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Huerto Alegre: an ecocentric socio-educational experience as a critical practice of education for sustainable development

Francisco Miguel Martínez-Rodríguez* and Alfonso Fernández-Herrería

Department of Pedagogy, University of Granada, Granada, Spain
*Corresponding author. E-mail: miguelmr@ugr.es

Abstract
This paper explores the innovative socio-educational experience of *Huerto Alegre* (Spain), linking it to a critical perspective of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Going beyond the 'pluralist practices' associated with the ESD, our case study seeks to redefine ESD from a critical and ecocentric perspective within the context of the Earth Charter (EC). Huerto Alegre's social-educational programme is aimed at children and young people with the objective of creating critical thinking and fostering connections between school and the natural environment by working collaboratively with teaching professionals. The methodology of the paper focuses on a content analysis of the centre's key documents and on the narratives of students, in addition to an in-depth interview with its director. It also presents a critical reconstruction of the subject. This complements, and gives meaning to, the theoretical debates surrounding ESD — debates that call for structural changes to our current model of society.

Problematising the Concept of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

This paper's case study focuses on an innovative educational practice that exists outside the context of the school classroom and is perceived as being part of Education for Sustainable Development (hereinafter, ESD). Huerto Alegre (hereinafter HA) was launched in Granada (Spain) as a cooperative at the beginning of 1980s, and it was promoted by young professionals within the socio-educational field. As we will see below, when we develop this case study, HA is presented in this work as a critical transformative experience in the field of SDE.

There is a whole global movement, plenty of significant variety about environmental education experiences, which connect schools with their social and natural environment. As an example, we can refer, first, to the Center for Ecoliteracy (CFE). This is an organisation based in Berkeley, California, in which a sustainable education model for formal education has been implemented. The CFE follows the principles that make ecological systems sustainable. Concepts such as interdependence, system integrity, biodiversity, cooperation and association and common goods are highlighted here. Its educational practice is focused on four principles that lead the transformation process in schools: 'nature is our teacher', 'sustainability is a community practice', 'the real world is the optimal environment for learning' and 'sustainable living is rooted in deep knowledge of the environment' (Goleman, Bennett & Barlow, 2012; Martínez-Rodríguez, Vilches Norat & Fernández-Herrería, 2018; Stone & CFE, 2009).

But in the work of Smith (2020), we can find another interesting example regarding the issue of teacher leadership and within the context of Deep Ecology. This experience shows the work carried out in several environmental clubs of secondary schools from the metropolitan area of Melbourne, Victoria (Australia). In this case, teachers appear as examples of sustainability when affective qualities of connection with, and love for, the environment are enhanced. From the point of view of Arne Naess' (1973) Deep Ecology, these qualities are significant for the development of sustainability. Our connection with the Earth leads us to an ecocentric perspective, beyond anthropocentrism.

From the global context of these experiences, and specifically from this HA case study, we first look over the concept of SDE. The United Nations promoted an important negotiation process in September 2015 in order to boost SDE. This process involved 193 countries, and culminated in the approval of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 2030 Agenda (see https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300) is a global plan based on these objectives, which have the ambitious task of eradicating poverty, caring for the planet and guaranteeing peace and prosperity by 2030.

From the perspective of UNESCO (2006), the aim of ESD is to incorporate values, habits and behaviours in all aspects of education in order to guide us towards sustainable lifestyles. The result would lead to the empowerment of those individuals currently working for change.

However, Huckle and Wals (2015, pp. 491–492), in analysing the UNESCO's literature on the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD, 2005–2014), argue that the discourse behind these documents is 'essentially reformist' given that 'there is too little attention to power, politics and citizenship'. These topics are structural issues that are key to defining a society. If ESD does not settle on these issues, we would be merely scratching the surface. Here central themes, such as the forms of production and the use of natural resources, global governance, the distribution of power and the role of citizenship are rendered invisible by the prevailing logic of neoliberalism.

Thus, not every practice carried out under the umbrella of ESD results in significant change or empowerment, as noted by UNESCO. Evans and Reid (2014) argue that practices — supposedly of ESD — are undertaken in a cynical way. These authors criticise those experiences in which disadvantaged citizens in poor countries are taught to adapt and show resilience, through ecological literacy for the 'good' of the planet, while those living in wealthy countries continue with the excesses of consumerism.

> It is well known that neoliberalism metamorphoses into different forms. It has the virtuosity that practices which at first glance may seem critical and transformative, if we look more deeply from the context of global governance, we see that they are assumed, integrated and even promoted by the system, nullifying their potential for change. (Martínez-Rodríguez, Vilches Norat & Fernández-Herrería, 2018, pp. 425–426)

For a practice to be transformative, it must begin by placing individuals within their local–global context. This enables them to visualise the impact of their lifestyle not just on themselves and the way they live, but also on other human beings and the natural world (Dobson, 2003). This leads us to consider issues of socio-economic justice, ecological justice, development patterns, power relations and decision-making; in other words, processes of resistance within the context of a sustainable global citizenship (Barry, 2005). Kopnina holds that the 'recent ESD debate does not fully realize the problematic nature of economic development for the ecological health of the biosphere' (Kopnina, 2012, p. 700).

ESD from the Community of Life (Earth Charter) and the Economy for the Common Good

From here, we set out the following objectives. First, we have chosen the experience of HA because it seems to us an innovative and significant practice due to its ecocentric approach. Planet Earth,

our common 'Home', is at its centre, which implies important changes to the structural aspects that we have been discussing from the point of view of a critical SDE. Second, we highlight the Earth Charter (hereinafter EC) (Earth Charter, 2000) because it implies a change in worldview that directly connects with the structural issues. Third, we use the values and principles of the EC as the 'mirror' in which to look at the experience of HA, searching for a correspondence existing between it and the Charter.

The EC, which was officially launched at the Peace Palace in The Hague on 29 June 2000, is conceived as a declaration of fundamental ethical principles and as a universal code of conduct for the construction of a fair, sustainable and peaceful global society. Unlike other similar statements, the EC has been built from a broad social base, from bottom-up, after the failure of its more institutional presentation at the Rio Summit in 1992. It is important to highlight that June 2020 marks the twentieth anniversary of this important initiative, which is increasingly known worldwide and has interesting repercussions in good educational practices around the world (please see https://earthcharter.org/discover/the-earth-charter/).

The EC focuses on four major sections. The first, and the most fundamental, refers to 'Respect and care for the Community of Life'. The other three sections relate to this, in addition to what is necessary for its fulfilment: 'Ecological integrity', 'Social and economic justice' and 'Democracy, nonviolence and peace'. In the document's preamble, it is stated that 'we are one human family', and more importantly, 'and one Earth community with a common destiny'. This perspective reaches a more inclusive level than 'all human beings' in that it integrates 'all living beings'; in other words, it embraces the whole Community of Life. In this Community, we are a thread, the ethical thread of the fabric of life. From this fundamentally ecocentric perspective, structural subjects such as power, politics, democracy, citizenship, economic models and the role of institutions are redefined, as is education.

We need to reconstruct ourselves in order to assume this new worldview, which would be at the heart of a critical SDE, one which brings us closer to the structural changes, which are necessary for our current model of society. In this sense, Kretz (2014, p. 5) contrasts the individualistic self with the ecological self, which we can identify with the Community of Life. 'The neoliberal self is characterized as atomistic, individualistic, competitive, economic, and Western . . . (while) The ecological self is envisioned as relational, reflective of community relations, it is cooperative and reveals a world seen through the clarifying lens of ecology'.

The socio-economic model of 'Economy for the Common Good', proposed by Felber (2012, 2015) (which we can only briefly mention here), is an example that makes this reconstruction explicit. In Felber's model, ESD's critical perspective is connected to its ecocentric vision in a real practice. This model overcomes the foundations on which both capitalism and the planned economy of traditional communism are based. It is alternative and non-partisan. It focuses on the 'Common Good' as a foundation that links economic and social aspects with nature. Furthermore, it is built on values of cooperation aimed at overcoming the pursuit of profit, rather than those values relating to the competition, which characterise capitalism. Its main objective is to promote the good life for all living beings and the planet, in other words, the whole Community of Life. Here, the Common Good appears as the good of the whole Community of Life. All this is possible 'without a change in current power relations' (Felber, 2012, p. 27). According to Felber, this involves rethinking the two fundamental questions on which free market economy is based: private property and democracy. His model proposes the Balance of the Common Good as the instrument with which good practices are made concrete and visible. It values compliance, both in private companies and in the public arena (e.g., town councils) in addition to the following significant categories: human dignity, solidarity and social justice, ecological sustainability, transparency and democratic participation. These categories combine to create what is called the Common Good Matrix. With this approach, the basic structures of advanced industrial societies are fundamentally changed (Lundmark, 2007).

From the principles of the Economy for the Common Good, and from those of the EC, ESD would then be redefined from a critical and radical perspective which would clearly overcome its pluralistic approaches. Thus, it is in line with the demands of those authors who call for structural changes (Huckle & Wals, 2015; Jickling, 2009; Jickling & Wals, 2007; Kopnina, 2012), which a critical ESD demands.

This case study on the socio-educational experience of HA contributes, in terms of real practice, to the creation of those conditions that favour the needed structural changes.

Description of the Case Study: The Huerto Alegre Cooperative

HA started as a cooperative in 1982, when eight young people, between the ages of 19 and 24, embarked on the adventure of creating a farm school as an autonomous professional space. It was set up by an interdisciplinary work team in order to educate and raise awareness of environmental problems, to support and train teachers in their educational work and facilitate outings to the natural environment.

HA have two basic facilities. The first is 11 miles from Granada. Here, the Nature Classroom 'Ermita Vieja' (Old Hermitage) is located in the Natural Park of Sierra Nevada. This is in a leafy valley, surrounded by walnut trees, orchards and pine forests through which the River Dílar flows. Here, in a recently constructed rustic building, there are several facilities including a library, a kitchen, spaces for workshops, laboratories, bedrooms and additional areas for multiple uses.

The second facility, the Farm School, is located 28 miles from Granada at the Natural Park of Sierra Tejeda, Alhama and Almijara. The building has several bedrooms, which can accommodate up to 70 people, a dining room offering home-made food prepared with organic products from its own garden and greenhouse. It also has various facilities and rooms for the development of different educational and cultural programmes in addition to outdoor facilities which house a variety of domestic animals including cows, horses, pigs and chickens.

The cooperative, which includes both facilities, currently employs 40 people, most of whom are women. In more than 30 years of existence, tens of thousands of children and young people have passed through these facilities as well as thousands of teaching professionals from all over Spain and other countries.

HA chairs the Andalusian Network of Environmental Education Centres, which was created in 2007. It is part of the National Centre for Environmental Education and the Seminar on Equipment for Environmental Education, as well as the Sustainable Tourism Charter of Sierra Nevada. Furthermore, it is integrated into the following networks: IRES (School Research and Renewal Network), FAECTA (Federation of Cooperatives), REAS (Network of Alternative and Solidarity Economy Networks). The AMECOOP network (Women's Association of Business Cooperatives) has been promoted by HA.

Methodology

We focused on a qualitative research, which aimed at shedding light on HA's socio-educational experience. Following Stake (1995), our research method has the fundamental purpose of reaching a deep understanding of HA's socio-educational practice. It is about understanding the very special nature of this initiative and presenting the experience in terms of a descriptive–interpretative perspective in order to facilitate a more in-depth understanding.

The data were collected using a semi-structured depth interview technique, and the narratives of students in addition to documentary analysis. The interview was conducted with HA's director, who also provided us with key working documents and reports from the centre. The narratives, which express experiences and opinions about their passage through HA, were provided by the management of the centre. We highlight the importance of HA's unpublished working document

for the analysis of this case: 'Huerto Alegre: Treinta años de educación ambiental y protección de la naturaleza' (Huerto Alegre: Thirty years of environmental education and nature protection). The complementary use of the interview and narratives, together with the documentary analysis, has allowed us to collect essential information. The interviews and the narratives were carried out from an emic perspective, in other words, from the director's own perspective and from the individuals who described their experiences. Using a narrative style, it focuses on the experience of one of its founders (Kvale, 2007). In the case of the documentary analysis, we present the perspective of the researchers (ethical perspective) (Denzin and Lincoln, 1984).

Analysis and Discussion Relating to the Case

Areas and lines of action: Daily living in HA

The key internal document contains the following sections. The first summarises the history of the HA Educational Centre and describes its main lines of action and its two centres (the Farm School and the Ermita Vieja Nature Classroom). It also offers some reflections on how the project sits within the field of EE.

Within the first field of action (Environmental Education and nature conservation), the organisation works in four major settings: the Farm School, the Ermita Vieja Nature Classroom, the oak wood of Sierra Almijara (for hiking) and in Sierra Nevada (for activities aimed at understanding and protecting the environment). This action springs from the view that 'the first condition, when taking care of something, is to knowing it, understanding it, loving it' (Huerto Alegre, 2013, p. 9). This reminds us of one of the principles of the EC in which the need for 'care for the community of life with understanding, compassion and love' is expressed. Boff (2012) also insists on the importance of the ethics of care as a precursor to all other behaviours. This author speaks of an inclusive epistemology when referring to the ethics of care. According to him, this constitutes a new way of inhabiting the Earth in the face of the current neoliberal capitalist paradigm of conquest and domination (Boff, 2002). The ethics of care is the basic ethical principle of the EC. In its Preamble, it is stated that:

> The choice is ours: form a global partnership to care for Earth and one another, or risk the destruction of ourselves and the diversity of life. Fundamental changes are needed to be made to our values, institutions, and ways of living.

This vision implies, as Noddings (2002) argues, a radical critique of neoliberal democracies, which means paying more attention to the necessary structural changes of which Huckle and Wals (2015) speak. The philosophy of care is not only a gender issue, but it also proposes a reconstruction of care as a human value (Comins-Mingol, 2015).

Each week groups of schoolchildren, accompanied by their teachers, go to the Farm School and the Ermita Vieja Nature Classroom. They carry out agricultural, livestock and product transformation tasks. Alongside these, it is possible to participate in other activities aimed at expanding and complementing the school curriculum. These include workshops on ecology, environmental resources, renewable energy and responsible consumption in addition to hiking through an oak forest, theatre, image techniques, recycling, creating audiovisuals (cineforum) as well as enjoying social gatherings, games, songs, storytelling and puppetry.

The self-care activities of young people in HA form part of their daily work and routine. They organise their bedrooms and have a healthy breakfast (Mediterranean style with fresh fruit, cereals, toast with olive oil and tomato), 'because food is also part of learning' (director). Following this, an assembly is held where they discuss what they have done the day before, what they have learned, things that have surprised them and experiences that they have had. Iván and Daniel, two students from a state school (sixth grade, 11–12 years old), said:

> We thank you for all your help in the workshops, rooms, dining room . . . We have learned to live together . . . We have learned a lot from you. We have had so much fun. Thank you for your patience and generosity (student 2).

Another student, from a higher grade, referred to the assemblies and the food with these words:
Here, we can also learn about the conflicts of life. In assembly, we discussed how to solve everyday problems . . . We also learned how to eat everything in a healthy way . . . Homemade food! How good everything was! . . . An experience like this can change our lives without us realising it (student 3).

After the assembly, the group is split into three: 'one group goes to the garden, another one goes to the farm animals and the third attends a workshop called Transformation of Natural Products. Many of the foods they consume are produced here' (director).

This is a way of understanding the origin of the products they consume, their transformation processes, their ecological quality and how they affect health.

> The contents on which we work depends on the age of the children. We explain things like organic farming, organic production, and intensive production, and the impact they have on the environment, and on health. We also explain how to purchase products, and what they have to pay attention to on the labelling. All this is in addition to trying to buy products produced in zero-mile of proximity. (director)

This connection with nature helps to improve students both physically and emotionally (Gill, 2014). In addition to the positive effects on health, a healthy diet and nature-based learning contribute to addressing the growing problems in developed societies, which are linked to hyperactivity, attention-deficit and 'Nature-Deficit Disorder', among others (Louv, 2005).

After lunch, there is some free time when pupils can rest, go to the library, explore the countryside . . . In the afternoon, workshops are held. In the ecology workshop, the streams, the forest and the ecosystem of the oak wood form part of the research. In the environmental resources workshop, these young people can learn a variety of crafts including wool spinning, how to make looms and working with clay. In addition, there are other workshops such as pressing, astronomy, music, language, laughter therapy, relaxation, conflict mediation and emotion management. Finally, in the evening after dinner, there is the opportunity to enjoy theatre, music, dances from all over the world, stargazing and trips to the forest.

> We investigate, discover, study natural science . . . , we experiment with water, we make soap, bath salts . . . Working as a team, we all bring different ideas and we live together. It is good to know each other better, build friendships and, as a result, it is easier to work and live together in the school. (student 4)

As can be seen, the educational experience of HA, which is located in a natural environment, is characterised by a pedagogical practice that seeks to challenge, and shake up, values, attitudes and behaviours rather than facilitate learning based on the mere transmission of knowledge. Its objective is to help the young participants to rethink their lifestyles so that there is a consistency with the values of environmental ethics (Sterling, 2004).

In line with Hedefalk, Almqvist and Östman (2015, p. 975), who support the approach of ESD that focuses on the interrelation between economic, social and environmental dimensions, a process has occurred whereby 'research has evolved from teaching children facts about the environment and sustainability issues to educating children to act for change'. A significant aspect of this approach relates to the student's involvement in an educational process that requires exploring through questioning, formulating hypotheses and confronting facts. This is carried out by way of a deliberative, critical group process in which findings are freely shared. It is interesting to note that

it involves the development of a form of learning based on several intelligences: cognitive, social and emotional, ecological and so on. HA's main focus is on practices that transcend the 'industrial worldview', a worldview that has influenced some of the curricular experiences linked to ESD (Jickling, 2009).

In the second area, referred to as the 'Training of teaching professionals', the will to share and discuss these educational experiences is developed. This objective has been present since the start of the cooperative. HA has an annual educational programme, called 'Educating Today', which is a reflection and exchange space on education and the environment aimed at teachers who come to the centre. The attendees are not only teachers, but also students from the different universities which embrace EE practices. This programme is also offered to those foreign centres, which participate in professional exchange programmes with HA.

The 'Design and Management of Materials and Programmes of Environmental Education' is the third line of action. A series of teaching materials, related to knowledge and conservation of the natural environment, has been produced and this is constantly updated. The critical analysis of the practice itself, and the confrontation with the experiences of other education professionals, has been the strategies used for the continuous improvement of these programmes. All this involves 'an internal system of self-training in which we are constantly questioning what we do: why we do it and the reasons for doing it . . .' (director).

Given that the HA project is not a closed proposal, rather a 'living' programme, the fourth area of action is 'Educational Research and Innovation'. This is based on strategic thinking that was related to reflection, confrontation and experimentation.

The HA educational project team defines its vision and practice in this way:

> Debate, self-criticism, continuing education, commitment to the creation and recreation of the project, passion for education and successfully completed projects, complementarity, exchange with other equipment, mutual support, cooperation, empathy, transparency . . . these are some of the values which our team aspires to. (Huerto Alegre, 2013, p. 13)

Objectives of the HA environmental education project

HA members start from the goals proposed in the Environmental Education Seminar of Belgrade, 1975. It is interesting to note that the language, which was used in this international seminar was much more explicit and categorical than the language currently used by the DESD with regard to the underlying problems related to the environment: economic model, global governance and political order (Huckle and Wals, 2015). In this conference, raising awareness about the environment and its problems, relating them to human interactions with the natural world and interactions between humans themselves, were identified as EE goals. The HA director puts it this way: 'what we do is raise awareness of how nature and humans are part of the same ecosystem, what relationships exist in the ecosystem, what links, what weaknesses prevail and, finally, what role we have to play in this context' (director). At a later stage, she highlights values and their environmental importance:

> How we develop attitudes, values, behaviours, and how they can be changed has the ultimate objective of helping to change the direction of this society, so that it can move towards more humanistic and sustainable goals and develop a new environmental culture (director).

Here, the instrumental conception of environmental education, as held by Sauvé (2005), is clearly overcome.

Based on this, the HA project defines these general goals with a series of *objectives:*

Knowing. Seeking to develop competencies in order to *understand* the environment. 'It is about understanding how this house works so that our activity in it favours life . . . To understand it we

need to immerse ourselves in it ... Life doesn't fit in a book' (Huerto Alegre, 2013, p. 19). These kinds of direct experiences foster a connection with nature, where it appears as 'our teacher'. Thus, an understanding of the flows of matter–energy is facilitated. Here, the real world (natural and social) constitutes the optimal environment for meaningful and critical learning (Stone, 2010; Stone y CFE, 2009). 'Coexisting in nature teaches us to respect the natural environment and the living beings that inhabit it' (student 4).

Learning to interpret. At a higher epistemological level, HA proposes the development of those competencies necessary to interpret the knowledge understanding acquired in the previous objective. Mere knowledge is not enough, methods and strategies forinterpreting nature are necessary in oder to raise awareness about environmental problems and the role that human beings play in them. The fruits of highlighting the relationships between environmental issues and the current mode of production and consumption open the way to a deeper understanding of what a sustainable lifestyle would be like. Thus, we commit to the idea that: 'We must develop, in an imaginative way, and apply the vision of a sustainable way of life locally, nationally, regionally, and globally' (Earth Charter, 2000).

Learning to participate. In education, it is not enough to know about, understand and interpret the environment. It is necessary to learn how to get involved and participate in the search for solutions to environmental problems. Therefore, we need to develop the competencies necessary for both involvement and participation in a 'conscious and critical way, a positive and constructive way ... in the protection and conservations of ecosystems' (Huerto Alegre, 2013, p. 20). It is important to emphasise that HA approaches the critical analysis of facts from a global perspective. Furthermore, they link it to responsible and supportive behaviours regarding the natural environment (Capra, 2005). As it is shown below, the educational values developed in their project (equality, participation, respect, solidarity) are approached from a transversal perspective and in different fields of education: 'coeducation, health education, consumer education, environmental education, education for peace ...' (Huerto Alegre, 2013, p. 20).

Contents and concepts of HA's educational practice

Regarding the contents and concepts promoted by HA in their educational practice the key ideas, which are supported by the principles of ecology, are as follows: *Life is diversity, Environment is an organised system, Environment is a changing system* and *A systemic concept of environment.* Life is an expression of diversity, but it is an interrelated diversity in which some elements depend on others to survive. Therefore, understanding the world is understanding the network of relationships that sustain life. However, contemporary education has taught us to separate, to isolate rather than to relate (Morin, 2005): 'Our world is a world of relationships and interdependencies; a change of thought is therefore necessary. Moreover, it must be one that understands reality in a global way, inserting the elements and problems in their context' (Huerto Alegre, 2013, p. 24). In this world of interactions, we, human beings, are part of a network of interrelationships with the rest of life (Earth Charter, 2000). We are dependent, but autonomous. 'True autonomy derives from the deep understanding of the ties that bind us' (Huerto Alegre, 2013, p. 24). In line with this: 'we know and also integrate the EC in our educational programmes, along with other documents such as the European Water Charter ...' (director). In this regard, a group of students said: 'Thanks to you we have expanded our knowledge of nature. This knowledge helps us to understand how some living beings depend on others' (student 5).

One of the fundamental elements of HA's educational approach is self-knowledge: 'who I am, how I interact and how I establish links with other people and the environment' (director). HA can be seen as a space where practices of public pedagogy (Gutiérrez-Schmich & Heffernan, 2016) are developed. These practices favour critical learning based on reflexivity about the self, the model of society we have and the model we want (Sandlin, 2010). Furthermore, HA provides learning spaces where resistance is encouraged and practised (Hill, 2002).

It is clear that the environment is an organised system and, in this sense, every human intervention has an impact on the whole. This impels us to respect and contextualise our actions. The EC talks about the precautionary principle regarding our actions. But the environment is a system that constantly changes. In it, there are displacements, cyclical, rhythmic, seasonal changes, in addition to relief modelling, population dynamics, human interventions, etc. This constitutes the elements of a systemic conception of the world (Capra, 2005).

The HA's learning tools

The HA educational project is based on a 'constructivist teaching model, which rests on the research and development of those personal competencies that contribute to the training of people able to get on their environment' (Huerto Alegre, 2013, p. 29). They start from the 'doing in order to understand' principle, whereby learning involves the discovery of, and confrontation with, the environment. Here, thought and action complements each other and produce a fact-based learning which leads to a higher level of understanding. HA is based on the constructivism of authors such as Ausubel, Novak and Hanesian (1978), whereby students are offered tools to build their own knowledge. This is achieved by means of a dialogue with the environment within an interactive, dynamic and participative process, and in interaction with others. Hence, this is an action-based learning. There is a cognition located as part and product of the activity, the context and the culture in which it develops (Packer and Tappan, 2001).

The HA works on the following learning procedures from a global perspective. There is 'The scientific method', which is an active non-passive way of approaching reality. This involves putting into practice a series of competencies such as hypothesis formulation, data search (its systematisation and organisation), drawing conclusions. It also includes 'Inventing, creating . . . to respond to different needs and problems', in order to create research and learning resources, explanatory models and other resources. In this context, HA has developed a very imaginative type of learning, based on an inductive knowledge of the world: 'what is happening here, how do things happens, what do I think, how can I improve things, what idea or hypothesis do I come up with regarding this' (director).

We find, in the cooperative's educational philosophy, an approach and move towards an ideal society. HA defines it as a more austere and less wasteful society: 'A world which is, say, richer in education, in culture, in music, in what makes us human . . . A more balanced and less ambitious world, governed less by finance, money and material goals' (director).

Complementing this model of an ideal society, and linked to it, HA proposes a model of person:

> What kind of person? What human potential could make this world possible? We need an individual who is able to develop all his/her intellect, all his/her senses, who is able to think, to get excited . . . I think that both in schools and in the education system we need to know where we are going. (director)

These last two statements connect with the following section of the EC's Preamble: 'We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more'.

Learning principles, values and environmental ethics

Consequently, and in line with the present discussion, it is about valuing and underlining 'Direct experience' of the natural environment as a basic objective of teaching–learning, favouring 'Participation and enjoyment'. HA believes that learning must be enjoyable, particularly when compared to traditional conceptions. All HA's activities are focused on motivating children to

participate in their own learning. This aims to ensure that work and play are enriching and engaging.

Thus, they distance themselves from the repetitive form of rote learning that takes place within the school classroom, in which the teacher is a mere transmitter of a 'canned,' 'closed' culture. The ability of students to create knowledge is recognised:

> We are not transmitters of information. We are the instigators of experiences which will enable children to generate their own knowledge and their own ideas. Then, they can share and contrast their experiences with others, and improve or reaffirm themselves (director).

Freire's dialogical action theory (2007) is reflected in all that has been said. In HA, dialogue and communication are values that constitute its didactic approach.

'The environment and the globalised perspective' will lead us to develop an inclusive point of view: 'The use of this global approach to learning will foster a more ecological and supportive awareness, a way of understanding reality in which everything and everyone has a place' (Huerto Alegre, 2013, p. 42). From this global perspective, HA introduces topics related to socio-environmental challenges in their educational programmes. These include global warming, issues related to waste disposal, recycling and the extinction of species. All this is related to confronting the 'consumerist and wasteful lifestyle' of the capitalist model.

> An important challenge is to create an awareness of this reality. Another key challenge is that of changing habits, even though changing habits is not enough. There must be an active involvement in social movements ... What can I do? (director)

'Turning conscience into action'. This is the new slogan celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the EC, and it also seems to be present in the values and principles that guide HA.

On the other hand, 'Critical reflection: assessment' appears to be a vital factor for the constant improvement of those programmes in which both teachers and students participate. HA has been changing significantly over the years as a result of more complex demands made by the attending teachers, who have shown a more systemic character. They request more specific activities and 'doing activities that embrace a deeper and more systemic view'. They want projects in which children can reflect on real situations, in addition to having experiences with which 'they can work and connect with the curriculum' (director). She continues: 'What has allowed us to create this process of change? Well, contact with other teaching professionals, understanding the school curricula, understanding socio-environmental problems ...' (director).

The teaching of these systemic processes is carried out in different ways. They include role-playing games, visual models of the functioning of a system, making visible causal links existing within the interrelationships of a set of elements. All this takes into account the different age groups of the children.

'Values and environmental ethics' are developed transversally in the design of their programmes and activities. This includes respect for the environment, gender equality, respect for diversity, learning about coexistence, peaceful conflict resolution, health, consumption and education.

At an organisational level, HA is a cooperative operating under the principle of self-management and the democratic management of the entire project: 'HA has a horizontal form of management, involving shared decisions. The assembly is where objectives are set' (director).

HA describes itself as 'a social economy cooperative' that follows the progressive and democratic principles of social justice and equality.

HA's entire organisational model, its community life, its assembly and democratic forms of decision-making, its cooperative practices, its responsible consumption, its ecological production clearly remind us of the lifestyle that would result from the realisation of Felber's (2012, 2015)

Economy for the Common Good. We hold that HA carries out a practice of 'prefigurative politics', given that the organisational forms, socio-educational modes and practices instituted here reflect the vision of the society they want to build outside the neoliberal framework (Flesher, 2014).

Conclusions

Neoliberalism has succeeded in colonising the nascent critical perspective of Environmental Education, which emerged at the Belgrade Seminar of 1975 (UNESCO-UNEP, 1975), incorporating market logic to ESD. Since the 1980s, neoliberalism has also shifted the focus of structural issues (economics, politics, power and citizenship) towards issues that are more in line with individual decisions relating to values, lifestyles and behaviours (Selby and Kagawa, 2010). These are 'recurrent' topics in the field of education. Seen in this way, ESD has assumed an instrumental function within the prevailing economic model. This is a function that displaces the power of education for change with the scope of individual decisions. As a result, it prevents ESD from considering a change in the current model of society. In UNESCO's ESD-related programmes, the relationships existing between the model of a capitalist political economy and environmental justice are not clearly visible.

This case study presents a dissident critical perspective that goes beyond mere 'ecological modernisation', which in the opinion of Læssøe (2010), still dominates a large part of ESD policy, thus overcoming the dominant hegemonic discourse. From Hargreaves' (1997) perspective, there is a need to connect educational institutions with their communities, enabling critical thinking with regard to structural issues: economic and political models, social and environmental issues, power relations . . . which link the local with the global. According to Huckle & Wals (2015, p. 493):

> There is an urgent need to restore a 'civic pedagogy' that 'rescues the notion of education as a human right' that can 'open the eyes to the democratization of societies', and 'train critical citizenship' in ways that 'establish bonds' with social movements.

This is seen as a crucial point of reference for many teachers and students, both locally, nationally and even internationally. As stated above, many educational centres refer to HA when seeking to amend the deficits of ESD's formal curriculum. All this involves the development of a different socio-educational practice that can change the mentality of individuals by building new ways of relating to nature and to each other and by promoting less transmissive and instrumental learning. It is about a form of learning, which is more firmly focussed on enquiry and experimentation. In the words of a former student, who was in HA in 1990:

> It was there, at HA, when I knew that I wanted to be a teacher. I wanted to be like those adults who combined research, creativity and a relationship with the Earth. I lived the community experience, a support system, the tools that facilitate a sustainable life sustainable life, caring for the environment and the importance of all the tasks that make that big things work. (student 1)

Critical theoretical approaches (Dobson, 2003; Huckle & Wals, 2015; Jickling & Wals, 2007; Kopnina, 2012; among others) emphasise the need for structural changes in power, politics, citizenship, the economic model; that is if we seek an ESD that is truly transformative. However, it is unrealistic to expect that this type of change will be easy in our current liberal democracies, taking into account the 'subtle' influence of neoliberalism. It is necessary, therefore, to create spaces of resistance where subjectivities beyond current power relations can be recreated. Foucault (1997) sees this construction of new subjectivities as a battleground, but recognises in it the advantage which means a practice of concrete, flexible freedom, which is located and contextualised. For

Slater (2015), these experiences favour the creation of 'revolutionary subjectivities', which distance themselves from the neoliberal being and neoliberal practice. This newly learned subjectivity can function as a mode of preparation that is capable of facilitating future responses to the growing pressure of the enormous socio-environmental challenges which all of us face.

The socio-environmental practices of HA are at the creative heart of these new resistant subjectivities. HA is a direct and locally contextualised experience that does not wait for the structural changes, which are discussed in this paper to occur by themselves. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that one of the fundamental principles of HA is the connection between local and global challenges. In this respect, we highlight the large number of networks that collaborate and coordinate with HA. As Huckle & Wals (2015) maintain, there is an urgent need to establish educational links with social movements, since it is not enough to change just our subjectivities, although this is crucial. It is also vital to understand that such experiences are:

> not so much a movement designed to fight against neoliberal ideology, but more a movement designed to build parallel critical alternatives . . . It is better to create alternatives that show that other types of institutions, democracy, learning, relationships are possible. In an implicit way, the new construction is a deconstruction and an alternative. (Martínez-Rodríguez and Fernández-Herrería, 2017, p. 144)

As stated above, HA is aligned with these approaches. Its educational philosophy, its learning practices, its integrative and contextualised education, in short, the structure and organisation of its entire socio-educational experience contribute to a deconstruction and the creation of exciting alternatives. This is in line with the principles of the EC and the Economy for the Common Good. We are, therefore, faced with an alternative vision within the context of the Community of Life. This paper describes an experience relating to a critical reconstruction of the subject that gives answers, in practice, to the much-needed theoretical debates about ESD. In addition, it presents an alternative vision to the mechanistic and anthropocentric cosmology of domination whose axis is accumulation. Faced with this, HA clearly highlights an ecocentric view with its core values of ethics of care and the sustenance of life. Working ESD from this perspective would facilitate structural changes in our society model.

However, as researchers, we did not find a systematic model of assessment at HA. This would allow HA members, first of all, to have a better knowledge of the real impact of their educational practice on those students who pass through the centre. The comments of students, families and teachers quoted by us in this paper did not come from an assessment process managed by HA, but were voluntarily submitted to us by the users themselves. It would be also interesting if a randomised follow-up of the participants was carried out. This would be in order to know if, for example, this experience had changed their worldview, their attitudes and values and their connection with nature, which are transversal elements in the EC. However, the fact that HA is not a public, but a private, entity must be taken into account. So, these requirements must be understood and nuanced. Still, we highlight the enormous value that centres such as HA have, from which a more active role could be demanded in the training, first of all, of educators and, in general, of young generations. From the perspective of a critical SDE, looking to the future means going beyond 'greening the economy'. Although this is crucial, we need to confront other structural issues in order to transform them starting from the perspective of the Community of Life. In this respect, the work and aims of HA are a small step in the right direction.

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Francisco Miguel Martínez-Rodríguez is a Professor (Assistant Professor) in the Faculty of Education of the University of Granada (Department of Pedagogy – Theory and History of Education). Currently, he works as a lecturer at the aforementioned university in the Degrees of Social Education and Pedagogy, as well as in different masters degrees. His main research lines are focused on Critical Pedagogy, Neoliberalisation processes, Earth Charter, Social Education, Precariousness and Practices of Resistance in Socio-Educational Contexts.

Alfonso Fernández-Herrería has a PhD in Pedagogy from the University of Granada, and BA and MA in Philosophy from the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas in Rome and the University of Valencia. Alfonso is a Professor in the Department of Pedagogy at the University of Granada. His research lines are Theory of Peace, Education for Peace, the Earth Charter, Critical Theories in Education and Neoliberalism, and Social Education. He is the founding member of the Spanish Association of Research for Peace and the Institute of Peace and Conflicts at the University of Granada.