

# Talking about Rural Environments, Education and Sustainability: Motives Positions and Practice of Grassroots Organizations

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**Abstract**— *The ecosocial crisis we are involved in for the last decades demands an urgent change in the way human being deals with nature. Arguably, the hegemonic economic system cannot continue the same for long, since it entails a kind of colonialism that exploits land, communities, and natural resources beyond the possibilities of restoration. It is also arguable that western positivist science has contributed to this system, both justifying productivity over sustainability and creating a symbolic distance with colonized Peoples all around the globe, justifying therefore the exploitation of the land. It has been defended the need for an epistemological dialogue with agents that directly manage the territory, as those of the countryside. This work starts a common path that is purposed for grassroots organizations from rural environments and higher educators based on service-learning. We aim to analyze the motives, positions, and cultural practices of those grassroots organizations. We have performed two focus groups on videoconference, with 15 participants from 14 organizations. Topics on the relationship between education, sustainability, and the rural environment were discussed and recorded to inductive-deductive content analysis. The study was open to the participation of people from the organizations in the whole research process. In the discussion, we can see a critic to an educational system at the service of the hegemonic economic system, as well as a purpose for the naturalization, humanization, and diversification of both the economic and educational systems. The rural environment appears as a field of opportunity to develop practices of interdependence and ecodpendence.*

**Keywords**— *service-learning, higher education, ecosocial crisis, grassroots organizations*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Research into the topic of what must be taught in higher education is already old, with questions being asked about how to adapt the education system to historical contexts that are radically different from those when the models were conceived. The need for a new ecology of learning is argued (Coll et al., 2020), with implications for changes in the very concept of education and the relationship of the education system

with other social agents, involving them in issues related to globalisation and the knowledge society, from a perspective of social justice (Manzano-Arrondo, 2011). Issues such as migration, technological change, job insecurity, or poverty (Paraskeva, 2020) are already incorporated into these discussions, but little attention has been paid to the climate emergency or ecosystem crisis (Bisquert i Pérez & Meira, 2020).

This is a weakness in research and educational practice since any issue associated with social justice and human rights is related to climate change's impacts and negative externalities and existing resources (Taibo, 2020). Furthermore, the very institutions of knowledge are directly implicated both in the justification of the economic models adopted, which have produced the current crisis and, in the ethnocentrism, and colonialism (Acciardi, 2020) responsible for the ecological damage in the peripheries of the system (García-Romero & Salido-Herba, 2022). We advocate that a new ecology of learning in higher education, capable of dealing with these implications, needs to reverse the epistemicide of cosmovisions and knowledge of dominated peoples (Acciardi, 2020), and enter into a dialogue with ways of understanding the present time that, in many cases, are more oriented towards the sustainability than western knowledge, since this last is imbued with productivist and universalist values (Herrero, 2014).

On the other hand, the higher education system needs greater contact with immediate educational needs, related not only to work, but also to social transformation (García-Romero et al., 2019). It is thus urgent to reconsider the education system that is not oriented towards the future as if it were a reproduction of the past (Matusov et al., 2016), but welcomes the educational needs that arise in practice and in the ecosocial emergency.

To respond to these two needs of dialogue and immediacy, it becomes fundamental that knowledge institutions (science and education) collaborate with other social agents in their environment. They need to assume a horizontal relationship, deconstructing their position of dominance and in which they can adopt strategies such as Service-Learning (McMillan et al, 2016) or participatory action-research (Moreira, 2020).

It is based on these assumptions that the University of Santiago de Compostela, the School of Education of the Polytechnic Institute of Viana do Castelo, and Avoar Association promote, since January 2021, the Community of Actions and Knowledge around Rural (hereinafter Aoredorural) (García-Romero & Salido-Herba, 2022). This community of practice (García-Romero et al., 2019) articulates higher education with rural collectives through Service-Learning practices, with the objectives of a) contributing synergies to the construction of sustainable initiatives in rural areas, b) building meaningful educational processes and c)

democratising knowledge (legitimising invisible rural knowledge), relying on Participatory action research (Moreira, 2020) and dialogical research (Matusov et al, 2019) as ways of creating collaborative and fair knowledge.

The present work is the witness to the beginning of the Aoredorural collaboration. Here, we perform conversations between different agents that allow us to problematize/conceptualize the phenomena that imply it in a horizontal way by identifying them and intervening to change those practices. For this purpose, two conversations were held, in a discussion group format, around concepts such as sustainability, education and rural environment, from which the first framework of the nascent community emerged.

## **II. NEW ECOLOGY OF LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE DIALOGUE**

The framework of new learning ecologies focuses on the need for educational transformation consistent with socio-historical change (Coll & Esteban-Guitart, 2020), in the context of globalization and the knowledge society. Currently, there are social changes related to the limits of the planet, which are already being felt, and which show an ecological crisis (Valladares et al, 2005), understood as eco-social (Herrero, 2014) and which will have strong implications for the economy and all our lives (Paraskeva, 2020). These changes cannot be understood solely as a result of climate change, as they are strongly affected by how different sources of power and populations question the impositions of the planet (Acciardi, 2020). It cannot be surprising that ecological impacts have an uneven distribution due to geopolitical issues, in which the countries of the opulent north (Taibo, 2020) externalise the negative results of their social-productive system. Evidence of this discussion is the forms of neocolonialism (Acciardi, 2020) such as the carbon emissions market or the so-called "sacrifice zones": parts of territories that incorporate important environmental damage under the justification of a greater public good, within the new industrial reconversion (as examples, strategic mineral extraction for the energy transition, energy production, ...).

Within this political framework, knowledge institutions (science and teaching) have historically responded to productivist interests (Paraskeva, 2020), both through the intentional intervention of the elites and through a situation of over-representation of them, which has

given rise to an ethnocentric conformism of knowledge systems (García-Romero & Salido-Herba, 2022). A falsely universal epistemology, imbued with what Herrero (2014) describes as the triple fallacy of Western philosophy: independence of mind over body; independence of humanity from nature and independence of people among themselves. Conditions that link knowledge to a colonialist, productivist and self-depredatory way of organising society (Acciardi, 2020).

It can be understood that epistemicide has eliminated and made invisible knowledge and ways of organizing with a greater focus on sustainability (Paraskeva, 2020), eliminating the knowledge and cosmovision of minority and small communities, which were involved in securing certain community goods and services, as well as in the cycles of feedback between knowing and doing of proximity in both economic relations and social organization. As Acciardi (2020) explains, the knowledge and ways of thinking of often dispossessed communities focus on integrating collective and individual rights, as well as community rights and means, and should ensure the guarantee of their orientation and of all their elements.

In a new ecology of learning, higher education needs to be oriented towards sustainability, making it necessary to reverse epistemicides as far as possible. Also, legitimising and reclaiming knowledge from the peripheries of the system, which has been pushed away/destroyed from knowledge institutions (Paraskeva, 2020), both for practical reasons and for reasons of justice. The just situation must begin with equal rights between voices (Bajtín, 2000), allowing real dialogue to be established. This does not imply replacing western positivist science with other epistemological frameworks (Paraskeva, 2020). On the contrary, the orientation is to legitimate the different voices and traditions of knowledge in a mutual scrutiny and keeping in touch with evidence and argumentation, far from impositions of any kind of dominant authority or mysticism (Matusov, 2020).

### **2.1 SERVICE-LEARNING AS A DUAL OBJECT**

Dialogue cannot occur in a vacuum, by simple contact. This needs mutual interests (Matusov et al., 2016) trying to find a common object: which can be a theme or an action.

Based on cultural-historical theory it is then argued that sustained collaboration between two systems, through a common object, can lead to systemic change. By confluencing two systems - a community's way of organising human activity for concrete purposes, in which specific norms, social meanings and artefacts exist - an intersection between the two or a mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1996) is created that is new and can imply changes in the two previous systems. For example, this may be the case of an educational institution and a rural social action entity, with different norms and objectives but sharing the same objective, being challenged to negotiate and even redefine meanings. McMillan and colleagues (2016) argue at length that Service-Learning in higher education can function as a dual object (combining objectives from one and the other system) that becomes a common object of intersecting space, with a referent centred on a new organisation of activity and learning different to the two original contexts.

We understand service-learning as a way of jointly articulating social participation and formal education (Peixoto et al., 2021), in which students approach learning through joint participation with collectives. In this way of organising, there are objectives of both action and learning and also referring to both the teaching institution and the one carrying out the action. Therefore, it may constitute an intermediate space in which an interproblematisation between agents takes place and dialogue may be established.

In addition to the potential for dialogue, Service-Learning also enables direct feedback between the learning process and the educational needs that emerge from social action, which is essential at a time of rapid change and uncertainty about the future (Matusov et al, 2016). Without abandoning a broad and long-term perspective, a new ecology of learning in the ecosocial crisis will have to be oriented towards the immediate, establishing feedback between what needs to be done and what needs to be learned (García-Romero & Salido-Herba, 2022).

Service-Learning gives students the opportunity to establish this cycle in their educational experience. Given the proximity between the learning process and its social end, it can solve the problem of educational alienation (Taylor, 2017) in an authentic learning process. On the other hand, the knowledge referents are diverse (Laluzza & Macías, 2020), they are no longer

only in the curriculum or in the teachers, but also in the people with whom the action is shared in the territory and in the community.

## **2.2 INNOVATIVE INITIATIVES IN RURAL AREAS AS AN OPPORTUNITY**

With respect to whom to establish a concrete dialogue with, it is important to directly look people, collectives, and communities who are working on the urgency of the eco-social crisis and who constitute the knowledge around it. When referring to the importance of legitimising historically delegitimised knowledge and engaging in dialogue with epistemologies of the south (Acciardi, 2020) it becomes relevant to do so in a relationship of contextualised proximity. It also becomes necessary to understand that the periphery of the system is also built with the interior of northern territories and that rural communities hold much knowledge forgotten by knowledge institutions, which have been historically accumulated, oriented towards the sustainability of territories and communities (Quiroga, et al., 2019).

Outside the walls of knowledge institutions, grassroots collectives of both a social, economic, and environmental nature have a long tradition (Díaz-Geada, 2020) in the sustainable handling of territories and communities (Taibo, 2020). These are experiences closely linked to agroecology, but which transcend it, applying a philosophy of multifunctional and extensive uses (Carreira & Carral, 2014) to other social needs, as are the cases of Rural Development Centres (Paül, 2013), or Innovative Productive Experiences (Quiroga et al, 2019), among others.

In the plurality of these experiences, it becomes important to highlight common aspects of many of them, which makes them spearhead about the orientation towards sustainability and justice. This context refers to grassroots initiatives from associations or cooperatives created from the bottom up (Paül, 2013). Over time, they present a focus that goes beyond action, finding themselves committed to claiming popular knowledge of the rural, historically stigmatised or ignored by elites (Franquesa, 2019). These social movements articulate with the responses to the needs, which the ecosocial crisis imposes on us from a perspective that intends to link action and knowledge and that transcends the rigid walls of positivist-western thought, by means of the heritage of the rural environment. It may be precisely these initiatives to

which the school system can turn if it wants to begin to respond to the educational-social needs of our future times.

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Research design and objectives**

The present work starts the action-research process of AredordoRural's and materializes through the realization, qualitative analysis, and visibility of results of two conversations that initiate around the community.

It responds to the objectives of knowledge and intervention as: a) To start a place of dialogue and collaboration between the educational system and social collectives in rural areas through Service-Learning; b) To define theoretical assumptions, problematisation of reality and expectations regarding the relationship between sustainability, education, and rural areas.

Knowledge is elaborated from the voices of the participants themselves (Caetano, 2019) and oriented towards decision-making (Moreira, 2020) about practice and knowledge as interdependent (Mcmillan & Schumacher, 2006). Throughout, research findings are not approached as finalised, but rather, as starting points for future dialogues that give rise to new knowledge and practice, in the sense of dialogic research (Matusov et al., 2018).

### **3.2. Participants**

For this first study, people from the rural activism field were invited to talk to prioritise the problematic phenomenon of the interests of voices rooted in the territory.

Hence, 14 organisations of the Galician scope agreed to participate in these first two focus groups with the following profiles: a) In the legal scope: one foundation, three cooperatives, four neighbor collectives, and six associations. b) In the type of activities: six integral rural development collectives (occupied of the community and the territory), four artistic and/or cultural, and four of management of the territory.

### **3.3. Procedures**

3.3.1. Data collection. The conversations were performed in an online manner, following the modality of discussion groups. They were recorded, after explicit consent was requested from the participants, and were

published online for their dissemination and access to any of those involved and at any time. These two focus groups will be differentiated in the article between:

"Face A"

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRKcnznMKsl>) : Agrocuir, Avoar, CDR Portas Abertas, Eco dos Teixos, Fraga dos Mouros, Obaixoulla.gal, Proxecto Carballiza, Rural C, Tempo da aldea.

"Cara B"

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoqeLbxYKQ4&t=375>) : Boa vida Rural, Euroeume, Pobo de Tronceda, Amarelante, Fundación Montescola, Carne Freire, Fousas ao Monte.

Subsequently, the recordings were transcribed verbatim for content analysis using Atlas.ti software. The narratives are identified following the pattern (colectivo\_Cara).

### 3.3.2. Phases of analysis.

An inductive-deductive process was followed with a triangulation in its various moments.

- Phase 1- Formation of the roadmap (first problematization): After a first theoretical approach, the questions focused on the themes: education in relation to sustainability and the rural environment; link between rural development and sustainability; social action fields of the different collectives and expectations around AredordoRural.
- Phase 2-Emergent analysis and triangulation with the participants: Identification of the most relevant themes. Parallel work between researchers was carried out with this analysis.
  - An online document was made available to the participants. This written text was categorized from the topics of the conversation and put up for discussion, turning it into an online collaborative document for the participants.
  - From the identified topics a codebook was created consensually dialogued with all participants.
- Phase 3- Deductive analysis: With the codebook, a deductive coding of the text was developed in order to ensure the exhaustibility of the information, until theoretical saturation

point was reached. The work was carried out in parallel by the three researchers and subsequently the different files were joined in the Atlas.ti software for the triangulation and debugging of the narratives.

- Phase 4 - Interpretative: Once the content of each category was known, an interpretative analysis of the relationships between each code and its membership in families was carried out, giving rise to the results.
  - At this moment a draft of this article was made available open to comments to the participants in the conversation.
- Phase 5- Dissemination: Part of the results were made known in AredordoRural in a joint session, serving as useful elements for the stimulation and collaboration of students, teachers and collectives opening these results to new ideas. The figures used in this session can be visualised in: <https://www.arredordorural.org/saberes/resultados-graficos-das-conversas-arredor-do-rural>

### 3.3.3. Validity and reliability.

This work entailed an ethic and emic perspective, as in the research team of the analysis, there are people who participate in rural social movements and elements who do not. Supported by this double perspective, a triangulation between researchers was carried out (Flick et al, 2004), working in parallel, contrasted in three moments: end of the inductive analysis; end of the deductive analysis and; interpretative phase.

Triangulation was undertaken with participants, ensuring access throughout the analysis process, and maintaining fluid and available communication throughout. Research progress was relayed, and the draft was shared before submission for publication, open to suggestions from participants in the conversation.

## IV. RESULTS

Supported by cultural-historical theory, a reading on the learning process conveyed to social participation was carried out (Peixoto et al., 2019). Thus, it was considered that three qualitatively distinct dimensions emerge from the themes: The motives;, which correspond to what gives meaning and is the motor of people's action and practice; the socio-political

positions: the places they occupy in relation to the perceived reality and in relation to their motives and from which daily practices are developed; and the socio-cultural practices: direct and manifested in a given context.

These three dimensions are dynamic and diffuse among themselves, since social participation and conceptions or meanings develop in an integrated and interactive manner, transforming each other (Wenger, 2001), as represented in figure 1. In this way, motives guide practices but are also modified by the experience of those involved, a process in which positions are mediated and modified.

The organisation of these results responds to a desire to make a subjective, complex, diffuse and multidirectional reality more discrete and intelligible. Its presentation intersperses the voices of the researchers with those of the participants in the conversations. This creates a continuous text with the intention of transferring, for those who read, the conversation as directly as possible, placing the voices of the participants on the same level of legitimacy of knowledge.

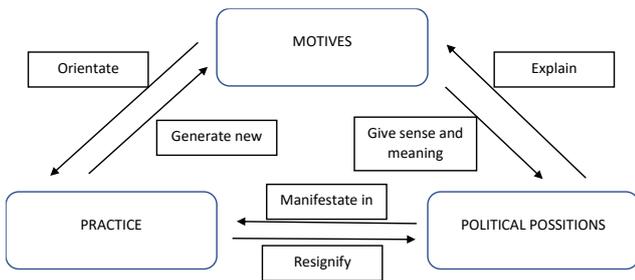


Fig.1: Relations between motives, socio-political positions and cultural practices.

#### 4. 1. Motives

This category Encompasses that which gives meaning to the participants' positions and mobilises their actions. The problems affecting the rural environment, the values with which the participants identify, and the expression of their goals are illustrated in Figure 2.

#### 4. 2. Problems

One of the problems that emerges clearly and forcefully is also probably the most widespread in popular public discourse, is that of depopulation: "There are no people" (Amarelante\_CaraB), situation us in an "a very agonizing moment [...] almost at the point of no return" (Amarelante\_CaraB).

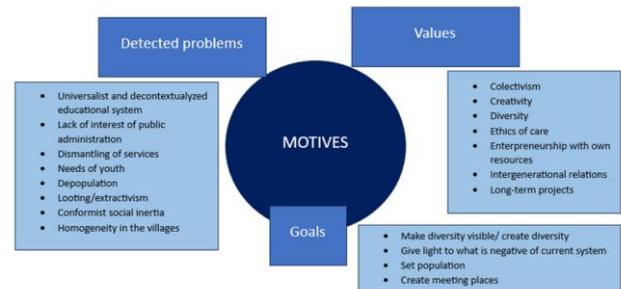


Fig.2: Reasons mentioned by the participating collectives

This problem is related to the perception of a lack of work opportunities and of a life project, which during the conversations is discussed whether it is real or a fallacy: "there are no people because they can't make a living in the world, we live in. What a lie! They don't see it" (Amarelante\_Cara B). This perception links with a universalist education system that does not focus on environmental resources, but rather on people trained for work and projects outside the rural areas. This lack of connection presents itself as a problem related also to the difficulty for people to build life projects related to the issue of sustainable territories. "Here there are all the elements to support and maintain life. What would the city be without the territories? In schools, they don't talk about the territories, and it seems that the city is the best [...] how can we think that the children will stay in our territory if we are teaching them that they should leave?" (Tronceda\_CaraB).

The relationship between the difficulty of maintaining the territory and depopulation manifests itself in other problems such as forest fires - which motivate the existence of projects such as Amarelante and Fousas ao Monte - and which are linked to the lack of human management of a mountain that was once exploited and, if neglected, can become very inflammable. A damage to the territory relates to abandonment, but also to "the looting [espòlio], the invasive tree plantations that are a danger and are unsustainable" (Montescola\_CaraB), "because if there are no people there are no supervisors of what is happening in the countryside, they are all mining megaprojects, all wind projects, eucalyptus plantations ..." (Amarelante\_CaraB). The management of the territory qualified as extractivist, is related to another type of abandonment, the "void that there is on the part of the administrations" (Obaixoulla\_CaraA), linked to a conformist social inertia, and which allows the continuity of this abandonment by not making the

problems of the rural environment visible, so that "a good part of the citizenship is comfortable or is in agreement with this productive system [...] to work on the subject of food was relatively easy, it was going to a [school] centre and give a lecture but to change the ways of eating in the canteens, with local products and so on. It was practically impossible" (Euroeume\_CaraB).

This is reflected mainly in the reduction of services for the population such as "internet connection, or public transport, which is totally denied" (Avoar\_CaraA), "it seems that they want to end transport to finish breaking us" (Obaixoulla.gal\_CaraA). "When we first asked for internet they asked us what we wanted it for if we were dedicated to chestnuts" (Amarelante\_CaraB). Also in leisure options, for example, for children who "depend on their parents to be able to play together a bit. The 14/15 year olds can't stay after school ..." (BoaVidaRural\_CaraB), as well as "the projects in the social area [...] have become more and more important, to compensate for the lack of services experienced by the population in our villages" (PortasAbertas\_CaraA). The problem of access to housing also appears "one of the biggest problems we have" (Tronceda\_CaraB) which is very difficult for those who try to live in villages for lack of public initiatives to promote them.

Finally, the issue of diversity is addressed "there is no diversity in the rural areas, that everyone goes the same way" (Fraga dos Mouros\_CaraA) and some of the participants discuss and argue that "of course there is diversity in the rural areas! because there always, everywhere, is" (Agrocuir\_CaraA). Depopulation and ageing, along with the difficulty of mobility, also point to the problem of covering specific needs of young people "for an 18, 19 year old boy who is not a very special boy, in principle there wouldn't be any needs here because there are no services" (Tronceda\_CaraB) "the 14/15 year olds after school can't stay or go for a walk [...] going from one village to another can mean an hour and a half" (Boavida\_CaraB). This problematic is aggravated by the difficulty of "going beyond certain layers of society that already share more our way of working" (Agrocuir\_CaraA), and disseminating the initiatives that the groups themselves launch to promote diversity and meet different needs. This difficulty also affects the field of education "because schools near by don't want to participate or are not interested" (Montescola\_CaraB).

#### 4. 3. Values

The idea of collectivism or collaborative practices emerges as central to the moral compass: "the fundamental thing is the feeling of community and the strength that the community has" (Montescola\_CaraB). It outlines a collective notion "we say as a People, as a society, as a tribe, as a village, as a family" (Carme\_CaraB) that defines a broad human relationship, integrating leisure and economy "because having friends and friends not only with whom to have or take advantage of the resources that there are in our local hill, for example, but also with whom to make a party and can be comfortable" (Carme\_CaraB). In the specific economic dimension concerning "cooperativism, the whole theme of the common good that has been there for many decades and many centuries" (Agrocuir\_CaraA). The emphasis is therefore on "getting out of the fantasy of individuality" (Troceda\_Cara B), "weaving the collectivity [...] that this is what fills us up" (Carme-CaraB).

These community values are supported by an ethics of care, since it has to do with interdependence as people and with the affective dimension of the community "to see that another way of living together, of caring for oneself is possible" (BoaVida\_CaraB), "to claim the short distance, the proximity of collective projects, and the care that we are all in need of each other" (Agrocuir\_CaraA). Care that also links with the concept of ecodpendence "I intend it to be from the perspective of sustainability of the environment, [...] a project linked to life" (Tronceda\_CaraB). Ideas of interdependence and ecodpendence that connect "with a feminist idea" (RuralC\_Cara A) and specifically ecofeminist.

In this idea it has a salient relevance to include the whole community in an active and intergenerational way. There is claim for a "two-way" education (Obaixoulla.gal\_CaraA) in which the different people are actively involved, of the need to "recover knowledge and listen to older people [...] many girls and boys do not have the opportunity to live with much older people" (PortasAbertas\_CaraA).

Finally, the need to undertake with the community and territory's own resources is emphasized: "to strengthen the cultural ecosystem already living in each place, which only has to be put to work" (RuralC\_CaraA) and "to make the project grow, based on the use of the village's own resources" (Tempo d'Aldea\_CaraA), linked to the care of the environment "a project which wants to respect

nature and value and use in a respectful manner" (EcodosTeixos\_CaraA).

It emerges as fundamental to respect the rhythms of nature and society, creating long-term projects "I realize a life project and for my whole life" (Fraga dos Mouros\_CaraA) and the small scale "the importance of the small, is who knows one of the keys" (Agrocuir-CaraA) "we learn that the micro is a failure, when not, really for me the micro ... well, that's where sustainability is" (PortasAbertas\_CaraA).

#### 4.4. Goals

One of the ultimate goals of most collectives is to "attract new people" (Tronceda\_CaraB), "generate future, generate employment and fix population"(Tempo d'aldea\_CaraA). Which they try to approach from different angles and visions.

One of them is the creation of spaces and activities "where to share the day to day and get together, to see what others are doing"(Boavida\_CaraB), understand that life in the territory and the connection to it goes beyond the settlement and also concerns the possibility of "sharing the affections and the day to day"(Agrocuir\_CaraA), "to build feeling of tribe, or any way we want to call it" (Carme\_CaraB). Emerging from this need for meeting spaces and community building, and also respecting the needs of young people, a goal which was also pointed out as relevant is "that there are more different people, more diversity, that everyone fits in" (FragadosMouros - CaraA), "to claim sexual and gender diversity in the rural areas" (Agrocuir\_CaraA), understanding that the so-called communities have to be "inclusive, diverse, and there must be a place for everyone" (RuralC\_CaraA) in order to be really alive "the more diversity there is... the better because the more proposals there will be the more we will learn and the more we will feel included" (Agrocuir\_CaraA).

Complementary to proposing new horizons is the goal of "making visible everything that is negative in the current model and that caused damage and why" (Montescola\_CaraB).

#### 4.5. Socio-political positions

This refers to the dimension that results from the explicit intersection between what is defined as motives and the actions (or activities or practice) in which the participants are socially involved. We find criticisms of the development and educational model as proposals for new models and, at the same time, expectations

about what can be done in AredordoRural. Figure 3 summarises them.

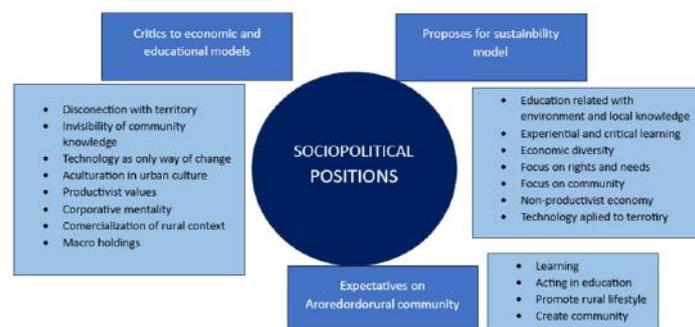


Fig.3: Socio-political positions

#### Criticism of the models of economic and educational development

On the one hand, and in a central way, the same notion of development associated with productivity is discussed "I can't say what I mean by development, but I know that I reject what is generally understood nowadays [...] this depredational vision of development, which is very much associated with productivity"(Obaixoulla\_CaraA). In some cases the reformulation of the concept is sought "there are aspects in which we have to grow, and others in which we have to decrease" (Tronceda\_CaraB), while in others "we are already starting from the idea that sustainability and development are contradictory terms" (Montescola\_CaraB), since the very concept of development, including sustainability, has been colonized by a "business mentality [. . . faith in the contract"(Tronceda\_CaraB), and which relates to productivity and efficiency, and irremediably to macro-exploitations. "The worst concept that came out of the headwaters was sustainable development" (Amarelante\_CaraB)

It links this mentality with macro exploitations, which are criticised for competing with small community and endogenous initiatives, becomes harmful to the territory at the level of negative externalities of pollution and finally, thinks of the global market and does not revert profits to the populations that need inputs. "Macro farms, in addition to polluting the territories, end up expelling small farmers who survive less and less, because they occupy spaces and territories [...] economic spaces too (Tronceda\_CaraB). The macro-exploitation model, therefore, is outlined in the

perspective of some of those involved as a form in itself "plundering projects and polluting projects" (Montescola\_CaraB), as is the case of macro wind projects, mining, or slate, which imply "totally aggressive and polluting territory management" (EcodosTeixos\_CaraA).

A relationship is established between this mentality and way of producing and the promotion of productivist values of education, with competitiveness "you have to be the best, you have to get very good grades, you have to step on people's toes. Even if there are teachers who fight against it [...] what counts are the final grades and not the collaboration" (Montescola\_CaraB), the individualism "that lack of training in human needs that we have, no? In that part but collaborative, in listening to my needs and respecting the needs of the other" (BoaVida, CaraB), the accumulation "Living well is a concept that has to do with the current economic system, is to say, live well who has a lot of money, who is very successful" (Carme\_CaraB) or disregarding the common "What we are taught is that what you have to do is look for a job where you have a boss, and the problems are theirs, the boss's, and not yours, and work even the right for a salary and that's the happy life" (Carballiza\_CaraA).

Participants that common social values that are linked to acculturation in the existing model of urban life and production, "with students of second of bachelor [17/18 years], out of 80 people, only three saw a future here, in the rural world, it means that the education system continues to deform their idea of success" (PortasAbertas\_CaraA). "I was never allowed to be a carpenter at school, which was what I wanted to be [...] I didn't receive these references and these models that were around me, of people who did things, who lived from the countryside, who lived from being in small places... the message was go away" (Avoar\_CaraA). It is noted that this acculturation is also associated with the "diversity of the urban, the more we still have to start explicitly questioning these things because if we put ourselves into analysis we could also say that in the end, in the cities, there is a brutal homogeneity, and the ways of life are very similar for a lot of people" (Agrocuir\_CaraA).

This acculturation goes hand in hand with the universalist perspective of the educational model, which "sectorializes knowledge, distorts the very idea of what you are in your environment" (Amarelante\_CaraB), decontextualizes the knowledge immediately necessary

to relate to the environment "in a super-rich territory, children don't leave the classrooms [...] are prepared to be managers of a company and cannot think about the territory and develop projects in the territory" (Tronceda\_CaraB), and therefore of local and community knowledge, making them invisible "and the elderly around them, who are dying, and dying as if they had been fools all their lives" (Tronceda\_CaraB), "life in the rural areas is totally... does not appear at all in the curriculum" (Montescola\_CaraB). This perspective makes the management and decision-making of people in their territory unviable, constituting a barrier to the exercise of their sovereignty "the Forest Neighbours Communities<sup>1</sup> what they offer in this sense is that they are sovereign to decide about the forest[...] a very strong example that we have in our territory is that we go, it is not dealt with at any time" (Montescola\_CaraB). The only option conceived is to settle in the labour market linked to the urban "in regular education, at the end of basic, they teach you to go away from here, from the rural area, in this case, so that you can develop in certain sectors, so to speak, but not in life" (Obaixoulla\_CaraA).

The disillusionment of technological advance as the only solution to the current problem of ecological crisis is shared as a critique. Firstly, the absence to the energy transition model is problematized "children study renewable energies but they don't know that in a year or less they will have 50 windmills of 200 metre here colonizing the mountains." (Ecosdosteixos\_CaraB). At the same time, negative externalities are pointed out that remain in the territory as responsible while energy benefits are globalised, turning the rural area into a sacrifice zone.

Digitalization is also discussed as a way to meet the needs of the rural population "not everything can be mediated by a machine, not for everything you can use a screen [...], people need to have contact, [...] it seems to us who live in rural areas that the solution to all our problems of isolation and lack of services, and others, will be solved through new technologies" (PortasAbertas\_CaraA). A way of managing that is also highlighted as exclusive relates to the "digital crack [...] in my day-to-day life and I see that many people are being

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<sup>1</sup> Here, by Forest Neighbour Communities this participant is referring to "Comunidades de Montes Veciñais en Man Común", a type of common property over 20% of land in Galicia, where the property are from the neighbours as a collective and decisions are taken in assembly

excluded from this society" (PortasAbertas\_CaraA), with "age differences, gender differences, and people at risk of exclusion from other areas..."(Avoar\_CaraA). Arguments are made for harnessing technologies without reducing everything to them.

Finally, there are also critical voices against the promotion of landscape tourism without cultural awareness that "commercializes our rural area. And I mean, it is an idealistic vision"(Obaixoulla\_CaraA). Here it is a nuisance to consider communities and their territories not as political subjects but as objects of consumption, which has a political impact on the invisibility of community voices and, economically, on the unique promotion of specific sectors "which was to mechanise the intensive primary and livestock sector. And a bit of tourism. And a community needs much more than that to be alive" (RuralC\_CaraA).

### **Ideas for a new sustainability model**

The proposals are mainly oriented towards abandoning economic production as the centre of development, if not as one more element of an "integral and balanced development, emotional development, community development [...] social, educational, environmental and economic development, because it has to be economic (Amarelante\_CaraB). Participants highlight that sustainability must encompass the environmental and social aspect, which needs to focus on notions of "needs and rights" (Agrocuir\_CaraA). "Development has to move towards ensuring quality of life for all people, and I think it has to be crossed with a rights-based approach [...] to live with dignity."(Euroeume\_CaraB).

This implies a change in the conceptualisation of the economy, understanding it as serving a social ecosystem "the education, transport, culture and social development of a territory [...]the cultural ecosystem that already lives in each place, that just needs to be put to work" (RuralC\_CaraA). The educational level aims at teaching "other economies" and economic diversification, which can emancipate themselves from the mercantilist and productivist vision and "understand that the people who are making money can have another type of relationship with the territory and with the people who work" (Amarelante\_CaraB).

These other economies are related to the "vision of decline and that we have to stop consuming so much, reuse and so on... " (Montescola\_CaraB), of rethinking the needs and dynamics of relationships with nature "de-ecommunize life, that is, that life is not subject to

economic criteria, but to natural criteria, logical criteria and that respond to the cycles and life in the rural world and in nature."(Tronceda\_CaraB), and that take as a reference the rural tradition "that has a lot to do with the traditional Galician culture that we already have and with the rural [...]. In a way that was not overly comprehensive... so there needs to be a sharing of resources and tasks" (Amarelante\_CaraB). It also implies a focus on the learning of traditional knowledge "to make traditional management visible, the place for children, that we take them to other generations" (Obaixoulla\_CaraA).

It thus constitutes a link between education and sustainability in a direct way: "thinking how we have to do to direct what we have to live and what we have to do to sustain ourselves"(Montescola\_CaraB), conveyed by the relationship between people who learn, the rest of the community and the environment "that are bidirectional but also experiential that put themselves in the skin and live and enjoy the activities "(EcodosTeixos\_CaraA), and linked with the recovery of heritage knowledge "understanding everything that the territory supports, that is to say, from cultural, socio-cultural factors, the management of resources, wisdoms, as well as traditions ... ." (Obaixoulla\_CaraA). This idea presents the proposal of Aredordorural, Service-Learning, which is shown to channel it, which leads us to stop at the expectations that have been shared in relation to what the network should be.

### **Expectations**

The expectations of Aredordorural are related to the creation of a community and support networks for these ideas, as well as the possibility of acting in education in the promotion of life in rural areas.

As regards acting in education and in the promotion of life in rural areas, they are understood as interconnected, in a field that is complicated because "the aspects that we consider relevant and that need to be developed are very difficult to develop in the educational field. So, any help that we can give each other, to try to improve this a little bit, I think would be fundamental" (Montescola\_CaraB). They also consider interesting the methodology of "having students or participants who can actively participate and absorb some of what we do and learn from what they can contribute"(Euroeume\_CaraB). Just as the educational change makes it possible to turn the gaze towards the rural environment and, at the same time, knowledge of

the rural environment, it opens paths for the promotion of educational processes related to sustainability.

On the other hand, expectations related to the construction of a broad network are presented. "I am here because it seems fundamental to me to weave and consolidate this community ... that we can share all this knowledge, all these actions, and that little by little they support us"(TempoD'Aldea\_CaraA), "there are many long-standing projects everywhere, no? we are already working in a different way, we are already proving that these things can be done differently, so the next step is how to unite more" (Agrocuir\_CaraA). Another motivation for the meeting has to do with mutual learning "my need is often to meet more people, more experiences that could shape it, that it is possible to do things differently"(Boavida\_CaraB), "learning to help us pass on our knowledge"(FousasaoMonte\_CaraB).

#### VI.6. DEVELOPED PRACTICES

This is where we reflect on the different spheres of activity, as well as on the networks and relationships already in place and the contradictions or

inconsistencies that arise in practice. Those found in the conversations are presented in figure 4.

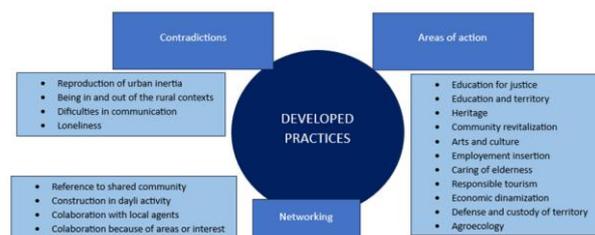


Fig.4: Practices developed by the collectives

#### Areas of action

In line with the proposal of the visibility of diversity and the diversification of the economy, we find great breadth in the activities developed by the collectives participating in the conversation. Table 1 summarises the different scopes of action

Table 1: Fields of action in which the participating collectives are active

Education for justice	Education in care and justice, with projects such as "awareness workshops" on topics such as "equality", "feminism", collaboration"
Education and territory	To foster the relationship between education and the territory with cases such as the collaboration of mountain communities with ANPAS, the "school villages" as well as environmental awareness (respect for nature in general and the common mountain in particular)
Heritage	References to actions on making known and interpreting "all that the territory supports, that is to say, from cultural, socio-cultural factors, the management of resources, the wisdoms, in short the traditions...."
Community Dinamisation	Promotion of "meeting spaces" and "time together", both in terms of participation in decision-making, leisure and shared care.
Artistic-cultural	Relating to the construction of cultural projects that recognise and expand the diversity around the rural area.
Employment promotion	Social and work support for neighbours.
Care for the elderly	Fewer are aimed exclusively at the elderly, otherwise most are intergenerational since the first encroachment on the elderly.
Responsible tourism	Promoting awareness about where you come from, and learning from people
Rehabilitation of houses	Reconstruction of ruins and rehabilitation of abandoned dwellings.
Economic promotion	Focused on the promotion of economic activities that allow the settlement of the population, work and social labour and social sustainability, ways of diversifying income and economic activities, capacity building and project development assistance.

Defence and custody of the territory	Actions aimed at the recovery and balance of ecosystems per se: orchard recovery, eradication of invasive species...
Agroecology	Projects related to economic production in a balanced way with the ecosystem based on the management of own resources in a non-harmful way.

### Relationships and networks

Given the important community and integrative perspective that was shared in the conversations, relationships are a central dimension in the practices developed, the importance of "strengthening ties"(Montescola\_CaraB), which allow to focus on the community perspective and channel joint action. Some of these relationships are already prior to the collectives, coming from a previous historical journey, as is the case of the relationship of Fousas to the hill that are "closely linked to the community of the hills"(FousasaoMonte\_CaraB). Others are being constructed in the practice itself, mainly regarding the scope of action of community revitalization "with the associative fabric, with the local commerce, and with the rest of the population"(Agrocuir\_CaraA). Relationships that have to do with the reiterated "feeling of community, of modern tribe, which we can call parish"(Carme\_CaraB) or the "mutual support" (Montescola\_CaraB).

In parallel, through actions in certain areas, more strategic relationships or alliances emerge, such as networks formed with local or community agents "with schools and with AMPAS and others, and offering a space where you can work with your hands and feet on the ground basically"(Montescola\_CaraB), "for example, with the association of Rural Women here in Bamio, they are helping us" (Obaixoulla\_CaraA), and also by acting at broader territorial levels, as is the case of REAS, COCEDER, Terra and Xente, which means that the participants already know each other because "we have already been together in various situations" (Montescola\_CaraB).

### Contradictions

Finally, contradictions emerge of which the majority are related, precisely, to the field of relationships. Some participants share the feeling of being inside and outside the rural environment "it is not unusual to be trying to do something in the rural world but living in Santiago" (Avoar-CaraA) and the "reproduction of urban lifestyles" (Agrocuir-CaraA).

Other participants refer to the feeling of loneliness, or the lack of support experienced by the community "sometimes we feel alone or misunderstood" (RuralC\_CaraA), both by the depopulation itself "there are no people, I'm the youngest and I'm 35 years old" (Fraga dos Mouros\_CaraA) and by the rejection of the new by the communities "they see us as weirdos" (Ecodosteixos\_CaraA), "I notice that I shock a lot [. ...] and I see that here in rural areas because the people with whom I live are very afraid of the unknown, because in general they criticise things because they don't know them". (Fraga do Mouros\_CaraA). Associated there is a bidirectional issue "that many times we also put-up barriers, and we don't put ourselves in their shoes..."(Obaixoulla\_Cara A) and strategies are shared to solve it "starting to talk to people, go and let them tell stories, take an interest in them" (RuralC\_CaraA).

## V. CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND PROSPECTIVE

It becomes complex and even of doubtful legitimacy to draw conclusions from the results regarding what was discussed in these first conversations of Aredordorural. However, what is intended is to point out lines that seem important from our point of view, but that are not exempt from being discussed, in a dialogue that is desired and expected.

According to the results we find clear positions on the questioning of the same social values and concepts, namely development, quality of life or even sustainability, and the desire to dethrone productivist values, which resonates in the urgency of an epistemological dialogue (Paraskeva, 2020). It manifests itself in the critique of the energy transition as the only way to talk about sustainability and the commodification of rural land, and in the proposal to "look at the micro"(PortasAbertas\_CaraA) and "good living [vis-a-vis] living well"(Carme\_CaraB). There is the conviction that the possibility of these values was taken away from us by an educational system that totalised another vision, disconnected from ecodpendence and interdependence (Herrero, 2014) and that forced the

incorporation of urban dynamics. A clear bet for humanization, diversification, and naturalization of both the economic and educational system is denoted, understanding the link between both in the way that references have already emerged regarding Service-Learning (García-Romero, & Lalueza, 2019), linking education to immediate experience and to alternatives of economic diversification and focus on human needs. Intergenerationality also becomes central as continuity, not only as past and legacy, but as integration of different people in the same community. This paradigm is clearly linked to training in sustainability and justice (Taibo, 2020), with strong implications for interdependence and ecodpendence.

The rural is thus seen by the participants as a place of possibilities, because of the breadth of what it offers, and the historically accumulated cultural heritage about the use of the soil and the sustenance of communities, as mentioned by Carreira and Carral (2013) and Quiroga and Simon (2018), among others. At the same time, it denounces the not only administrative, but also systemic neglect of the rural environment, in what could be called internal colonisation processes: the rural area exports food, raw materials, energy, and workers, provides a place for rest and leisure, and there is no administrative concern to provide it with services, moreover, it describes a dismantling, while reducing the health, education and transport services that once existed. It is thus that, elaborating an articulation between the rural environment, as a space of opportunity abandoned by the institutions, it is worth asking if one can guide the educational processes in higher education towards sovereignty through a direct look at the territory and awareness of the need for social action, as some of the participants suggest.

The dynamics of proximity, the extensive and unsaturated organisation (Quiroga & Simón, 2018), the repositioning of human values (Herrero, 2013), and the experience of learning directly from the environment/community may be opportunities that the rural environment can put at the service of an education that helps people to face the ecosocial crisis. This implies taking very seriously the contribution of these conversations with regard to integral action: understanding villages as ecosystems that must be cared for in their entirety and diversity. Service-Learning in higher education can serve to guide us in this direction of sovereignty to be able to take advantage of the lines of work for the common good, care and

interdisciplinarity proposed by the AredordoRural groups.

As a perspective for action, we design future research in the specific projects of Service-Learning: a constant joint evaluation of the participants of the community, and with the perspective of diversifying forms of research to others less sustained in the text, open to epistemological dialogue.

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