

Environmental education, territoriality and interculturality, from the sustainable to the 'good living' in latinoamérica

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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 Latinoamerica consists in this: the holistic and constructivist vision of the Red Nuevo Paradigma (Souza, Victorino 2010).

The target of the present paper is to do a synthesis of the evolution of the theories about environmental education, territory, interculturality and development, throughout a document review, from the most traditional theories such as the environmental education to preserve even the most recent, about environmental education to sustainability, including ingredients such as the integral endogenous development and for 'the good living', from the latinoamerican 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

The relationship between humans and environment is very old. Some scientists think that our human species (*Homo sapiens*) was born in Africa more than 100.000 years ago; however, some authors think that the human evolution was multiregional. Whatever the origin of our species was, the ancient *Homo sapiens* used to eat a variety of plants, such as fruits, berries and roots, so did they eat the animals they collected and hunted. The interaction of the human beings with the animals, made them become selective hunters, and, later, domestic animal breeders, after that, they became nomad ranchers, and finally, in the agrarian era, they became agriculturists. (Souza, Victorino 2010).

Development ways: Modernity and conservation, critique to the occidental model and an emerging proposal

According to Leff, the human society, since the 60s, in the twentieth century, bit by bit perceived that something was wrong with nature, and started to question the beginning of the progress, impulse by the science and technology in the service of an unlimited growth. The monistic speech of 'development', was up to a point, imposed according to the needs and interests of the imperial domains (military, mercantile or in media), and

later ended up becoming universal. In this pattern of development, it is not enough to assume almost naively that the mere signaling of development as sustainable, will magically change a civil model of six decades, which has canalized its energy (scientifically, politically, economically, culturally and spiritually) and has rationalized based in the infinite-subsidized growth because of the planet's fossil resources.(Leff 2008).

At present, in the new era of knowledge, known as postmodernist or informationalist (Souza, Victorino 2012) where the globalized processes are evident, and the generalized environmental concern, there have emerged, from Iberoamérica, critiques to the model of the 'hegemonic' development. It is argued:

"The dominant speech tries to promote the economical sustained growth, denying the ecological and thermodynamic conditions that set limits to the capitalist appropriation and transformation of nature... So, the ecological and symbolical processes are converted in natural, human and cultural items, that will be assimilated in a process of reproduction and expansion of the economical kind, resetting the conditions of the production through an economically rational environmental management" (Leff, 1998).

In global issues, despite the efforts made by political and legislative via, and the advances gotten regarding the improvements in health and better production of food, the environmental and social problems have overwhelmingly increased since the second half of the twentieth century. So, from the ending of that century, the gap between rich and poor men got increased in many regions of the world, and it is currently said that there is a lowly developed world inside the highly developed ones and vice versa. The green revolution, after the Second World War, despite it did help a lot to have aliments, it did not improve the distribution of these, it generated a big amount of chemical contamination in the environment and in people's health.

The advance of the technology and medicine has generated sanitarian solutions, but these were not and are not accessible to everyone. At bottom, an ambitious vision as a value to an unlimited enrichment of the powerful economical groups prevails, disrespectful to nature and the poor people (Torrealba y 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.

Facing the global fact, that the natural resources are finite, in 1987 the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development of the United Nations, known as 'Brundtland report', made the definition of sustainable development insert into the world political diary. <<Who attends the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of the future generation. The environment must be understood as an integrated part of great durability in the sustainable development and not as a resource that will be emptied or wasted because of the 'economical' development>> (CNUMA 1992). Since then, the integration of people in the environment is preferred, and on the nineties of the twentieth century, it became the renowned paradigm of the sustainability. In the 'Earth Summit' in Río de Janeiro, Brazil (1992), the 'Agenda XXI' was generated and legitimated. Even if it exist a great controversy about the best concept of 'sustainable', referring to either using the word 'sustainable' or the word 'tenable'. In this paper we consider the Sustainable Development, defined by the Centroamerican Alliance on Sustainable Development (ALIDES, 1997), but it is necessary to recognize that as a concept, it is a situation lived since many years ago in some cultures, mainly in the indigenous ones.

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 imbalance 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..."

Gallopin (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 quantitative process of concretization of potentialities that may or may not carry economic growth (quantitative increase of wealth). It also suggests over the need to separate the economic growth from the material or energetic flow, due to it is not necessarily a synonym of 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 latinoamerican 'poor rural', as the main direct threat to the natural ecosystems. In this part, it is important to clear 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 from 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 mark. (Palacio 2001).

In the report "GEO 2000: Perspectives of the Environment", made by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 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" (UNEP 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 Panamá, 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, inter alia. The truth is that currently, 12% of the continental population is aboriginal, ergo, approximately 29.464.000 persons 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 América), must inescapably recognize themselves and accept the historical conditions that triggered the precarious situation they currently live, this historical debt has necessarily to go through an assertion of its view and consciousness, invisible for hundreds of years of intolerance and discrimination; to be able to go ahead toward new proposals of

respect and consolidation of the multicultural issues 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, wisdom, institutions and resources. It includes a continuous adjustment and innovation process, beginning on the internal local community. This implies working with people, which is why a key criterion 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. Inside the endogenous development, the importance of the local identity and the vision of the involved people are recognized, being able to reach the balance in the meeting 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 to people, but directly linked to the nature, a search of an imbalance 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, indigenous environmental reinforcement, environmental schedule, environmental education, Centroamerican integration schedule, duality and indigenous woman, governability, justice systems), made alternatively and based in the Conocimiento Tradicional Indígena (Traditional Indigenous Wisdom) and the cosmogonic vision (communitarianism, time register, balance and harmony, consensus, dialogue, respect, penal system). This vision involves a fundamental interaction among the indigenous vision, 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 wisdom about the sources of modernity, Bourdieu and Wacquant (2005) are quoted, as the promoters of the term 'non-thought 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 story of thinking or about creating new categories and concepts to think the non-thought 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 affirm that being next to the latinoamerican and world-wide current panorama, makes possible to see in the intercultural philosophy a 'kairos', an era that brings new chances, an era that is renovation and change germination. The diversity stops being a threat, and becomes a fundamental category of comprehension, which the human beings can use to approach each other, to dialogue, to coexist and to grow humbly.

"... 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 critique to the current ethno-ecologic researches, is located in the fact that they are distinguished because of the legitimation of the traditional ecologic knowledge, and because they are proposed as viable ways for the modern societies; ergo, they neither theorize nor confront both visions, they are only dedicated to bring out information for academic use or for marketing utilities.

It is clear then, that all the scientific community is found in front of an enormous challenge about revising their theories and imagining them facing an environmental crisis. Even about recognizing other ways of knowledge, that have subsisted until today as the indigenous wisdom. 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 wisdom 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 wisdom, 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 the old epistemological problems, analyzed from a new look in the context of the current situations. Because of this, the discipline at its best as a trans-disciplinary matter becomes a need, as the integration of two or more articulated sciences must provide a new cognitive conglomerate, an integrator unpublished conglomerate.

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 wisdom and the totalized organization systems of their societies is to center; 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 of sustaining, 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 queries 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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