns, which often resulted in marginalisation of civic sector initiatives. In certain instances, non-governmental exchange programmes were not only deprioritised but also instrumentalised by the government as a means of exerting pressure on the DPRK in relation to political and security issues. Consequently, the capacity for CSO action was substantially restricted.

Furthermore, in addition to explicit policy restrictions, the state also employed what Steen-Johnsen (2017:95) has termed '*subtle forms of control*', by invoking a securitised discourse and linking South Korean humanitarian support to North Korea's nuclear provocations. These control mechanisms served to reinforce the authority of the state over civil society engagement, even when formal prohibitions were deemed absent.

The Moon Jae-in administration, although sharing the 'progressive' designation of 'phase 1' administrations, in contrast to its predecessors' policy orientation, adopted a *Sonkwon Humin* (government first, civilian second) approach, and became increasingly preoccupied with resolving high-level issues, such as denuclearisation and military tension, via a series of summits. With the responsibility for the peace process shouldered almost exclusively by political elites, the majority of other stakeholders, including CSOs, became marginalised (Brewer 2019:276–277). Moreover, by not establishing intricate, multi-layered networks of engagement (via CSOs) and by not implementing a broader imperative of inclusive peacebuilding that could integrate non-state actors, the failure of government-level negotiations to yield tangible outcomes left a paucity of mechanisms at the CSO level to supplement or compensate for the shortcomings of inter-governmental dialogue. Thereafter, inter-Korean relations entered a state of further deadlock.

The degree of institutionalisation guaranteeing civic sector IKEC engagement also had a serious impact on CSOs. Although civic sector IKEC initiatives expanded considerably since the Kim Dae-jung administration, they remained vulnerable to shifts in political leadership and

intergovernmental dynamics. This vulnerability created a significant impediment to the establishment of stable, trust-based relationships at the non-state level.

Even though the legal framework governing inter-Korean exchange – most notably the IKEC Act – was designed to promote IKEC, it simultaneously granted the government extensive discretionary powers to regulate civil society activities. This control-oriented legal framework, established in the early 1990s, has remained virtually unchanged for over three decades (T.-K. Kim & K. Lee 2023:97–99). In ‘Structural-Agency Theory’ terms (Giddens 1984:25), this can be regarded as a structural constraint limiting the agency of civil society actors. Accepting that governments themselves function as agents capable of surmounting structural limitations (D. J. Kim and Y. Chung 2022:6), evidently conservative administrations were either unable or reluctant to accommodate such agency.

Contextually, in terms of inter-Korean relations, structural barriers are frequently interpreted in terms of tangible spatial constraints – for example the physical existence of the DMZ, which impedes routine cross-jurisdictional interaction (Hughes et al. 2007:630; D. J. Kim and Y. Chung 2022:10). From a civil society perspective, however, the persistent existence of legal and institutional frameworks that impose restrictions on the autonomy of CSOs constitute an even more substantial structural impediment.

In summary, it can be asserted that within the context of inter-Korean relations, South Korean CSOs have contributed to the sustainable

peacebuilding on the Korean Peninsula via two principal tracks. Firstly, CSOs have occupied the intellectual, institutional, market, and political spaces through CSO-led IKEC projects, simultaneously building and sustaining relationships with their DPRK counterparts. Secondly, once CSOs secured an effective operating space, they demonstrated their influence on the political peace process by both encouraging proactive government policies and advancing inter-Korean dialogue. Concomitantly, they contributed to the social peace process by fostering recognition of the DPRK as a legitimate partner in the implementation of IKEC projects, thereby alleviating underlying anxieties that were embedded within the peace process.

It is noteworthy that key facilitating and constraining factors did not correspond neatly to a distinction between ‘conservative’ and ‘progressive’ designations of South Korean administrations. Despite the Moon Jae-in government’s ‘progressive’ designation, the level of legal and institutional guarantees for the civic sector IKEC was among the weakest across all administrations, and civil society was not recognised as a genuine partner.

9.3 Scholarly and Policy Significance

9.3.1 Scholarly Significance

In highlighting civil society’s role with regard to the pursuit of sustainable peace, this study reveals that most scholarly approaches are founded upon international political frameworks which allow government-led peace regimes to dominate the peace studies discourse (Y. K. Park 2016; M.-H. Heo 2019; J. S. Hwang 2019; K.-W. Koo 2019). Few studies have adopted a

broader institutional view on peacebuilding, which can accommodate a civil society perspective (H.-H. Choi 2005; K.-S. Kim & H. G. Jung 2008; J.-M. Lee et al. 2009; D. J. Kim 2019; T.-K. Kim & K. Lee 2023).

This gap in terms of mainstream academic research is addressed by this thesis through an implementation of Brewer's theoretical framework (among others), which acknowledges the role of civil society within the Korean peace process, while elucidating the mechanisms by which civil society has exerted influence over inter-Korean relations. Moreover, this thesis is noteworthy insofar as it identifies the principal factors hindering civil society from becoming a central pillar in inter-Korean relations. From a theoretical perspective, research findings suggest that, at least in the case of the Korean peace process, Brewer's framework requires further refinement to account for government-related factors more adequately constraining the role of civil society.

**a) Conceptualising the Role of Civil Society in Inter-Korean Relations:
Elucidating the Mechanisms by Which CSOs Contribute to Sustainable
Peacebuilding**

This thesis, in broad terms, seeks to address a central question in peace process studies, identified by Hancock (2008:231–233): i.e., how can the 'right mix' of top-down and bottom-up approaches (what Hancock refers to as 'the key to sustainability') be combined to contribute to sustainable peacebuilding? As Hancock (2008:232) notes, analysing the interplay between top-down and bottom-up processes in peacebuilding is exceptionally challenging. This is due to the multitude of narratives and

actors involved, the difficulty of tracing causal links across levels, and the ethical constraints posed by the need for confidentiality in field research. Taking account of these limitations, this thesis examines how civil society has contributed to sustainable peacebuilding within the shifting policy landscape of five South Korean administrations, which have alternated between top-down and bottom-up strategies with regard to IKEC policies. Specifically, this thesis aims to reassess the potential of CSOs operating at the intersection of government (top-level leadership) and civil society (mid-range leadership). It also seeks to analyse the constraints these organisations encounter in their efforts to contribute to sustainable peace.

First, this thesis examined the specific roles of CSOs across four spheres, drawing upon Brewer's theory of strategic social spaces, while illustrating how these roles were influential and relevant to peacebuilding (Brewer 2010: 203). Several studies previously conducted on civil society within the context of inter-Korean relations, highlighted particular aspects of CSO involvement, including: fostering trust and reconciliation between North and South Korea (Jonsson 2006; Reed 2009; Kudláčová 2014); promoting the participation of ordinary citizens in inter-Korean engagement (S.-M. Han 2008); and advocating for humanitarian aid policies through NGOs (K. Y. Moon 2011). However, such research fails to capture the multifaceted nature of CSOs' roles within the broader dynamics of inter-Korean engagement, particularly when faced with this thesis's critique of the functionalist approach of Paffenholz and Spurk (2006),

Distinguishing itself from previous research studies, this thesis significantly simplifies and elucidates the dynamic roles CSOs have negotiated throughout

the peace process. Framed by Brewer's four strategic spaces (intellectual, institutional, market, and political), this study is the first to demonstrate CSO contributions to peacebuilding, while using this analytical framework to reveal how CSOs engaged in and sustained relationship-building, while navigating state-imposed limitations amid volatile inter-Korean relations arising from changes in government, ideology and the enduring threat of conflict.

Moreover, by disaggregating contributions to the Korean peace process into social and political dimensions (largely overlooked or only partially addressed in existing literature), this study demonstrates why CSOs are not mere subsidiary actors but are pivotal agents in the pursuit of a lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula. This thesis employs Brewer's distinction between political and social peace processes to show how civil society can help overcome the fragility of state-led political negotiations and foster long-term peace through engagement while reshaping the public perception of the DPRK as an adversary. Whilst earlier approaches have focused primarily on how CSOs support and complement government policy, this present study is distinguished by its exploration of how CSO activism across the four spaces can foster a virtuous cycle that links political and social peace processes, thereby making a substantive contribution to both.

b) Identifying the constraints on CSOs in the context of inter-Korean relations

This study makes a significant contribution by identifying constraints on the role of CSOs in inter-Korean relations through its application of theoretical

frameworks developed by Brewer and Steen-Johnsen on government–civil society relations. Whilst earlier studies have tended to attribute CSO constrictions to external factors, such as North Korean military provocations, the DPRK’s reluctance to embrace transparency (K. Y. Moon 2016; K. Moon & A. S. Lee 2023), internal weaknesses within civil society itself (Jonsson 2006; S.-M. Han 2008), or inconsistencies in government policy and the weak institutionalisation of public-private governance mechanisms (Jonsson 2006; D. W. Kang 2008), this study moves beyond such accounts.

Instead, this study demonstrates that factors that facilitate or constrain South Korean CSOs are contextually shaped by the government and civil society relations, notwithstanding external variables. Contrary to Brewer’s theoretical framework (2022: 501–502), which locates primary constraints occurring within civil society itself, this research finds, as Steen-Johnsen’s amended framework suggests (Steen-Johnsen 2017: 52), that the influence of government has been determinative in the context of inter-Korean relations.

Specifically, two principal constraints are identified: the lack of a supportive policy framework for government/CSO partnerships, and the low level of institutionalisation that guarantees civic sector IKEC. Importantly, this study highlights the fact that the political ideology of the administration (i.e., conservative or progressive) did not significantly impact CSO roles, which were determined by whether or not the government adopted a favourable stance towards government/CSO partnerships. In other words, the crucial factor was not merely the provision of financial support to CSOs, but the extent to which governments recognised CSOs as legitimate peace process actors and then ensured their participation within the operational arena.

Importantly, this study demonstrates that institutional guarantees for civic engagement remained inadequate across all administrations, irrespective of political orientation. Despite the introduction of the IKEC Act in the early 1990s, the framework for IKEC has fundamentally remained control-oriented for over three decades. This persistent absence of institutionalised support for autonomy has subsequently left civil society perennially vulnerable to governmental control.

This constraint was further exacerbated under conservative administrations, by the mechanism of securitisation described by Steen-Johnsen (2017: 95) . While government justified tighter control over CSOs on the grounds of safeguarding national security, and the scope for CSO activity contracted, the consistent absence of legal safeguards across the board, meant that civil society remained structurally vulnerable to control, irrespective of the governing party's ideology.

The study thus reveals that not only were there physical limitations on cross-border engagement, as symbolised by the DMZ, but also internal structural conditions that continue to curtail South Korean civil society.

c) Limitations of Brewer's Theoretical Framework

This study also reveals certain limitations in Brewer's theoretical framework that warrant further refinement. The most salient issue concerns the framework's tendency to understate the influence of CSO-led social processes before the initiation of formal political negotiations. Whilst Brewer acknowledges the possibility that a social peace process might precede a political one (Brewer, 2010: 201–203), and suggests that it can "open up back

channels of communication" in preparation for official negotiations, he also argues that such periods are typically short-lived and lack sustained impact. However, the present study demonstrates that, within the Korean context, CSOs frequently functioned as primary agents of change, establishing avenues of engagement and cooperation in politically sensitive scenarios, where formal diplomatic channels were either non-existent or stagnant. These CSO-initiated measures engendered conducive environments for subsequent governmental discourse, and in select instances, functioned as alternative or ancillary communication channels when state-level negotiations reached an impasse.

Consequently, this thesis contends that Brewer's framework may have underestimated the significance of the social processes which occur before political negotiations. This raises the question of whether political peace processes are inherently more fragile when they are not preceded by substantive social engagement. Further empirical investigation is warranted to determine whether social peace processes are as limited in their role as Brewer proposes, and if political processes are actually rendered more susceptible to failure by their absence.

Furthermore, this study emphasises the necessity for a more sophisticated theorisation of the state's role as an impact factor influencing CSOs. In contexts such as South Korea, where state dominance in security-related domains is historically and institutionally entrenched, the government's influence on civil society appears far more determinative. This lends support to Steen-Johnsen's argument for an amended framework (2017), which

insists upon a greater emphasis on state agency regardless of democratic status and political alignment. As demonstrated in this paper, both legal-institutional and policy-oriented factors significantly influenced the extent to which civil society could participate in, contribute to, and influence peace processes.

This is consistent with the findings of scholars such as Lederach (1997: 24) and Bar-Tal (2007:1436), who contend that the intractable nature of contemporary conflicts is deeply entrenched in institutionalised and socially ingrained structures. Consequently, establishing sustainable peace necessitates not only grassroots transformation but also proactive intervention at the top-level, encompassing state institutions and policy frameworks (Lederach & Appleby 2010:44; Bar-Tal & Halperin 2013:942; J. Y. Heo 2021:84). In light of these considerations, this thesis argues for a further refinement of analytical frameworks, to incorporate a more comprehensive analysis of governmental factors that facilitate or constrain civil society's role in peace processes.

9.3.2 Policy Implication

This thesis, which examines the IKEC role of Korean CSOs through Brewer's theoretical lens, presents three key policy implications: 1) prioritisation and re-evaluation of the importance of social processes and civil society engagement in peacebuilding strategies; 2) development of policies to support government/civil society partnerships; and 3) drafting and enactment of laws and institutional mechanisms that secure civil society's role in peacebuilding.

a) The Importance of Social Peace Processes and Civil Society Engagement in Peacebuilding

Firstly, a reassessment of the significance of the impact of social processes and civil society on peacebuilding strategies is essential. As highlighted throughout this thesis, the peacebuilding approach on the Korean Peninsula has traditionally been government-centred, pursued via government-led dialogue and negotiation, which tended to focus upon political and military agendas. However, the limitations of such government-led negotiations, including their historical exclusion of civil society actors, were evident under successive administrations.

Given these limitations, there is undoubtedly a need to re-evaluate the role of civil society in inter-Korean relations, especially considering the contributions of CSOs involved in IKEC initiatives, as explored in this study. While seventy years of division have deepened the political, economic, and cultural differences between the DPRK and South Korea, resulting in significant heterogeneity, prolonged military confrontations, and sporadic provocations, both national identities have been strengthened through opposition, while the socio-economic gap has widened. Addressing peace building on the Korean Peninsula via government-led political processes alone is therefore likely to be increasingly limited and prone to failure.

Viewing the development of relationships between the residents of North and South Korea as essentially a social process creates an imperative that this process is recognised as a central component of inter-Korean relations. Civil society should also be acknowledged as a critical actor in leading this effort.

Although it is beyond the remit of this paper to comprehensively address this topic, further research is encouraged to explore the benefits of supporting civil society contributions to peacebuilding and to develop policy alternatives that optimise this potential.

b) The Necessity of Designing Policies for Government–Civil Society Partnerships

Secondly, there is a risk that future administrations may replicate the approach of the Moon Jae-in government, which prioritised addressing high-stakes issues (e.g. the DPRK's WMD programmes and nuclear weapons), alongside the reinforcement of sanctions, while positing government initiatives as prerequisites to allowing civic sector exchange. Lederach (1997:43–46) argues that in conflict societies, top-level leadership is constrained by short-term goals, and that this limits the sustainability of peace efforts, whereas civil society and grassroots actors often have a longer-term vision. This insight remains highly relevant in the Korean context, where balanced policy frameworks are needed to value civil society-led social processes alongside government-led political initiatives. Hence, a policy framework for fostering government-civil society partnerships is essential.

While government-led dialogue and negotiation processes address immediate political, security, and institutional concerns, they are government-led and focus on short-term outcomes. In contrast, civil society-led relationship-building focuses on fostering mutual understanding, repairing fractured relationships, and envisioning a community-centred

peace. This long-term process, driven by civil society with grassroots and government support, seeks the sustainable peace that requires ongoing collaborative efforts across social spheres, rather than rapid solutions that frustrate long-term peace objectives.

When governments focus solely on the political process, the process of social relationship-building risks being overlooked. This undermines the foundation needed for sustainable political dialogue and negotiation. Therefore, to support long-term peace efforts on the Korean Peninsula, a balanced policy framework that promotes both government-led negotiations and civil society-led relationship-building is essential to ensure that one dimension does not come at the expense of the other.

c) Enacting Legal and Institutional Measures to Safeguard Civil Society's Role in Peacebuilding

Thirdly, laws and institutional measures must be established to secure and ensure the role of civil society in promoting peace between the DPRK and South Korea. Re-assessment of current IKEC-related laws, whose foundational framework has remained largely unchanged for over three decades, is critical. Institutional provisions, such as legal foundations, support organisations, and relevant constituted bodies, need to be strengthened to ensure a minimum guaranteed space for civic sector IKEC operations. For example, reforms to the existing reporting system, which mandates that all contact with DPRK residents be officially reported, raising CSO concerns, could facilitate a consistent legal basis for humanitarian assistance to the DPRK, regardless of political shifts in ideology.

Further consideration should also be given to the systems that support CSOs engaged in humanitarian assistance to the DPRK and/or social and cultural exchange. Currently, governance frameworks are predominantly government-led; therefore, it is necessary to develop a system in which the civic sector can lead or operate on an equal footing with the government. This would allow CSOs and supporting organisations to function with a degree of independence, while providing a secure space for civil society to fulfil its critical role in the peacebuilding process and to promote a more sustainable, balanced approach to inter-Korean relations.

9.4 Limitations and Further Studies

This study acknowledges three primary limitations and outlines areas for further research.

First, it should be noted that this study does not address the relationships between CSOs and grassroots, nor between the government and grassroots activists. This limitation is attributable to the study's primary focus on CSOs and their principal interactions with the government. While the thesis briefly mentions shifts in South Korean public perceptions of the DPRK, it does not analyse these changes in relation to interactions with CSOs.

Lederach's three-tiered peacebuilding pyramid (1997: 39) demonstrates that government/grassroots interaction constitutes a critical component of the overall peacebuilding architecture. It is therefore recommended that future research explore the manner in which South Korean CSOs have engaged with grassroots constituencies over time, and the manner in which the state, in turn, has influenced and been influenced by grassroots attitudes and

behaviours. It is believed that such investigations would provide a valuable addition to the present study, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the multi-level dynamics underpinning peacebuilding efforts.

Secondly, this study does not address another essential pillar of the Korean peace process: the DPRK dimension. As the purpose of the peace process is to restore relationships with the other party to the conflict, the absence of research on the DPRK is a significant limitation. However, due to the current state of inter-Korean relations, accessing the DPRK and engaging with relevant DPRK counterparts is challenging. Moreover, DPRK literature on this subject is limited, and verifying its reliability is difficult. If inter-Korean relations improve in future, it will be incumbent upon researchers to make an attempt to examine the impact of relationship-building facilitated by CSO-led IKEC projects on the North Korean side.

Thirdly, the effect of external variables, such as international sanctions or bilateral measures, on the role of South Korean CSOs requires further investigation. While this study has acknowledged the influence of these external factors, it has focused on aspects of government/CSO relations unaffected by sanctions, thereby highlighting opportunities and constraints within this specific framework. However, as international sanctions continue to intensify, their impact on CSO activities will predictably increase. Future studies should therefore explore the evolving role of these external variables in greater depth, to provide a more nuanced understanding of how they shape and impact CSO capacities and present constraints to the peacebuilding process.

Each of these areas offers valuable opportunities for follow-up research, which would undoubtedly deepen understanding of the opportunities and limitations of civil society engagement in inter-Korean peacebuilding.

9.5 Key Conclusions and Recommendations

This study presents the following six key conclusions:

First, from the Kim Dae-jung administration to the Moon Jae-in administration, Korean CSOs contributed to building and sustaining continuous relationships with the DPRK through civic sector IKEC initiatives, despite regime changes and the resulting shifts in policies and inter-Korean relations. Although communication channels were severed at a government level, and nearly all civic sector IKEC projects were suspended in the latter part of the Moon Jae-in administration, South Korean CSOs maintained connections with the DPRK through a range of alternative methods.

Second, the diverse roles undertaken by South Korean CSOs in the peacebuilding effort can be conceptualised according to Brewer's four strategic spaces. In intellectual and institutional spaces, CSOs have accumulated data, knowledge and experience regarding their conflict counterpart, North Korea. Through this, they have contributed to the redefinition of the DPRK (a long-perceived enemy) as compatriots in need of support and partners for cooperation. CSOs have also sought conduits for direct exchange between South and North Korea, which could involve ordinary citizens, while exploring and even implementing various creative alternative forms of cooperation. (For example, CSOs have moved beyond

the conventional shared ethnic heritage justification for engagement to pursue exchanges grounded in a universal understanding of peace). In the market spaces, CSOs have advanced IKEC by utilising both governmental and their own financial resources, as well as leveraging human and cultural resources accumulated through IKEC initiatives. By doing so, they have facilitated IKEC projects that promote multi-layered relationship-building between the two Koreas. Significantly, throughout this process, CSOs have acted as cultural interpreters, helping to overcome social and cultural differences between the two opposing societies. During periods of deteriorating inter-Korean relations, they have also used international networks to maintain engagement. In the political spaces, they have provided direct and indirect channels for dialogue and driven more proactive IKEC policies. Furthermore, during periods of heightened tension, they have pressed the government to change its stance.

Third, South Korean CSOs have demonstrated their potential to enhance the stability of South Korea's peace process by playing a key role in both the political and social peace processes. However, the extent of their contribution has been determined by the character of the governing administration. During the administrations of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, CSOs occupied the intellectual, institutional, market and political spaces, at times acting as first movers, and entering sensitive areas during periods when governmental action was difficult, as well as facilitating political dialogue. When intergovernmental relations deteriorated, CSOs also served as direct and indirect channels of communication, thereby contributing to the political process. In terms of the social peace process, CSOs played a role in

improving perceptions of the DPRK, and fostered a perceptual shift in South Korean society whereby positive views of the DPRK began to outweigh negative ones. Once a space for CSO activity had been secured, a virtuous cycle emerged in which political and social peace processes developed in a mutually reinforcing manner.

By contrast, under the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administrations, the scope for CSO activity was significantly restricted, and their contributions to political and social peace processes diminished accordingly.

Although a series of high-level summits led to an unprecedented activation of the political process during the Moon Jae-in administration, an excessive reliance on a top-down approach resulted in civil society becoming less engaged than under previous conservative administrations. Correspondingly, as the political process became increasingly frustrated during the latter part of the Moon administration, inter-Korean exchanges were effectively severed. This outcome highlighted the vulnerability of a political process that lacks civil society involvement.

Fourth, in the area of IKEC, two factors have been particularly important: first, a policy framework supportive of government-CSO partnerships, and second, the level of institutionalisation guaranteeing civic sector IKEC. The activities of CSOs were invigorated when a policy framework recognising the role of the civic sector was implemented, for example, the so-called '*Sonmin Hukwan*' (civilian first, government second) approach. Conversely, in the absence of such a framework, the scope for CSO engagement diminished. Regarding the second factor (i.e., the level of institutionalisation

ensuring civic sector IKEC), there was no substantive change in the legal framework represented by the IKEC Act throughout the period examined in this study. This persistent lack of legal development indicates that the space available for CSO activity has remained consistently vulnerable.

Fifth, contrary to the opinion advanced by the majority of previous commentators, CSO constraints were not directly determined by whether the government in power was defined as ‘progressive’ or ‘conservative’. This is evidenced by the fact that, despite it being categorised as a ‘progressive’ government similar to that of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, the Moon Jae-in administration’s adoption of a government-led approach compellingly contributed to the significant reduction of CSO-led IKEC activity.

Finally, there was no substantive difference across the five administrations from Kim Dae-jung to Moon Jae-in, in terms of the level of institutionalised guarantees for the civic sector IKEC. All five governments maintained and promoted a discretionary and control-oriented legal system, and failed to provide an institutionalised space through which private actors could engage in even minimal exchanges with their North Korean counterparts, regardless of government policy. This persistent lack of institutional guarantees acted as a structural constraint analogous to the way in which the DMZ serves as a physical, psychological and symbolic barrier to IKEC

These findings underscore the importance of instituting a stable policy framework and creating institutional support that empowers CSOs to continuously contribute to peacebuilding through sustained engagement with

the DPRK, while navigating fluctuating government policies and volatile inter-Korean relations.

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Appendix 1: Interviewee List

No	Interviewee	Date	Sector	Sub-Sector
1	Former minister of the Ministry of Unification (MOU) / Current Professor of Unification	13/Feb/2024	Gov.	Top level (General)
2	Former minister of the MOU / Current Professor of unification	15/Feb/2024	Gov.	Top level (General)
3	Former minister of the MOU / Former chairman of the National Security Council	22/Feb/2024	Gov.	Top level (General)
4	Former Senior Government official of the MOU	01/Nov/2023	Gov.	Mid-level (Socio-culture)
5	Former Senior Government official of the MOU / Current representative of an NGO providing aid to the DPRK	16/Jan/2024	Gov.	Mid-level (Aid, Socio-culture)
6	Government official of the MOU	02/Nov/2023	Gov.	Mid-level (Aid)
7	Government official of the MOU	06/Dec/2023	Gov.	Mid-level (Aid)
8	Former Government official of the MOU	18/Jan/2024	Gov.	Mid-level (Socio-culture)
9	Local Government official	11/Jan/2024	Local Gov.	Mid-level (Aid, Socio-culture)
10	Current middle manager for a government agency (South-North Korea Exchanges and Cooperation Support Association)	06/Feb/2024	Gov. Agency	Mid-level (Aid, Socio-culture)
11	Former leader of NGO providing aid to the DPRK for over 20 years / Former Chairman of KNCCNK, Former Chairman of a government agency	31/Oct/2023	CSO	Aid
12	Leader of NGO providing aid to the DPRK and peace education for over 20 years / Former Chairman of KNCCNK	03/Nov/2023	CSO	Aid

13	Leader of a humanitarian aid NGO for over 20 years / Current Chairman of KNCCNK	06/Nov/2023	CSO	Aid
14	Director of an NGO providing aid to the DPRK for over 15 years	30/Nov/2023	CSO	Aid
15	Leader of an NGO providing aid to the DPRK for over 20 years	05/Dec/2023	CSO	Aid
16	Leader of an NGO providing aid to the DPRK for over 20 years / Catholic Rev.	12/Dec/2023	CSO	Aid/Socio-Culture (Religion)
17	Director of an international NGO providing aid to the DPRK for over 10 years	18/Dec/2023	CSO	Aid (international)
18	Chairman of an NGO providing aid to the DPRK and peace education	21/Dec/2023	CSO	Aid
19	Former secretary-general of an NGO providing aid to the DPRK	02/Feb/2024	CSO	Aid
20	Former Secretary General of the National Council for Reconciliation and Cooperation / Former NGO leader providing aid to the DPRK	29/Jun/2023	CSO	Socio-Culture/Aid (Unification Movement)
21	Co-President of the Women's Peace Movement	26/Nov/2023	CSO	Socio-Culture (Women)
22	Executive Director of an umbrella organisation for unification and peace movements	19/Dec/2023	CSO	Socio-Culture (Unification Movement)
23	The Executive of the Secretariat of the Joint Board for the Compilation of Gyeoremal-keunsajeon (South-North Korean language dictionary)	09/Jan/2024	CSO	Socio-Culture (Academia)

24	Former president of the National Council of Churches of Korea / Current Chairman of a peace movement NGO	17/Jan/2024	CSO	Socio- Culture (Religion)
25	Journalist specialising in inter-Korean relations issues, with experience in inter-Korean broadcasting exchanges	23/Jan/2024	CSO/ Journal ist	Socio- Culture (Broadca st)
26	The Secretary General of the Council of North and South Historians	29/Jan/2024	CSO	Socio- Culture (Academi a)
27	Academic expert on inter-Korean relations/executive of NGO working on providing aid to North Korea	24/Jan/2024	Resear cher/ CSO	Socio- Culture/ Aid

Appendix 2: Interviewee Questions

Interview Questions (for Government Officials)

Section 1: Introduction

1. Please briefly introduce yourself, the government you have served under, the role of the organisation you have worked in, and the civil society sector you have been involved with.

Section 2: Assessment of the Roles of CSOs during the Kim Dae-jung and Moon Jae-in Administrations

2. What role do you think CSOs have played in the development of inter-Korean relations?

2-1 Did you expect CSOs to play a role in inter-Korean relations?

2-2 In your assessment, have CSOs fulfilled the roles you expected? If you have a specific example, please share it.

2-3 Do you think the role of CSOs differs between the areas of aid to North Korea and social and cultural exchanges?

3. In your view, what are the advantages or disadvantages of the role CSOs play compared to other actors (e.g., government, businesses, international organisations) in inter-Korean relations?

Section 3: Factors Influencing the Roles of Civil Society Organisations

4. How would you describe the relationship between the government and CSOs during your tenure?

4-1 What impact do you think this relationship has had on the ability of CSOs to perform their roles?

4-2 Among the various laws, policies, and systems in place during your time in government, which ones supported or promoted the role of private CSOs?

4-3 Which laws, policies, or systems restricted or controlled the role of private CSOs during your time in government?

4-4 Were there any other formal or informal mechanisms or practices for controlling or constraining private CSOs in the governments you served in? If so, what were they?

5. Beyond this, what do you believe were the key factors influencing the ability of CSOs to carry out their roles?

6. How would you assess the overall impact of CSOs on inter-Korean relations during the time you served in government?

6-1 Please explain the reasons for your assessment.

Section 5: Additional Comments

7. If there is anything else you would like to add beyond the above questions, please feel free to share.

Interview Questions (for CSOs)

Section 1: Introduction

1. Please briefly introduce yourself and the role of your organisation.

Section 2: Roles of Your Organisation during the Kim Dae-jung and Moon Jae-in Administrations

2. What role do you or your organisation think you have played in the development of inter-Korean relations?

2-1 Were there any changes in your role due to shifts in government or major events in inter-Korean relations?

3. In your opinion, how does the role of your organisation differ from that of other entities such as the government or international organisations? What do you perceive as the advantages and disadvantages of CSO involvement?

3-1. How do these differences manifest in inter-Korean exchanges and cooperation?

Section 3: Factors Influencing Your Role

4. How would you describe the relationship between your organisation and the government in carrying out your roles? What impact has this relationship had on your organisation's ability to fulfil its mission?

4-1. Which laws, policies, or systems implemented by various governments have been supportive of your organisation's activities?

4-2. Which laws, policies, or systems have hindered your organisation's activities?

4-3. Do you believe that governments have employed any formal or informal control or constraint mechanisms on private CSOs? If so, could you describe them?

4-4. What other factors have influenced your or your organisation's ability to carry out its role? Have there been any significant changes over time?

Section 4: Challenges and Limitations

5. How has your relationship been with other CSOs involved in inter-Korean relations (e.g., the Civil Reconciliation Association, the June 15th South Committee, religious organisations, peace and unification groups, exchange and cooperation bodies, etc.)?

5-1 Have any instances of cooperation or conflict affected your organisation's activities?

6. What challenges or limitations have private CSOs, including yours, faced in fulfilling their roles?

Section 5: Additional Comments

7. If there is anything you would like to add beyond the scope of the questions above, please feel free to share.

Appendix 3: Interview Consent Form

<Consent Form>

Please ask <u>any</u> questions you may have when reading each of the statements. Please leave the box blank if you do not agree. Thank you for participating.	
General	Tick box
I confirm I have read and understood the Information Leaflet for the above study. The information has been fully explained to me and I have been able to ask questions, all of which have been answered to my satisfaction.	
I understand that this study is entirely voluntary, and if I decide that I do not want to take part, I can stop taking part in this study at any time without giving a reason.	
I understand that I will not be paid for taking part in this study ¹¹⁵ .	
I agree to take part in this research study having been fully informed of the risks, benefits and alternatives which are set out in full in the information leaflet which I have been provided with.	
I know how to contact the research team if I need to.	
I agree to be contacted by researchers by email as part of this research study.	
I agree to take part in an audio-recorded interview for this research study.	
Data	Tick box
I understand that any identifiable information about me (personal data), [including the transfer of this personal information about me	

¹¹⁵ Amend as appropriate.

outside of the EU], will be protected in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).	
I understand that the audio recording of my interview will be retained by Trinity College Dublin for 7 years for use solely by Trinity College Dublin, and then destroyed.	
Anonymity	Tick box
I agree for my name to be used in the research.	
I don't agree for my name to be used in the research.	

Participant Name (Block Capitals) Participant Signature
Date

To be completed by the Principal Investigator or nominee.

I, the undersigned, have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant, the nature and purpose of this study in a way that they could understand. I have explained the risks and possible benefits involved. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

I have given a copy of the information leaflet and consent form to the participant with contacts of the study team

Researcher name: Donghyuk Kwon

Signatures: _____

Date: _____

< Information Leaflet>

- **Research Title : : The Role of Civil Society Organisations and Sustainable Peacebuilding in Inter-Korean Relations**
- **Researcher: Donghyuk Kwon**
- **Affiliation : Trinity College Dublin (Peace Studies PhD Candidate)**

My name is Donghyuk Kwon, and I have been pursuing a PhD in Peace Studies at the Belfast Campus of Trinity College Dublin since 2021. My research analyzes the role of civil society in inter-Korean relations from the peacebuilding perspective.

Research Objectives This study re-evaluates the roles of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) engaged in inter-Korean relations from the Kim Dae-jung administration (February 1998) to the Moon Jae-in administration (May 2022). The research examines these roles across two dimensions: the Political Peace Process (e.g., inter-Korean dialogue) and the Social Peace Process (e.g., reconciliation and social healing). By analyzing how the relationship between the government and CSOs influenced the latter's roles, this study seeks to identify sustainable directions for inter-Korean exchange and cooperation.

※ Definition of Terms:

- **Political Peace Process:** Defined as the resolution of conflicts through bilateral and multilateral negotiations, accompanied by the reform of political and institutional frameworks to support these efforts.
- **Social Peace Process:** Defined as the process of restoring inter-Korean relations, fostering reconciliation between individuals and groups, rebuilding community and social bonds, and achieving both social and personal healing.

Interview Details

- **Duration:** The interview will take approximately one hour.
- **Confidentiality:** If you prefer to remain anonymous, your identity will not be disclosed. All personal data will be strictly protected in accordance with research ethics protocols.
- **Compensation:** Please note that no monetary compensation or fees will be provided for your participation.
- **Significance:** The findings of this interview will contribute to academic peace research and may inform future policy-making processes.
- **Data Management:** The interview will be audio-recorded and stored securely in a dedicated **Trinity College Dublin OneDrive** folder. The recording will be deleted upon the conclusion of the research.

Before deciding whether to participate, please feel free to contact me at any time if you have any questions.

Thank you for your valuable time and consideration.

Donghyuk Kwon PhD Candidate, Peace Studies Trinity College Dublin

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< DATA PROTECTION INFORMATION >

Data Controller	Trinity College Dublin
Data Protection Officer	Secretary's Office Trinity College Dublin Dublin 2 Dataprotection@tcd.ie

What is the lawful basis to use my personal data?

We will use the information you provide to us for this research study which is sociological information in the public interest.

What are my rights in relation to your use of my personal data?

You are entitled to:

- The right to access to your data and receive a copy of it
- The right to restrict or object to processing of your data
- The right to object to any further processing of the information we hold about you (except where it is de-identified)
- The right to have inaccurate information about you corrected or deleted
- The right to receive your data in a portable format and to have it transferred to another data controller
- The right to request deletion of your data

Unless the request would make it impossible or very difficult to conduct the research. You can exercise these rights by contacting the researchers or the Trinity College Data Protection Officer (contact details above). Please note that these rights relate to data which could identify you (personal data). If your data has been anonymized, we will not be able to access or delete it, as we will have no way of being able to link the data to you.