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BARBA NÚÑEZ, MARÍA; MORÁN DE CASTRO, CARMEN; MEIRA CARTEA, PABLO  
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# ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN TIMES OF CRISIS. WHERE IS IT WHEN IT IS MOST NECESSARY?

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MARÍA BARBA NÚÑEZ  
CARMEN MORÁN DE CASTRO  
PABLO MEIRA CARTEA

## 1. Introduction

It is difficult to ignore the seriousness of the environmental crisis and the fact that its causes are closely related to socioeconomic and political structures operating on a global scale, to a nonequalitarian market model based on the exploitation of human beings and nature that imbibing cultural patterns and ways of life, colonizing individual and collective identities. Despite this, when faced with this reality we maintain a position between unconscious and irresponsible, by internalizing, reproducing and reinforcing the dominating models that lead to social and environmental collapse.

The capitalist model also shows its darkest facet in the self-proclaimed developed societies, a facet formerly confined to other spaces – impoverished, exploited, forgotten, marginalized –, leading to a point where growing sectors of these societies started questioning the development and progress dogmas underlying this model. This was the beginning of the debate on human necessities and satisfiers, thus creating a gradually increasing sensitivity towards the limits imposed by a finite biophysical world and the mazes that colonize subjectivities, distort our priorities and make us lose autonomy over our own lives (care, work, relationships, time, values, etc.).

In this changing context, there has been a revival of the political dimension of citizenship, accompanied by the relevance of meeting, debate and mobilization spaces where people might develop new ways of making politics and look for alternative social models<sup>1</sup>. Undoubtedly, this prepares the stage for the transformations which, historically, Environmental Education (EE) has tried to promote in order to build equitable and sustainable societies. This is the time to strengthen the political nature of education in its most critical facet (FREIRE, 1973), oriented towards the analysis of environmental, social, economic, and political realities with a view to creating change at a global scale (CALVO y GUTIÉRREZ, 2007), to understanding them as vectors or reflections of dominant ideologies so as to make them visible or transform them (SAUVÉ, 1999).

Nevertheless, in the established context EE encounters a completely irresponsible institutional response, which undervalues the challenges of the environmental crisis. Galician environmental educators denounced in a manifest published in 2010 the sys-

tematic process of dismantling that is going on in this field and is manifest in the drastic cuts in programs and resources; the marginalization of EE in the education system; the redundancies in the public administration system and the disappearance of companies; the poor management of dwindling resources and the chronic lack of coordination between administrations (SGEA, 2010). On the basis of the imperatives of the economic crisis, EE is disappearing from public politics and funding lines, which leads to a dismantling of a field that had reached a certain level of consolidation in the last decade.

This situation caused the development of a thesis that sought to analyze the trajectory and the current state of EE in Galicia, as a product of the historic development of the field and of the influence of other social spaces. It is considered that hidden behind the discourse that lobbies for the dismantling of the field based on the “necessary” and “inevitable” austerity policies and cuts, there are power struggles, both for the symbolic, and for the factual power, which have been affecting and placing constraints on the trajectory of EE.

This article applies a critical approach to the past and present of EE in Galicia, and, more broadly, in Spain, seeking to understand it with all its genealogical complexities, as opposed to the lineal and historicist representations which ignore the clashes, conflicts and struggles that have been and continue to be a part of it (MEIRA, 2009). To analyze EE as a field – in Bourdieu’s sociological sense of the word – means to approach it from a double perspective: on the one hand, to establish its limits and the relative position it occupies socially, in order to identify the social forces that act upon it; and, on the other hand, to provide an objective view of its internal structure, as to interpret the causes of its vulnerability and subordination with respect to external dynamics, in spite of the developments observed in the past.

The social position of a field with respect to others is strongly influenced by the recognition, operativity and value of its specific capital in the current social structure. For this reason, this interpretation of the situation of EE in Galicia starts from the analysis of its specific capital and the beliefs that support and distinguish it in the social space, in order to be able to assess on the basis of this analysis the relationship between EE and other fields, especially with the public administration.

Although the research is based both territorially and socially in the Galician community, its approach and scope offer patterns for the interpretation and understanding of the situation of EE in other territorial contexts where similar dynamics are at play.

## 2. Methodology

This approach to the field of EE employs a socio-biographical perspective where life stories “are, at the same time, record of individual trajectories as well as witnesses to the history of EE as a field” (CARVALHO, 2005, p.54). This working perspective allows to address the triple interest described by MILLS (1970) for biography, history and a social structure where the first two intertwine. This means that the voice of the people who make up the reality subject of study must be linked with external data that might allow to build the socio-structural space and offer a context to these stories (BERTAUX, 1980).

The research is based empirically in the analysis of the life trajectory of 9 environmental educators with a solid professional and militant career, interpreted according to the position in the social structure of reference and the forces to which they have been subjected. These people were asked to narrate their own life, telling the story autonomously. They did not know the questions of the study a priori, to avoid conditioning. They were requested to look back and translate their life history through in-depth interviews. After the transcription of the first round of interviews, the stories were crossed to identify coincidences, aspects of interest and information gaps. Based on this data, an individualized interview script was designed for each participant, and it served as a guide in a second encounter. With the information obtained, a unified story was constructed and then sent to its protagonists for review and as a methodological triangulation strategy.

In order to represent the field's structure, as well as to extract information from previous research and reflections on the current state of EE in Galicia (GUTIÉRREZ, 2005; MEIRA y PARDELLAS, 2011; conference proceedings; publications; etc.), a survey aimed at the Galician population of environmental educators was carried out. The questionnaire was organized in two blocks: the first, composed of 9 questions, framed according to variables of segmentation (age, gender, origin, education, professional profile, family composition); the second, containing questions aimed at exploring the professional and occupational situation of each person at two different moments: at the beginning of the crisis, in 2007, and at the time of the survey, in 2013. This second block comprises 14 questions: 6 closed-ended questions (with single or multiple answer), 6 open short-answer questions and 2 Likert scales, addressing the area of work, the position occupied, the contractual status, the number of hours devoted, the salary, the type of activities that are performed, the degree of professional satisfaction, and the consistency with EE of the work being done.

As a complementary technique, once the initial interpretations of the biographical material were extracted, a discussion group was organized with the people who contributed their stories, in order to check for accuracy and enrich them, seeking a more complex reading of the reality studied.

## 2.1. Sample

During the research, different samples were selected for each of the techniques used. In the life trajectories, a significant sampling was applied, limited by the saturation criterion which, although difficult to achieve, offers a solid base for the transferability of results. To this end, the diversification of the selected informants was a priority, as the research sought to represent different positions within the structure of the EE field. The nine people (Table 1) were selected according to two categories of variables: prerequisites for participation in the study (career, identity and recognition in the field of EE); and the representation of different positions within the field according to a double distinction, socio-demographic (gender and generation), and professional (education and area of professional activity). This sample was established as a reference for the discussion group, in which 4 of these 9 people participated, thus ensuring the presence of different positions in the field structure.

**Table 1. Sample of life trajectories and discussion group.**

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Professional field</i>
1 <sup>st</sup>	Woman	Teaching	School level
1 <sup>st</sup>	Man	Biology	School level, Third Sector and Private Sector
1 <sup>st</sup>	Man	Biology	Administration, School level and Third Sector
1 <sup>st</sup>	Man	Biology Master's Degree in EE	School level
1 <sup>st</sup>	Man	Biology	School level, Third Sector and Private Sector
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Woman	Education	Administration, University and Third Sector
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Man	Biology	School level
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Man	Environmental Sciences. Doctoral Degree in EE	Third Sector, Private Sector and University
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Woman	Biology	Third Sector and Private Sector

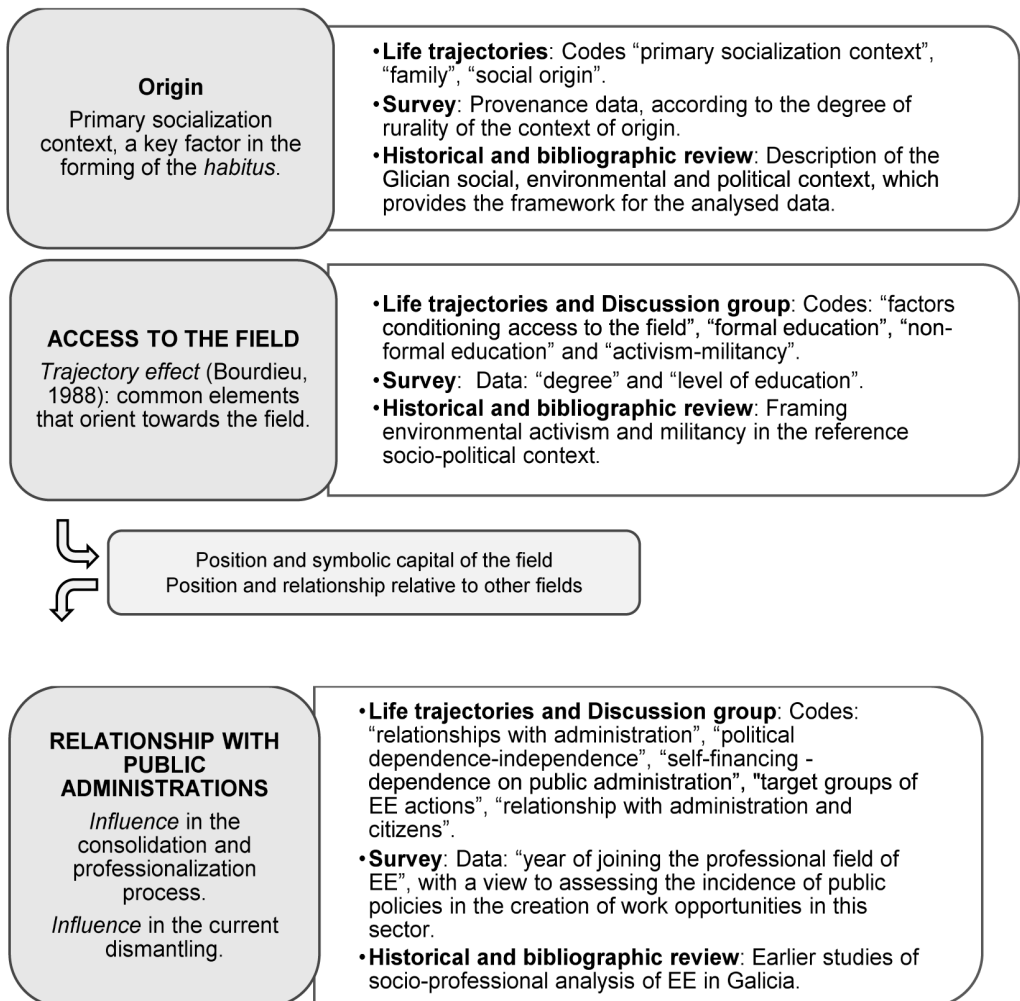
**Note:** Shown in italics, the people who participated both in the life trajectories and in the discussion group.

In order to ensure representability in the survey, it was necessary to overcome the methodological difficulty of accurately defining the field of EE and identifying who are the professionals acting within it. This issue was resolved by consulting the directories of two key institutions in the Galician EE: the University Extension and Environmental Outreach Center of Galicia (CEIDA) and the Galician Society for Environmental Education (SGEA). Both centers have established relationships with virtually all the Galician environmental educators. Their specialization and relational level enables us to feel confident that the sample reflects the heterogeneity of the profiles characterizing those who define themselves as professionals in this field. The questionnaire was sent to 391 people, 115 of whom answered. This number may suggest a high experimental mortality rate in absolute terms, but not when connected with the method that was used (questionnaires sent electronically through the *e-encuesta* platform), with a satisfactory response rate which allowed for the collection of a representative final sample of the studied field. For strengthened representativeness, we compared these data to the 2010 estimates of The Foundation for Biodiversity and the Spanish Observatory for Sustainability, which placed the number of people with professional ties to EE in Galicia at 345. Taking into account these parameters, for a confidence level of 95%, the margin of error of the survey is 7,47%.

## 2.2. Analysis process

The article starts with the analysis of the social position and beliefs that underlie the field of EE in Galicia, examining the social origins of its members and the ways of access to said field. Both dimensions allow for the definition of the position and symbolic capital of the field, properties which will influence in the relationships – of proximity, remoteness, dependence, conflict, etc. – established with other social spaces.

Figure 1. Analytical diagram. Methodological triangulation.



This article examines specifically the relationship with the public administration, assessing the influence it has both on the consolidation and professionalization of the field, as well as on its current dismantling, and on the orientation of its discourse and types of action. Figure 1 illustrates the methodological triangulation diagram that leads us to this analysis.

### 3. Political and militant identity of the EE field in Galicia

The analysis of the position of origin and the trajectory effect that attracts people to the field of EE allows defining the beliefs that support and delimit the social space: What motivates one's implication in the activities and interests of the field? What does people's background contribute to the field? What are the environmental, educational, political, and socio-cultural bases of the field? Etc.

In order to construct this representation, the dual classification of EE communities established by GAUDIANO (1999, 2005) is adopted: Latin America and the Caribbean, on the one hand, and Europe and North America, on the other hand. In Galicia, EE shares some of the identifying traits of the European current, but also shows fundamental qualities that approximate it to the conditions existing in the Latin American and Caribbean scenario. This duality is defined according to several characteristics:

- An association of the concept of “environment” with “nature” and “wildlife”. All the participants in the study emphasized their childhood memories of experiences marked by contact with nature, not so much by their naturalistic value as by secondary properties associated with such experiences (ways of life, relationships, etc.). Nevertheless, they also present a perception of the environment as a space of life and conflict, when contextualizing the origins of the field in the industrializing epoch of late Francoism (the ‘60s and ‘70s of the 20th century), when people reacted to initiatives with great environmental impact (cellulose factories, nuclear power plants, polluting industries, oil spills, large transport infrastructures, etc.), and intensifying the urbanization of spaces and lifestyles.
- Most participants are people who were linked to the emergent social movements (student, pacifist, ecologist movements, etc.), formed by social groups with a high level of education (according to the survey, 89.5%). In fact, the majority of environmental educators situate the beginning of their vocation in the university stage of their lives. But it is also an EE that stems from the Spanish democratic transition initiated after the death of dictator Francisco Franco in 1975, a historical stage in which “there was a lot of debate and, therefore, processes of critical awareness” (life story). EE emerged as a field that was associated with the demand for political rights and as a social means of addressing the strong loss of prestige of Galician culture and language, also expressed in the environmental deterioration of the territory. This context endows it with a strong nationalist character.
- In their educational dimension, environmental educators define in their stories the areas of (ecologist or educative) militancy as “authentic training schools” (life story), where the foundations of the field and the forms of action were defined.

Ultimately, and similarly to the results of the analysis of the Brazilian context carried out by CARVALHO, ROSELAINÉ and VILLELA (2011, p. 39), in Galicia EE had its origins “in the libertarian ideal and the resistance to the hegemonic civilizing process”. Multi-militancy and involvement in citizen mobilization are common traits in the life trajectories of the main protagonists of the foundational stage of the field, in troubled times that fomented their involvement in the political struggle.

The life histories of the environmental educators, most of whom did not share a social context with the main figures of the field, reflect stages that can be identified as an awakening to the consciousness about the environmental issues and the historical, political and cultural reality in which they are inscribed. This experience led them to approach other people with the same concerns, thus converging in groups with different orientations (environmentalists, ecologists, pedagogical renewal, etc.), around which the Galician EE was born. People contributed their ideology and their background to these groups, which are originally defined by the sum of their members – political subjects – but without an identity of their own – collective subject – as pointed out in the discussion group.

Maybe at that initial stage, because it could not be any other way, because probably identity was necessarily more heterogeneous, because you were all that – this, another thing, and yet another –, you were basically defined by your militant trajectory, and, well, that more or less defined you. Of course, after some time, when we had this Faculty, these experiences, EE workshops, well, I guess at that point the process of defining changed, and one’s manner of identifying oneself changed as well. (Discussion group)

Within these groups and other educational and reflection spaces, there was a process of development and growth in the definition of the identity of the field, its beliefs, bases and practices. It is the realization of these beliefs, of counter-hegemonic character both in discourse and in forms of action, which will mark their relationship with other social spaces.

#### **4. EE as a counter-hegemonic field subject to moderating and redirecting**

The political dimension of the field increases the interest of certain social groups to fragment, but also to dominate it, to control it or to adjust it to less uncomfortable models, close to conservationist or naturalist concepts, or related to a weak interpretation of sustainable development. The tensions to which the field is subjected in its relationship with other social spaces are not limited to conscious and visible constraints. As FOUCAULT (2002) pointed out in his analysis of the exercise of power in contemporary societies, its effectiveness is derived not only from the use of tangible elements such as the application of certain legislation or economic asphyxia, but also from subtle and symbolic forms of violence, invisible, capable of defining in an intangible way the symbolic capital and people’s behavior.

The analysis of the life stories allowed identifying points of tension in the definition of the identity of EE in Galicia, as well as in its trajectory, aspects that were later debated in the discussion group. It was observed within the field the dilemma between a EE that is critical of the socioeconomic model, that radically questions its mechanisms of social and cultural domination, and a more technical EE that focuses on solving specific problems, but without questioning structural factors and causes. This bipolarity generates internal and external conflicts in the identity of environmental educators and constitutes the basis of many disputes in order to delimit the field, as it was recognized in the discussion group:

Is seems that there was a moment when it was made apparent that there is an education that is technical, that is, that education for sustainable development is technical: it's technical knowledge needed in order to apply technical knowledge in its turn, renewable energies... A whole range of things. And the other thing is that EE is that sort of, as they call it, "watermelon" education, that is, green on the outside but red, or red and black, on the inside. And, of course, this doesn't interest us [i.e., the Administration], so we're going to stop using this name because after all it identifies with, it is recognized as something that is politically charged, which is something that we're not interested in. (Discussion group).

It is possible that the rejection of the concept of sustainable development by several participants in the study is due to the awareness that the institutions governed by the power groups, which they feel as outsiders, privilege the work undertaken from this approach. As one of the educators points out, in Galicia talk about education for sustainable development began

Sort of following the example set by UNESCO, at the 2000 congress of UNESCO in Santiago, (...) there came about that paradigm change in EE, when talking about sustainable or durable education, as philologists would have us say, and the Ministry and the new team clang on to that." (Life story).

Since the public administration is the promoter of this approach, the reluctance to accept it is understandable, as the educators of the sample attribute to it an interest to control and limit the potential of the field, as well as a lack of interest on the part of the same hegemonic groups for fomenting a critical and transformative EE:

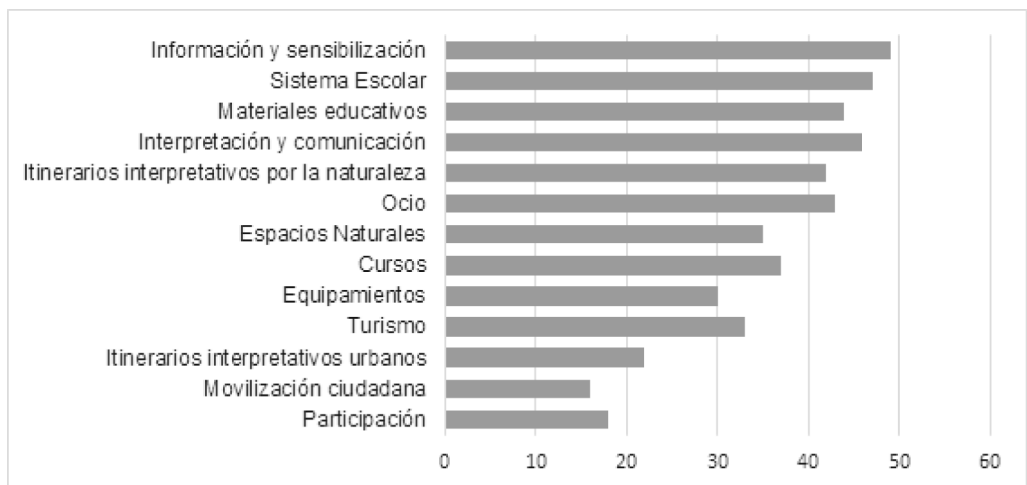
At the level of the Administration it was never good, because they have always treated this issue with carelessness and impassiveness, as if it were not important. At most they could say 'yes, we could do some activities for children', that was the most you could get from any meeting or anything, I mean, there was no sensitivity or belief that it was a process of transformation. I believe that nowadays it's the same,

because the first thing that gets its financing cut is that [transformative actions], not going out to take the children for a walk. (Life story).

The economic dependence of the field on public financing strengthens the likelihood that the factual powers might enforce their interests and reorient educational-environmental practices towards more harmless political positions. An eloquent example is the derivation of activities towards groups with little capacity to influence social reality, such as children. Several previous studies show this aspect: the data from Project *Fénix* (SOTO and PARDELLAS, 2010), indicate that 91.5% of EE companies have as a main target students from different educational levels; the study of IGLESIAS (1998) emphasized, on the municipal experiences of EE, that “the school population between 10 and 14 years of age is the one that receives preferential attention” (p.408); and the conclusions of the VI Conference on Environmental Education (MORÁN, FERNÁNDEZ and BERMEJO, 2010) pointed out that “the school population continues to be the target group of most of the programs developed by public institutions” (p.117).

On the other hand, considering the data of the survey regarding the type of activities developed, it is crucial that the ones aimed at citizen mobilization and participation have a reduced presence (figure 2), even though EE is declared to be a field that aspires to generate social transformation. This dynamic is favored by the field’s internal weaknesses (professionals who are insufficiently trained to promote participation, constraints associated with the employment sphere in which it is inscribed, difficulties in opening to new spaces, etc.), which, in consequence, make the field excessively dependent on external interests.

Figure 2. Types of EE activities.



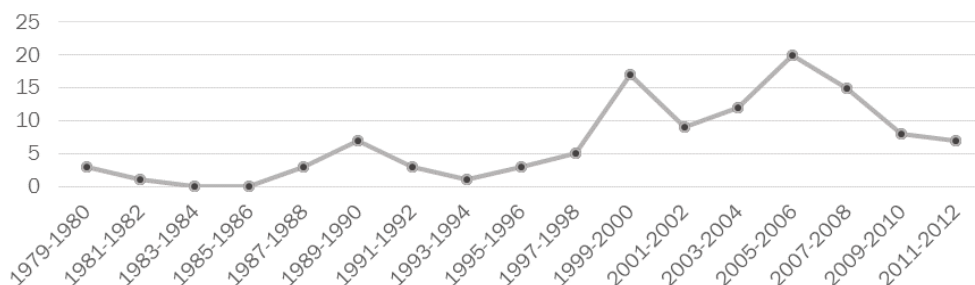
From this line of reasoning it should not be inferred that there is a governmental plan of action with the objective of undermining the field of EE, but rather a concentration of interests and pressures coming from different fields, acting unconsciously, but effectively along these lines. This means interpreting the institutions of the State as “central nodes of different networks composed of actors who try to put pressure or forge alliances with them”, (MARTÍN, 2008, p. 23), where the sectors occupying positions of power in the current social structure have a greater capacity of incidence than those seeking to transform it. In this way, the neoliberal ideology impacts on the reality of EE, evidencing deep contradictions between the pro-environmentalist rhetoric of the political parties’ discourse – although with notable differences – and the initiatives promoted by the different administrations, which strengthen a capitalist model with high environmental and social impact (STAHELIN, ACCIOLY and SÁNCHEZ, 2015). It is in this way that the field of EE is undergoing a reorientation and moderation, not only of its discourse, but also of its practices.

## 5. Wins and losses with respect to the public administration.

The relationship between the field of EE and the Galician (also, more generally, Spanish) public administration is a notable reflection of its evolution, fostering conquests, as well as losses throughout its trajectory.

As to the conquests, the gradual recognition of EE by the Spanish public administration starting in the 90’s, represented a clear breakthrough in the consolidation, institutionalization and professionalization of the field. The survey records the year in which each professional entered the field. Although this data does not imply an uninterrupted professional activity in this field, it does allow mapping out the periods that generated a higher number of employment opportunities. In the studied interval, three peaks in the field’s trajectory can be identified (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Year of joining the professional field of EE.**



Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the survey.

The first peak, in the biennium 1989-1990, is a consequence of the small numbers of professionals who up to then had joined a still incipient field, but the influencing factors cannot be determined due to the low number of cases (7). The second peak appears in the

biennium 1999-2000, after a rise that had begun in 1996-1997. In Galicia, this peak can be related to the creation in 1997 of the Ministry of Environment (*Consellería de Medio Ambiente*) and, within it, the Center for Environmental Information and Technology (*Centro de Información e Tecnoloxía Ambiental*), a public organization which first took on the responsibilities related to EE at a regional level. At this stage, the Galician Strategy for Environmental Education (*Estratexia Galega de Educación Ambiental* - EGEA) was developed, approved, and published, and became the first of its kind in Spain, which reflects a certain level of recognition for the field of EE in Galicia. During the last peak, in 2005-2006, a new wave of public projects was implemented: fomenting School Agenda 21 programs; project Climántica; signing a partnership agreement with the Galician Society for Environmental Education (SGEA) for the development of a diagnostic study on EE in Galicia and a proposed set of indicators for the purposes of evaluating the quality of equipment; establishing specific lines for subsidies, etc.

Between 1997 and 2007, EE switched from a development that was fundamentally within the frame of social, political, educational, or environmental militancy, to being supported by the public administration. This dynamic was broken as a result of the financial crisis, to which the government responded with policies of financial cuts with unfortunate consequences.

The data collected in the survey reflect the change from an unemployment rate of 5,7% in 2007, to 30% at the beginning of 2013, a higher impact than the crisis suffered by other professional sectors, accompanied by the growing precarity of working conditions (lower wages, labor instability, etc.) and by a proletarianization dynamic, as the levels of professional qualification, satisfaction and coherence decreased (MEIRA, BARBA and LORENZO, 2015).

The boom created at the time by the support of the public administrations favored the professionalization of the field, provided some stability to the initiatives, and influenced the nature of the groups and entities within the field of EE, groups that evolved towards more institutionalized forms or moved towards the business sector. It is at this point when important achievements were obtained, but there were also compromises that eroded its militant and transformative dimension. As argued by FOUCAULT (1986), it was not a direct attack to an institution, group, or class – in this case, the field of EE – but rather the most critical and subversive proactive positioning as a mark of identity in its origins. The control strategies by the administrations on the field have not been characterized in the last decade by direct repression, but rather by relative support; that is, a ‘laissez-faire’ attitude as long as the field did not become an inconvenience or, precisely, to prevent it from becoming an inconvenience. It is through this low intensity strategy that the socio-critical expression of the field of EE and its capacity for social mobilization are gradually reoriented and deactivated. This demobilization leads to the passivity of the sector towards the dismantling of the field, as reflected in this quote:

The example is that when the Regional Administration, the Xunta, started dismantling everything that was EE, the reaction was rather poor, due to the sector's lack of internal cohesion. Both from within

the field, as well as from the Galician Society for Environmental Education, there were very few reactions. (Discussion group)

The incidence of logic and interests that are external to the development of EE is an inconvenience for the professionals of the field, who are aware of the situation, but are forced to accept these dynamics in order to ensure their professional survival. This is how an educator expresses it:

Partly, we are victims of that, of the fact that the possibility one has of developing EE projects is conditioned by whoever is financing those programs. Partly, we are victims of this situation, trying to get out, because... because there are also many gaps where you can get out, and partly we are also accomplices to it. (Life story)

This conditioning is not only a consequence of the guidelines established by the public financing lines, but also of the change in nature that the field has undergone due to its recognition and the momentum received from the administration. This was the general trend since the 1990s, and not only in Spain; in other contexts, such as Brazil, these entities also had “a closer dialogue with the State, participating in their actions and legitimizing some government programs” (TRISTAO and TRISTAO, 2016, p.53).

Many of the associations or entities of the so-called third sector also began to operate within the social economy, along with new entities that might be called “minority and very *managerialist* service associations, leading to the emergence of association-enterprise, which is registered as an association when it should be registered as a cooperative” (ALBERICH, 2007, p.202). This dynamic was favored by the increasing outsourcing of services by the administrations. The participants in the discussion group judged that “the situation in which the great environmental associations are, at this very moment, is that conflict”, with “a behavior bordering on business-like”, where “you no longer know if they are associations or companies”, sometimes even reaching dynamics where “they invested their resources in collecting more resources, not in developing transformative actions” (life stories).

When, in the midst of this dilemma, arises the tendency to adopt formulas associated with the model of the “service provider” entities, SEGOVIA (2000, section II) points out that “the interests of the technician – their own position – can be confused – unintentionally, if you will – with the interests of the beneficiaries of their action”. As one of the participants in the study says:

I see many problems with the idea of associationism, a lack of vitality or a non-vitality that we are now witnessing, as well as this aspect – which to me does not seem minor – of confusing it, or using it as an expectancy for *modus vivendi*. I mean, I see the employment market in such a bad state, so closed, that if an entity offers me this possibility and the political sector gives it a subsidy as a means to justify their own actions, and to keep it more quiet and less combative than without the subsidy, then I'm in. (Life story).

In the school system, EE also suffers the consequences of the progressive weakening of the pedagogical renewal movements, and the teachers change from the protagonist role that they played in the origins of the field, to that of participant or driving force of the projects devised and offered by other entities or by the administration itself.

In summary, the efforts invested by the EE field in order to gain institutional recognition and social visibility may have led to the acceptance of the very structure it questioned, and to the abandonment of more transformative aspirations. These are, undoubtedly, consequences of the distancing from the field's identity as a social movement, possibly a victim of an ideological mechanism that created the illusion of social conquest without the necessary attention to what was being abandoned along the way. This trajectory can be described as a process of social ageing in which its political dimension and its basic counter-cultural force have become weakened. BOURDIEU (1988) defines this process as:

This slow renunciation or disinvestment (social-assisted and encouraged) which leads agents to adjust their aspirations to their objective chances, to espouse their condition, become what they are and make do with what they have, even if this entails deceiving themselves as to what they are and what they have, with the collective complicity, in order to manufacture their own bereavement, of all the 'lateral possible' they have abandoned along the way, and of all the hopes recognized as unattainable due to always having remained unattained. (p. 109)

The relationship between the EE field and public administrations is fraught with a great deal of conflict, since "the State, which ensures the minimum conditions of autonomy, can also impose constraints generating heteronomy and also adopt the role of expressing or transmitting the pressures of the economic forces it is supposed to liberate from" (BOURDIEU, 2003, p.55). A perverse effect which is very evident in the case of the neoliberal State towards which we are heading or in which we are already installed. The fact that the decisions regarding the field are fundamentally in the hands of an external institution and, sometimes, contrary to its interests, acts as a limit to its autonomy and hinders its consolidation. The fact that public institutions can be categorized as entities that are distant from the protection of the environment and of people, removed from the sustainable and equitable administration of the common goods, is the most serious aspect of the situation.

## Conclusions

It is important to begin by freeing EE from the (self) blame for its alleged failure as a public policy tool, and move towards more equitable and sustainable societies. In the social space, EE has a reduced presence with respect to other fields that operate under logics contrary to it, and which have a much greater capacity for incidence. This is how "the Atlas complex" is born: "that is, that environmental educators have to save the world. No matter how few we might be, it's we who must save it" (discussion group).

The analysis of the beliefs that support the field allows identifying qualities that do not fit into the hegemonic current and that, therefore, have a low social recognition (opposition to the current model of development, nationalist profile in Galicia, relationship with spaces of militancy and social transformation, etc.). These qualities place EE in a weak position in that it defines itself as being “against” the hegemonic model and other spaces with greater capacity of structuring social habits and subjectivities, and of informing public policies. In a sense, the issue is not that EE is in a crisis (although it is), but rather that EE is part of the evidence of the socio-environmental crisis.

In its socio-professional projection, the recovery of the field to the conditions prior to the crisis is not only an impossible option, but also an undesirable one. In the period immediately preceding the beginning of the current critical phase, environmental issues seemed to make an impact on citizens, despite increasingly unsustainable lifestyles associated with growing consumer capacity. They also appeared to make an impact on public policies, despite their supporting an unsustainable development model; and even in the discourse of initially refractory market sectors that used, and still use, EE as a green-face strategy. In this context, EE had the support of a growing number of administrations in Galicia and Spain, with a significant number of initiatives (equipment, programs, materials, etc.), which boosted the creation of activity and employment in the sector, as never before. However, since the beginning of the crisis in 2007, public policies started progressively marginalizing the environmental issue, allowing the market to shamelessly impose its objective and subjective schemes of domination in the void thus created. EE was represented and treated as an expendable field, faced with a silent dismantling. The poor response of the members of the field in the face of this disarmament is strongly associated with the process of demobilization and weakening of its militant dimension, precisely in what were supposed to be its golden years. A situation, undoubtedly, strongly mediated by the relations established with the public administrations.

Identifying harmful dynamics in the relationship with administrations should not lead to a discourse that legitimates their neglect. Since public resources must be oriented towards the common good, an EE public policy should give stability to these actions. But the analysis of the relationship between the field, state institutions, and citizens supports the need observed by CARVALHO (2002) of a cultural change that addresses new lifestyles and alternative forms of political action. Present times do not demand renewed visions within structures already created but, as SORRENTINO, TRAJBER, MENDOÇA and FERRANO (2006) argue, a new role of the citizens that should enhance their “capacity for self-management and the strengthening of their resistance to capitalist domination” (p.287). Power must change hands, from the top to the bottom, because, as long as it is associated with privileged minorities, there will hardly be a real involvement on the part of the States in the structural transformation of our societies and, therefore, in the consolidation of an EE public policy. It is necessary that citizens should be aware of the seriousness of the environmental crisis, and undertake political action as a counterhegemonic way of life against the neoliberal *laissez faire* and the individualism that characterizes the market beyond economy. Citizens must question the patterns that permeate our welfare

culture and colonize our subjectivity, conveniently fed by the media and the new forms of communication through social networks.

The promotion of a conscious and involved citizenship poses a major challenge for EE, which must be able to renew its ideology and forms of action. It must, on the one hand, reconnect with other struggles seeking structural change that places life and the common good – and common goods – in its center, resisting the fragmentation promoted by the neoliberal system (RAUBER, 2006); on the other hand, it must overcome an EE focused on the transmission of environmental knowledge. The change requires an ideology of shared construction, whose starting point is not nothingness, as if everything were still to be established, but rather one that, from the experience and reflection generated in the field, invites people to act as protagonists. People do not want to learn a pre-established model of a more equitable and sustainable relationship with the environment; they want to devise and experience it based on their own questioning of the imposed truths, and on confronting them with their own experiences, beliefs, and needs. The life stories showed that these pedagogical-practical experiences of social transformation, linked to multiple spaces of participation and social action, brought people closer to the field of EE. In this respect, it is necessary to question the current structures of participation in entities and groups, reclaiming militancy approaches and connecting with the other struggles that aspire to conquer other possible futures.

## Notes

1 The Spanish crisis and austerity policies triggered a citizen movement that became apparent on May 15, 2011 (15M), and constituted the origin of many other social movements.

2 CARIDE y MEIRA (2001) differentiate between two interpretations of sustainable development: a “weak” one, which does not question a concept of development associated with growth, and a “strong” interpretation committed to radical changes in society and the socioeconomic model.

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# ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN TIMES OF CRISIS. WHERE IS IT WHEN IT IS MOST NECESSARY?

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MARÍA BARBA NÚÑEZ  
CARMEN MORÁN DE CASTRO  
PABLO MEIRA CARTEA

**Abstract:** This article analyzes the disappearance of environmental education from public policies and their funding lines, precisely at a historic time that, now more than ever, would call for its strengthening. For this reason, it is important to analyze the power dynamics that lie beyond the discourse justifying the austerity policies that lead to a disappearance of EE. To this end, we approach the field's trajectory by applying Bourdieu's theory, from a socio-biographical approach based on the life trajectory of nine environmental educators, a survey addressed to the Galician professional field, and a discussion group. The analysis of the point of origin and access to the field reflects the political and militant dimensions that characterize an anti-hegemonic field which is constantly an object of subjugation and adaptation to less incisive models by certain forces. To this respect, the ambivalent relation with the public administration has fostered both conquests, as well as important compromises in its trajectory.

**Key words:** environmental education, socio-biographical approach, Bourdieu, public policies.

**Resumen:** El trabajo analiza la desaparición de la educación ambiental de las políticas públicas y sus líneas de financiamiento, justo en un momento histórico que reclamaría, como nunca, su refuerzo. Es por ello relevante analizar las dinámicas de poder ocultas tras el discurso justificador de las políticas de austeridad, entre las que la EA se desvanece. Para ello se aborda su trayectoria como campo aplicando la teoría de Bourdieu, con un enfoque sociobiográfico sustentado en la trayectoria de vida de 9 educadoras/es ambientales, una encuesta dirigida al universo profesional en Galicia y un grupo de discusión. El análisis de la posición de origen y acceso al campo refleja las dimensiones política y militante propias de un campo contra-hegemónico, permanentemente objeto de sometimiento y adaptación a modelos menos incisivos por determinadas fuerzas. En este sentido, la relación ambivalente con las administraciones públicas ha propiciado conquistas, pero también grandes renuncias en su trayectoria.

**Palabras clave:** *educación ambiental, enfoque sociobiográfico, Bourdieu, políticas públicas.*

**Resumo:** O trabalho analisa o desaparecimento da educação ambiental das políticas públicas e suas linhas de financiamento, justo num momento histórico que reclamaria, como nunca, seu reforço. É por isso relevante analisar as dinâmicas de poder ocultas depois do discurso justificador das políticas de austeridade, entre as que a EA se desvanece. Para isso se aborda sua trajetória como campo aplicando a teoria de Bourdieu, com um enfoque sociobiográfico sustentado na trajetória de vida de 9 educadoras/es ambientais, uma encuesta dirigida ao universo profissional em Galiza e um grupo de discussão. A análise da posição de origem e acesso ao campo reflete as dimensões política e militante próprias de um campo contra-hegemónico, permanentemente objeto de submissão e adaptação a modelos menos incisivos por determinadas forças. Neste sentido, a relação ambivalente com as administrações públicas tem propiciado conquistas, mas também grandes renúncias em sua trajetória.

**Palavras-chave:** *educação ambiental, enfoque sociobiográfico, Bourdieu, políticas públicas.*

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