

## EDUCACIÓN AMBIENTAL, TERRITORIALIDAD E INTERCULTURALIDAD, DESDE LA SUSTENTABILIDAD DEL “BUEN VIVIR” EN LATINOAMÉRICA

### ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION, TERRITORIALITY AND INTERCULTURALITY, FROM THE SUSTAINABLE TO THE ‘GOOD LIVING’ IN LATINOAMÉRICA

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#### RESUMEN

Recientemente ha habido nuevas propuestas teóricas con un enfoque territorial y cultural y sin calificar el desarrollo. Lo que queremos decir con esto, es que no es el mercado lo que tiene que ser apoyado, ni la producción, ni la economía; lo que tiene que ser sostenible y duradera, es la duración de la vida. La visión del mundo de una de las corrientes más importantes de Latinoamérica consiste en esto: la visión holística y constructivista de la Red Nuevo Paradigma (Souza, Victorino 2010).

El objetivo del presente artículo es hacer una síntesis de la evolución de las teorías acerca de la educación ambiental, el territorio, la interculturalidad y el desarrollo, a través de una revisión de documentos, a partir de las teorías más tradicionales tales como la educación ambiental para preservar incluso lo más reciente, sobre educación ambiental para la sostenibilidad, que incluye ingredientes tales como el desarrollo endógeno integral y para 'la buena vida', desde la perspectiva latinoamericana para construir una propuesta política y educativa basado en la educación ambiental para la sostenibilidad en la educación superior, en el contexto intercultural con un enfoque territorial.

Palabras clave: educación ambiental, interculturalidad, territorial y sostenibilidad.

#### SUMMARY

There have been recently known new theoretical proposals with a territorial and intercultural focusing and without qualifying development. What we mean with this, is that is not the market what has to be supported, neither the production, nor the economy; what it has to be sustainable and lasting, is the length of life. The world vision of one of the most important flows in Latin America consists in this: the holistic and constructivist vision of the Red Nuevo Paradigma (Souza and Victorino 2010). The aim of this article is to make a synthesis of the evolution of the theories of environmental education, territory and interculturality and development, through a documentary review, from the most traditional theories such as environmental education for conservation until the most recent of the environmental education for sustainability, including ingredients such as the integral endogenous development and for 'the good living', from the Latin America perspective to build a political and educative proposal based on the environmental education for the sustainability in the superior education, in the intercultural context with a territorial focusing.

**Key words:** environmental education, intercultural, territorial and sustainability.

#### BRIEF HISTORY

Human and environment relationship is ancient. Some scientists argue that our human species (*Homo sapiens*) had a sole origin in Africa more than 100,000 years ago. However, some authors believe that human evolution was multi-regional. Whatever its origin of our species, the ancient *Homo sapiens* were fed a variety of plants such as fruit, berries and roots, as well as animals that collected or hunted. The interaction of human beings with animals, made them move from hunters to selective hunters and, later, breeders of domestic animals in groups, then with a cattlemen-nomads and, finally, in the agrarian era, they became agriculturists (Souza, Victorino 2010).

*Forms of development: modernity and conservation, criticism of the Western model and an emerging proposal*

According to Leff, human society, from the 60s of the 20th century, was slowly sensing that something was wrong with nature, and began to question the principle of progress driven by science and technology in the service of unlimited growth. Because speech monistic "development", was to

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some extent imposed according to the needs and interests of the Imperial domains (military, commercial or media), then ended up becoming universal. In this development model, it is not enough to almost naively assume that the mere use of the sustainable development, will magically change a model civilization of six decades, which has channeled their energies (scientific, political, economic, cultural and spiritual), and rationalized based on infinite- subsidized growth funded by fossil resources of the planet (Leff 2008).

Currently in the new era of knowledge known as postmodernist or informationalist (Souza, Victorino 2010) where globalized processes are evident and the concern for the environment, have emerged from critical Ibero-America to the "hegemonic" development model. In this respect it is argued:

*"The dominant discourse seeks to promote the sustained economic growth, denying the ecological and thermodynamic conditions that establish limits on ownership and capitalist transformation of nature...Thus, the symbolic and ecological processes are converted in natural, human and cultural capital to be assimilated to the process of reproduction and expansion of the economic order, restructuring the production conditions through an economically rational management of the environment"(Leff, 1998).*

Despite the way political and legislative efforts and the progress taken in terms of improved health and greater food production in the global, environmental and social problems have increased strongly since the second half of the 20th century. Thus, since the end of that century, the gap between rich and poor increased in many regions of the world and today speaks of a third world in the first world and vice versa. The green revolution, after the Second World War, though it helped to have more food, did not improve the distribution at the time that generated large chemical pollution on the environment and on the health of the people. Advances in technology and medicine, although generated health solutions, these were and are accessible to everyone. Ultimately prevails an ambitious vision as a value for an unlimited enrichment of powerful economic groups, disrespectful with nature and with the most needy (Torrealba and Carbonell, 2008).

It is not strange then, the emergency of an educative process via the environmental awareness that achieved to expand in a global scale in the sixties with the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm, 1972); it is, in that moment when the limits of the economical rationality, and the challenges that generate the environmental degradation to the civilizing project of modernity, are set; no wonder that economy, has been designated as the motor of the development, that it has gotten critiques and has promoted the emergence of alternative proposals like the stationary economy, of decrease, ecological, political and sustainable economy.

Before the global awareness that natural resources are finite, in 1987 the report of the World Commission for the environment and the development of the United Nations, known as the "Brundtland report", made the definition of sustainable development that it is inserted on the global political agenda. «He who attends to the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations. The environment should be understood as an integrated part of durability in sustainable development and not as a resource to be emptied or wasted by the so-called "economic" development"( CNUMA 1992). Since then the integration of people and environment and in the nineties of the 20th century, it becomes called the sustainability paradigm. In the "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (1992), it was generated and legitimized the Agenda XXI.

There is great controversy about the best concept of "sustainable", in reference to whether it is appropriate to use the word sustainable or tenable; for purposes of this paper we consider

sustainable development, defined by the Central American Alliance for Sustainable Development (ALIDES, 1997), but it is necessary to recognize that as a concept, it is a fact lived for many years in some cultures, especially indigenous.

In the Ecological Summit in Managua, the ALIDES (1997), defines the Sustainable Development as a process of progressive change in the quality of life of the human being, which sets him as the center, and main character of development, through the economic growth, with social equity and transformation of the production medium and of the patterns of consumption and that it is sustained in the ecological balance and in the vital support of the region. This process implies the respect to the ethnical and culturally regional, national and local diversity, such as the strengthening and the full citizen participation, in pacific coexistence and harmony with nature, without compromising, and guaranteeing the quality of life of future generations.

*“... Development is the effort that puts a society, to assure and optimize the integral welfare of its own members through a process of material, social and human emancipation, ideally projected in the mythological past and the utopic future...”*

Gallopín (2003:38) concludes in an analysis about sustainable development, that many times the term ‘development’ is used as ‘economic growth’, but it is necessary to differentiate them clearly. The development is a qualitative process of concretization of potentialities that may or may not carry economic growth (quantitative increase of wealth).

It also indicates about the need to separate the economic growth of the material or energy flow since it is not necessarily synonymous with material growth.

Many thinkers of the development that were not ready to approach the topic of the conversation from ‘below’ (Betancourt 2006), and leave it in hands of the developers and environmentalist of a ‘preserving’ thought, generated the proliferation of protected areas to preserve the biodiversity, based in theories and scientific models that mark the human being, and specially "the rural poor" Latin American, as the main direct threat to the natural ecosystems. In this part, it is important to clarify the concepts of preservation, conservation and protection that are interchangeably handled. Indeed, the first one is associated with the idea of the exclusion of the human intervention in nature, the second one is associated with a more efficient and sustained usage of the natural resources, and finally, as a regulated use, mainly in the legal point of view (Palacio 2001).

In the report “GEO 2000: Perspectives of the Environment”, made by the United Nations Environment Programme (PNUMA), supported the idea that: “The two main causes of environmental degradation in the world are the persistent poorness in most of the habitants of the planet, and the excessive consume from the minorities” (PNUMA 2000), Barkin (1998:2), argues that the perception of poorness as the cause of the environmental problems, overall in the rural environment is wrong, they do not plunder the land due to their insensitive waste of resources, but because of the lack of equal distribution of the available social wealth and because of the ruthless way the rich defend their control. It is also said that the environmental problems in the rural Latinoamérica show the inherit of a politically polarized pattern, since the colonization in Latinoamérica set off an endless succession of displacement, appropriation and expropriation. Inside the latinoamerican rural world, where the natural systems are still on, the indigenous towns (México, Guatemala, Costa Rica and Panama, for instance) are the most vulnerable social sector. Visible and paradigmatic are the cases of the Landless from Brazil, the Neozapatista revolution in Chiapas, México (1994), the Mapuche conflict in the south of Chile, among others.

The truth is that currently, 12% of the continental population is aboriginal, ergo, approximately 29.464.000 people belong to one of the 420 linguistic groups that have achieved to survive the extermination and whitening policies of the population (Tolindor 2002:53).

Nowadays, the indigenous people present a big historical deficit with respect of their chances to access to the economic, educational and sanitarian benefits of recognition of their identities and collective rights. Because of that we talk about them-us, *Abyayalenses* (people from America), inevitably have to recognize and accept the historical conditions that triggered the precarious situation in which they live today; necessarily, this historical debt must also undergo a vindication of their worldview and knowledge, made invisible by hundreds of years of intolerance and of discrimination; so, to be able to move towards new proposals of respect and consolidation of the multicultural and multilingualism in our countries.

When we synthesize the case of indigenous population, 'the culture is every configuration of sense and membership that emerges from the territorial communication' (Devora 2006:63). In consequence, the culture cannot be thought isolated in the nature. The culture is generated in its relation with the nature and this, at the same time is modified by the culture, this is the conceptual base of the culture-nature system (Geertz 1973:88)

#### *Endogenous development, territoriality, interculturality and the 'Good Living'*

All these elements are put together, to origin the endogenous development or etno-development, which arises as a reaction of globalized development. The word 'endogenous' means 'from the inside', it is the development based mainly, though not exclusively, in local strategies, knowledge, institutions and resources. It includes a continuous adjustment and innovation process, beginning on the internal local community.

This implies working with people, so a key for this sort of development is that it has to be coordinated by the local actors and their capacities must be enhanced, so they can solve their own problems and amplify their options without romanticizing neither their points of view nor their practices.

Within the endogenous development recognizes the importance of local identity and the worldview of the people involved, reaching equilibrium in the encounter of the three spheres of life: the human world, the natural world and the spiritual world.

The 'Good Living' involves a development in the quality of life of the person, but directly linked to the nature, a search of a balance between the human being and the nature, and not only the economic growth, fortifying the culture and their identities. The Good Living is a philosophical approach, a directive rule for an examination of every social topic (indigenous rights, sovereignty/food security, climatic change, biodiversity, strengthening of indigenous networks, environmental schedule, environmental education, Centroamerican integration schedule, duality and indigenous woman, governability, justice systems), made alternatively and based in the Indigenous Traditional Knowledge (ITK) and the cosmogonic vision (communitarianism, time register, balance and harmony, consensus, dialogue, respect, system of law). This vision involves a fundamental interaction among the indigenous cosmovision, the nature and the human beings.

Leff says that, to face this civilizing crisis coupled to an environmental crisis, other sources of thinking and actions are necessary, further than the possible reflection of the modern knowledge about the sources of modernity, Bourdieu and Wacquant (2005) are quoted, as the promoters of the

term 'unexpected categories', an unknown fact which scientific paradigms and modern thinking don't seem to be prepared (Leff 2010):

*"... it is not only about hermeneutics to rescue and mean the sense of the old concepts created in the history of thinking or about creating new categories and concepts to think the unthought yet, but to deepen the ways in which the inconsistent categories of the social imaginers manage to express in the process of social structuring."* This is mentioned alluding to the origin of the concept about the indigenous Good Living.

Some authors claim that before the current scene of Latin America and the world it is possible to see in intercultural philosophy a "kairos", a time that brings new possibilities, a time which is the germ of change and renewal. Diversity is no longer a threat to become a fundamental category of understanding why humans can approximate, talk, live and grow in humanity.

*"... the reunion with those voices, supposes a new learning; a re-learning to think, from a different perspective that leads us to have a perspective about our way of considering things"* (Madrigal 2009:110).

The historiographical philosophy as a part of our scientific mission is an evidence, indeed, that it has been written normally from behind the reality, to the cultural diversity of our people; without knowing the value of the autochthonous points of view, ignoring them as possible sources of theoretical and practical reconfiguration.

Let's remember Martí, referring to 'Our América', it is, primarily, an historical novelty, a novelty that is set in his concrete profile into the historical fight for the political and economic emancipation, such as the cultural release of the civilizations that compound it. "Our América" is a critique to the colonialism as an oppression system and the destruction of the biodiversity.

The most important criticism of the current ethno-ecologic researches, lies in that are distinguished by legitimizing the traditional ecological knowledge and propose it as viable for modern societies; i.e., they do not theorize or confront both views, only are dedicated to extract information for academic or useful for the market.

It is clear then, that all the scientific community is found in front of an enormous challenge about revising their theories and imagining facing an environmental crisis. Even about recognizing other ways of knowledge, that have subsisted until today as the indigenous knowledge. New epistemological thoughts emerge from there. The Bolivian experience, for instance, tries to explain the difficulties to establish a dialogue among very different things in ontological and epistemological terms, as the scientific knowledge and the indigenous wisdom. According to Rist (2006:92), the comparison between the indigenous knowledge and the science is featured for:

- The position of the indigenous knowledge shows us that there is no separation among the material, social and spiritual lives, and that these three ambits of life are tied together.
- From the point of view of the dominant social sciences we also have the ontological position of the dualist kind. The material issues are in a side and the spiritual issues correspond to another dimension; but the bound between both cannot be explained.
- A third position is found in the natural science, based in a materialist ontology that indicates that everything is determined by natural phenomena, affecting what science is studying.

Since the moment Bacon and Descartes assigned to the scientific knowledge, the purpose of getting power and domain over the nature, including the human nature, subordinating the other branches in

the tree of wisdom. But we all do not see this, neither do we suffer its effects, because a big majority still suffers the blindness of wisdom (Morín 1999:1) or the consequences of having 'learned not to learn'.

However, thinking today in the interdisciplinary focusing, does not mean that in the previous decades, the studios and the researches did not generate contributions, it means that it is valid to reflect about the weaknesses of that contribution as old epistemological problems, analyzed from a new look in the context of the current circumstances. As a result, the discipline in its maximum expression as transdisciplinarity, becomes a must, to the extent that the integration of two or more articulated science should provide a new, unpublished, cognitive conglomerate that is inclusive.

The scientific research with indigenous perspective developed in Bolivia, first of all, reinforces the fact that the original towns mold civilizations, because they carry among them, the same ontologies and epistemologies that organize their societies in a totalized, non-fragmented way. This self-recognition is a process that appeals, in an immediate way, to the concept of education and interculturality or strengthening of the cultural, and identity qualities sui generis of the original civilizations.

So, the decolonization of the knowledge and the totalized organization systems of their societies is central to face a subsequent step, as the symmetrically related with the social and civilizing forces that are present in the globalized scenery (Delgado y Escobar 2006:26)

### **PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS**

The debate about the theories of development, such as the contribution of the endogenous development, the good living and the environmental education for sustainability, appears as an eminently political-educative proposal, because these contexts are the real ones into the current scientific job. Through the experience, we get close to the need of a dialogue about knowledge for a trans-disciplinary job in the rural environment, assuming the following features:

- When we work from science, the questions that are important to set a dialogue, must be developed from an integrating perspective from the main ambits of the natural and social sciences.
- This dialogue must be based in an opening attitude that overcomes the aspirations of an exclusionary target, in the sense of only recognizing one absolute truth; to present something that goes further than the ontological abstract knowledge that we may have.
- The trans-disciplinary focusing looks for the integration of actors and sciences, not disciplinary parceled.
- We do not propose the questions of investigation related to one of the scientific theories; these are defined starting in a process of negotiation among many actors, where the scientists are a social kind of actors among many of them.
- Many and different levels of reality are recognized, there is not one only reality, but many of them as conjunctions, that are sometimes disjointed, but that are in the match when we try to define something in the perspective of what a trans-disciplinary focusing is.

This way, the development must be seen as a social learning process that determines the role of science, not vice versa, as it is being presented up to now. As it can be improved, with the Bolivian example, there is an indigenous perspective; we add the inclusive cultures via the interculturality that in our case, must be taken into account for the researches as dialogues and its incorporation to the superior education.

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