

The environment as a common good in the time of globalization: its conceptualization and social perception

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Abstract:

It is usual to consider the environment as a common good, but we are far from having a clear definition of either of them: the environment and the common. Both vary according the scope of the analysis (world, national, regional, provincial, local), the different societies, and the diverse elements included, and so vary the social perception and action on the environment. On the other hand, new and increasing demands from the environment as a common good, as it is the case of preserving biodiversity or landscape among others) might clash with traditional commons. Societies face now a challenge to compatibilize traditional commons and the new common: the environment. In order to study the idea of the environment as the new common is relevant to pay attention to legal conceptions and issues related with property rights. A conceptual and historical clarification of the sense and meaning of *common* is required. In this paper the conceptual problematic of the term common for the case of the environment is analyzed, and the change in its social perception within the process of industrialization and globalization. A case study of Navarre (Spain) show how people conceive Nature in terms of common good.

The environment as a common good

Nowadays, when we think of the environment clearly it includes elements such as trees, air, water... and the surrounding physical constituents where we live. But all these “physical” phenomena have their social definitions, as resources (economic, recreation, preservation...), as legal space (establishing norms in the political arena...), as a space for social organization, as a psychological space (where work, pleasure of learning takes place), among others. All these definitions are going to confer on the environment a socio-historical value. Thus, the environment is composed by both the physical and the social means, in their interrelations, including the complete relation of the external, physical and biological conditions where an organism lives. On the other hand, the mainstream way of dealing with the environmental problems that of is trying to achieve compatibility between human needs and those of the natural environment. In order to reach this goal, it is necessary to take into account both natural and social systems in their interrelation, in an integrated way.

On the other hand, it might seem that defining the environment as a common good goes without saying. Nevertheless, it is necessary to think deeper about this issue to find out if *common* is an inherent characteristic of the concept ‘environment’ or a social construction that becomes evident during the time of globalization. Our interest here more than establishing whether the environment is a new common (universal) pertains to focusing in on this phenomenon looking at the various ways it is perceived. Of the various factors impacting this perception are most importantly the social distribution of knowledge and the institutionalization of certain meanings, for which it is necessary to rely on judicial typology as a source of interpretation.

The meaning of *common* changes as well depending on the physical context, such as local, national, global, and on the different elements involved, such as history, tradition, and law.

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For this, there is not just one meaning of common goods; people assign various. It is important to reflect on the kind of good to which we refer when we talk about the environment, and whether to consider the environment as a *new common*. To analyze these issues, we will follow Erling Berge (2002) who points out that common pool goods are not defined by who is the owner of the goods but how these goods are appropriated.

On the whole, the elements composing the biosphere (water, air and soil) could be considered common as everybody can get access to them and no one should be able to appropriate them as abiotic system. On the other hand, the biotic subsystems produce benefits to all humankind, no matter where people live. Nevertheless, the interrelation between the abiotic and biotic system and the social system affects the meaning of *common*, particularly in the way a community incorporates such a relation.

Berge points out three ways of understanding common goods: 1) by the usage of the goods that can be found in the common pool resources, 2) by ownership, which can be of several kinds of groups, and 3) by the property rights that are held by the owners to keep the free access to the resources (Berge 2002: 3). Following this classification, the usage of the environment is different depending on diverse factors. Some resources can be used or consumed without damaging them (for instance, the air we breathe). Even so, the quality of the air is different depending on the places and the activity as not everybody gets access to good quality air. Taking into account the way goods are appropriated we find that some goods of the environment can be used without appropriation, as it is the case of air. On the other hand, other natural resources must be appropriated for use, because their usage diminishes their quality or quantity (gas, for instance, or wood). What it is clear is that environment's goods can be appropriated without a direct usage. It means that some people can limit the use of a given resource by others, or force them to use it in a specific way. Clean air, for instance, can be bought a thousand of kilometers away from where a community dwells in order to "compensate" the pollution that this community produces. In a strict sense that community has not appropriated that good, rather this community defines how this particular good must be kept in a particular way.

Thus, it is important to take into account the use of a particular good as well as the person(s) who benefits from it. In the above example, where a community pays for clean air as a compensation for the pollution this very community produces, can be said that this is a selfish usage of this good (air), as this community can use this good although it implies a damage (through pollution) seeking its own interest, and at the same time this community prevents other people to get access to that good on behalf of the "humankind benefit". There is a hidden conflict between a selfish aspect and an (apparently) altruist one that eventually are complementary. Due to the special characteristics of some natural goods (like air) of the environment, it is irrelevant to conceive limits to determine who owns a share of it and what use can be taken from it. Although national borders exist, they are meaningless in environmental terms²⁷ to some extent. The existence of national borders can be used to ask for certain rights of usage, like the aerial space that a country has sovereignty to.

The indivisibility of some of the components of the environment is something relevant for its consideration as a common. But even the divisible aspects of environment are so related to the rest of the system that a small change in some of them will have important consequences for the whole (the sulfur dioxide pollution, causing acid rain and its consequences, for instance).

²⁷ National borders in environmental matters are irrelevant because pollution can not be stored behind these lines. Acid rain, global warming or ozone depletion is produced in national terms. Each state can choose to protect the environment or to decrease its level of pollution. The efforts that every State do to improve its environment and to minimize pollution is very relevant and is helpful in global terms.

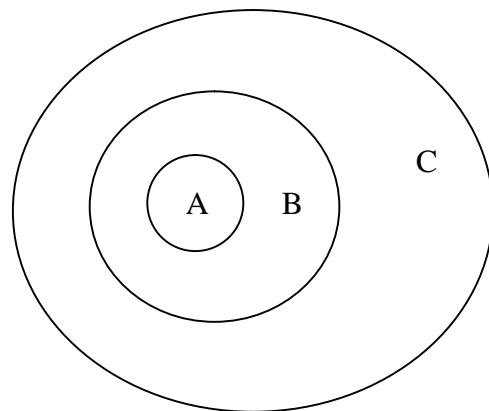
Natural resources must be carefully managed in the framework of the general interest. The use of natural resources by a small part of the population must be analyzed and judged taking into account the global interest of society and global ecosystem. Particular interests, no matter whether they are held by individuals or communities (a village, an ethnic community, a whole society, etc. as it is the case of traditional communal) will always be in conflict with the higher interest of protecting the environment.

With regard to property, common goods can be property of different kinds of people that hold different rights to its access and consumption. Berge points out that common pools can be differentiated (among other criteria) by property indivisibility. Some commons can be split into shares that can be sold, but others have to be exploited in a combined way, as they can not be split. Special attention must be drawn to the ownership as well as to the way legal rights of the common are held. This analysis asserts two issues: the sort of owners and the way in which these property rights on common pool are held.

Linking this idea to the environment, it could be stated that the common pool of Earth has been split into as many shares as countries. In addition, each country defends the private property of some natural resources as well. Countries have rights on their realms (namely sovereignty) although they are not the only owners as private property exists linked to individuals or groups on some goods and resources.

Following this idea, there are several dimensions of the use of the environment. Some social spheres divide administratively the environment to be managed, appropriate and protect it (or damage it as a side effect). In every sphere we could find subjects holding legitimate rights (as long as they hold property titles) but those rights will always be “selfish” (so to speak) when compared with a higher good.

This could be shown in the following graphic:



The rights of A (a person or a group of people) within the natural common pool, although they are legitimate from the A's point of view, must take into account the interests of B that might collude and limit these rights. Likewise, C's rights and interests are of a higher importance and in case of conflict B should stop the exploitation of the natural resource. This graphic shows the way a good, which can be property of an individual or a group placed on a piece of land and on which an exclusive right is held on behalf of a community (no matter its size), can happen to be very limited if it is examined from a higher point of view.

In the area of Law, Leon Duguit (1894) includes a 'social function' in considering the exercise of private property rights. That is to say even though one has ownership of such a good, ownership implies use but not abuse, attaching limits to the exercise of such a right. Because of this, in some circumstances there are limits to property and duties to the owner, even in private property, in favor of general interests. In some circumstances, various duties in relation to the private property are created to guarantee the communal interest. A

way for this ‘social function’ to be implemented is when an owner is forced to use big extensions of land in a proper way, for instance, assuring that this land must be productive. However, in the case of public ownership (state or local administration) it is assumed that there will be a collective use even though the collectivity does not own this land. For example, the State may be the owner of a forestland situated in a locality, allowing use by inhabitants and visitors on it for hiking or enjoying the landscape. It may also occur that the State restricts the use in favor of a greater benefit - forbidding the extraction of its resources in order to maintain balance in the ecosystem²⁸, or closing it to human entry so that there is no damage from such activity.

Hence, the existence or non-existence of limits on the exploitation of resources does not depend on who is the owner of the land but on the particular context. The questions here are: Who defines what is a more advisable benefit for the land? How can we define this? For instance, is the carrying capacity of a particular territory the most important benefit to take into account? Or is it the interest most of the people share that really matters? These questions require clear definitions.

The term *common* will also mean different things depending on the context. Regarding the environment, ‘common interest’ and ‘common patrimony’ mean something different, and it is questionable what makes some aspect of environment to be a *common*. The root of the meaning of *common* for the case of the environment could come from its own characteristics, or from its connotations, for example in a normative way. The concept *common* has a different meaning also when defining the common aspect of the environment. The idea underlying *common patrimony* is that it belongs to “all of us” (so to speak), i.e., nobody is the owner of this particular good, but everyone is owner of it as long as they belong to the community. When a national park²⁹ is said to be part of the national heritage it means that it does not belong to one person rather to all the citizens, which can use its resources and space when they want. But when a national park is said to be part of the national heritage the most important meaning is that the Nation as a community can exert rights on this property, i.e., to use the good in the way they want.

On the other hand, the idea of *common interest* can exclude other implications that the concept ‘property’ holds, but independently of who owns the property, the use of that good must be to everyone’s enjoyment. It entails the idea that the use of the property (no matter who is the legal owner) must benefit to “all the people”. It means that a private property can guarantee the common interest. For instance, a community can be the owner of a natural good (e.g. a natural area) and “use” it in the way they want but must keep it well

²⁸ It can be instructive here to explain some categories of the Navarre Law 9/1996, June 17. There are a) Integral Reserves: small spaces, ecologically important, that are legally created in order to achieve the integral preservation of the whole set of ecosystems that they contain. By doing this, destruction, transformation, deteriorating action, perturbation and denigration of the places are avoided. b) Natural reserves: spaces that hold high ecological values that are legally created in order to achieve the preservation and improvement of particular forms or geological phenomena, species, biotopos, communities or ecosystems. This allows its evolution according to its own dynamics. c) Natural sites (enclaves): spaces that have certain ecological or landscape values. These spaces are declared as such in order to preserve or improve them but it does not mean that controlled human activities are not allowed as long as these activities help to maintain those values. d) Natural areas of leisure: spaces that hold natural values or that are valuable in landscape terms that are places where people choose to spend their leisure time, as long as it is compatible with the conservation of nature and environmental education.

²⁹ For the legislation in Navarre, Natural parks are natural areas with little transformations from human exploitation or occupation, that because of the beauty of its landscapes, the representativity of its ecosystems or the uniqueness of its flora, fauna or geomorphic formations, have ecological, aesthetic, educational and scientific values that worth an important attention. Natural parks might include inside its limits some other categories cited above (integral reserves, natural reserves, natural sites, leisure natural areas, protected landscapes).

maintained. This community holds all the rights linked to ownership, as long as this community protects this landscape to assure the benefit of everyone who wants to enjoy it. Nevertheless this explanation can not be applied on a broader scale, as the rights that might clash from different realms are not compatible. The concept of sovereignty is a good example. A state that has sovereignty on a territory can freely use the resources within its boundaries as long as it has not signed an international treaty limiting its powers to do so. It could also happen that a good of this State is considered to be a common good, which satisfies global interests. In this example, it might happen that the common interest of a particular state differs from a “global interest”. In order to solve this issue the international legal system has introduced the term ‘common interest’ recognizing the sovereignty of state on its territory, but always protecting (or exploiting) some key resources on behalf of humanity.

The concept of *common patrimony* is harder to grasp and define in an international context. In this context what does it mean that a particular good belongs to all of us as a common patrimony of humanity? How can it be properly used? The first point to make clear should be the possibility of the expropriation of a good (in order to be expropriated by humankind) that is its patrimony deriving from its particular legal owner (for instance, the State). On the other hand, on practical grounds it seems evident that not everyone could manage this common good. Who could be the proper agent to manage it? Another country? An international board? Or maybe simply the one who could guarantee the “best” possible management.

Thus, the concept of *common* at the international level can be understood in two ways. It can be understood as natural areas or natural resources within the realm of any State (like oceans) and it can be understood too as resources located under the sovereignty of a particular country but at risk for its inappropriate management. In this case, an international board must act in order to preserve the natural area for the common interest of humankind. This is a source of hidden and manifest conflicts between rich countries, which can afford expensive measures to protect the environment, and poor countries that might be forced to disregard this measure for the sake of income. Usually, these countries do not welcome the idea of ‘common patrimony’, as they would be literally expropriated. This point of view could change if some economic compensation was given or measures were taken guaranteeing its use in the interest of the world community.

The concept of *common good* can be linked to the benefit of a particular community. Some theoretical perspectives as the communitarism model are based on the ideas of “community” and “common good”, and define the public realm from the adscriptions associated to common social properties. As a consequence, the distance between the public and the private is erased. They work in a holistic schema where it is supposed that the common pre-exists and surrounds the individuals. Nevertheless, it is clearer to understand the idea of a common interest managed by the State where the State has the duty of manage it beyond particular interests. We do not intend to go deeper into the difference between public and private interest. Nevertheless, to analyze the subject we deal with here, we will follow Pécaut’s thinking of the public space as an intermediate space: civil society (that can adopt very different forms) holds it but do not mix with it. The public issue means, in fact, to define a common horizon that needs some sort of institutionalization of civil society itself. Thus, for Pécaut, some procedures are needed in order to let generalization of particular points of view and the rules of confrontation between different perspectives. It means that a *common good* needs a process like this in order to be so.

Nevertheless, this can be discussed as the rights of citizen that were raised against totalitarianism. Getting deeper into the definition of public and private realms, there are three interrelated levels: the individual, the community and the State.

The person and citizen bill of rights was developed to protect the individual from the unlimited power of the state. Basically what happened was that some limits were built for the State not to overwhelm the individual, leaving a space where the individual could enjoy freedom. In addition, the State must be an active factor in the development of society on the whole and guarantee people's rights as well as their chance to fully exploit their potential. The relation between individual and state is also mediated by the concept of community. A community is a group of individuals inside a state. Nevertheless, the concept of 'community' and 'common good' for its members is left behind in the Middle Ages. In the Middle Ages social relations were strongly mediated by the land, and people were attached to the land. When the modern state rises, social relations got rid of the land subjection. The growing importance of modern state and individualism also changes the meaning of borders of a community. An important consequence of it is a process of de-territoriality of individuals, when people is pushed out of their lands to go to work in cities and the links between people and their lands fades away.

Often the limits of a state do not coincide with the limits of a community. Thus, boundaries that were easily perceived by the members of a community are disappearing gradually meanwhile the politic boundaries of States are built up. This change produces a reaction that proves that the organization juridical-political called State and community is not co-extensive. Rather, the State tries to gain power and control on many communities, which will be transformed by the State in order to be more efficient in their work. Because of this, new political-administrative divisions take place at that moment. In many places, those divisions do not correspond to traditional divisions held by historic communities.

This change affects to individual perception as members of a community, a process that logically influences their identity. Because of this, the community symbols are replaced by symbols of the State (for instance, the national flag or the national anthem). But what it is interesting is to highlight what happens with the relations and links to territory. The links to a territory can be of different sort: as a space to dwell or as an environment to develop the sense of belonging and personality. We are more interested in the last sort of link. This change affects to the identity of the community. The changes in identity and social perception of communities also influence the interpretation of the *common environment*. A change in the interpretation of *common* in relation to environment will have as a consequence a change in the interpretation of common property too.

After the change that overcame and weakened communities, the meaning and usage of common property in a community changed in several ways. One of the choices for a common space was to be transformed into private property, where the legal owner of the title of property could use it as they wanted. Another possibility could be to become a public good, becoming property of the State or some of its political-administrative divisions but also including the chance for the community use and/or exploitation.

Nevertheless the issue is more complicated than it appears. In the first possibility there is no more problem, but in the second possibility two issues arise. On the one hand, an important issue to take into account is the kind of "title" through which the inhabitants of a place are related to their land and the rights that are linked. If they are not the owners of the land it is not possible that they can have "free access" to that good. Nevertheless, they could use that good because it is a public good, and yet it is difficult to assert in any case if we face an "use" or an "usufruct" ("usufruct" should be the right to access to the benefits of a good without implying property of that good).

We can distinguish three levels of property: property itself; use; usufruct. For the case of the environment, the issue is far more complex as we do not mean just a territory, but many other aspects. Because of this, the use or enjoyment of the benefits of a natural good raises a number of questions.

Thus, we do not talk just of a forest and considering the possibility of cutting timber. We talk also of the interaction of timber as part of the biotic system, as landscape, as a source of inspiration for a poet, as part of the history of folklore and many other things. The social perception of the environment will always change, which will affect the idea of *common*. It is possible to mark limits of property on a territory and it contains, but is it possible to delimit its use and the benefits that can be taken out of it? Is it possible to fall down trees in a little forest property of a collectivity when, for instance, this behavior affects the rest of neighbors' rights to enjoy the landscape? At his point, we consider different choices and benefits.

This discussion leads to other issues that, although they look of juridical essence, they have important ethical consequences, as well as political and on the whole about different ways to perceive and understand the world. There is a basic question here. What is the most important common good? Is it possible to rank?

We do not intend to answer to these capital questions. Anyway, it is important to remember that this discussion involves some aspects related to the development of the identity of individuals and collectivities. Likewise, one of the issues that has helped to create in a certain way the sense of belonging to a global community is the environment, as long as it has been perceived as a good that belongs to all humankind and that reinforces the links that tie us as members of a same context of living.

Usually it is taken for granted that the State has defined that *common good*, and that democracy has played an important role defining it as the interest of the whole society. Nevertheless, the state can emphasize the rights and interests of particular social class, ethnic or religious group. This issue leads to take into account the international regime of the environment.

Because of this, the environment is the 21st century *new common*, whose protection pushes us to think collectively. The growing environmental interdependence of the states has forced to revisit the concept of 'common'. Nowadays the concept of *common* has been de-territorialized. The pictures of the Earth taken from the outer space in 1969 allowed realizing the side effects of industrialization all around the planet. From that time on a social discourse began to be created talking about the necessity of common action to solve the global problems, particularly environmental problems.

The processes about environment issues carried out the celebration of three world conferences on the Earth, Stockholm (Sweden) in 1972, Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in 1992 and Johannesburg (South Africa) 2002. The conference held in Rio de Janeiro was of special importance because it was held in a moment of changes in the international context and when new trends like globalization appears. Thus, the "global village" will give new stimulus to the idea of common. The perception that all belong together to the global village called Earth re-inforces and points to new challenges.

This happens to be a thorny issue because it meant limiting the power of states on their own territory. The problem is far from easy to solve since economic and security interests are at stake when considering sovereignty. The issue is also problematic inside countries, because the borderline between private and common property is not that clear as the World Commission on Environment and Development notes. The fact is that ecological interactions and flows cross through private properties and do not care about legal jurisdictions. In a mountain, for instance, when a particular farmer uses water he directly affects to the water that farms located below will use.

Following the World Commission on Environment and Development, the agrarian traditional systems did concern about some aspects of this interdependence and gave certain control to the social community over the natural resources (water, timber, and soil). This system of management and control of natural resources did not necessarily avoid growing and expansion although it could limit the acceptance of new technical innovations.

But modernity has undermined the traditional way of doing and has settled enclosures, limiting powerfully common rights and free access of communities to certain natural resources as well to prevent groups and individuals from the making decision process.

Thus, the World Commission on Environment and Development in its report to Rio de Janeiro conference introduces the term *common* several times in various ways. In fact the title of this report is “Our Common Future”. For the Commission the connection between economic and ecological issues are clear, precisely because the model of development known until now that only takes into account economic profit and forget the costs that are consequence of that economic growing, is being questioned. At this respect, the most important cost of economic growing is the ecological cost.

The Commission (1987) focused its attention in the growth of population, energy resources, species extinction, genetic resources, industry, and human settlements. When considering animal and vegetal species and genetic resources, the commission shows concern for the richer areas of the world (which are the poorest economically in many cases). This Commission proposes a net of bigger protected areas all around the world that should be surveilled by an international body. The Commission proposes to subscribe an act of species convention, which declare them universal resources and common patrimony. The Commission proposes to governments to sign a “Convention on Species” where, for instance, animal species may be declared universal resources, and even that animal species may be declared common patrimony. Clearly the Commission says that the species and natural ecosystems will be soon considered important aspects that have to be conserved and administered for the benefit of humankind. As a consequence, the international political agenda will add the task of preserve species.

When the Commission talks about common spaces, it says that the traditional ways of national sovereignty cause particular problems when “world spaces” and shared ecosystems (oceans, outer space, Antarctic) must be managed. Nevertheless, this issue is a very problematic one, as these areas are of great importance for the natural global equilibrium as well as they are strategic points. A proposal of the Commission for the management of the geosynchronous orbit gives account of how the administration of the common is perceived. The Commission proposes, as a way to manage common resources and to extract its value on behalf of common good, to give them to an international board that gave permissions to organizations. This is a similar solution as the one adopted by the International Authority of Sea Depths.

Social perception of the environment as a common good

The interpretation of the environment (mainly “natural” areas) as a common (collective and public) good of human society - whose “utilization” can be articulated in economic, symbolic, aesthetic, health (physical and mental), leisure and social identity – is supported by social factors mainly in the XIX century. Four of the most important are the politics of the hygienist theories; the increasing importance of the environmental values; the creation of the first natural parks; and the extension of tourism to social classes other than the wealthy.

The hygienist movement in Europe and America was concerned about the urban illnesses of the working class that resulted from the increasing size of cities following industrialization. Another goal to meet at the same time was to prevent antisocial behavior. They backed the construction of urban parks in the lower income neighborhoods to decrease congestion and improve air quality (Thomas 1983). The urban higher classes (following the nobility) maintained the custom of gathering in parks, in practice since the 17th century. The construction of parks in working class areas legitimized access to natural areas by all social classes. In the 19th century access to natural areas on the part of urban population was already seen as a social need.

In the European tradition the awareness for Nature is a recent phenomenon. The pre-Indo-European animist traditions and their surviving thread in Celtic and Germanic religions are the antecedent of a more respectful relationship to Nature. Animism considers that all human being (and some non-human) have a spiritual essence, and because that the exploitation of Nature is interpreted as a violent act³⁰. When the catholic religion expanded throughout the continent, it became an instrument to legitimize the European social structure. Catholic religion also constitutes an explanation of the Society / Nature relationship as promotes more efficient land exploitation, as deprives the natural environment of its spiritual dimension (White 1967). Christianity assumes features more anthropocentric than Hebrew doctrine does, for its early contact with the classical Greek ideas. Though the orthodox thought among the classic Greek thinkers is anthropocentric, there were some ecocentric authors as is the case of Pythagoras. In Christian doctrine there does exist some exceptions to the anthropocentric mainstream perspective, mainly Saint Francis of Assisi, some Irish and Gaelic saints, and the “desert fathers”³¹.

In the Middle Age natural spaces were associated with those most apart from human influence and as areas inhabited by witches and devils³². These areas were thought to house pagan³³ practices and sinful costumes. The respect for animals, as the prescription to not produce pain to them unnecessarily, is understood in a different way than currently: at the time, it was assumed that a person who mistreated animals would end up causing pain to humans as well.

After the XVIIth century, there is a change in the perception of Nature with the consequence of less sensibility toward the environment. The classical European interpretation of Nature is based on an organic metaphor, where the environment was basically considered as a living system (non-conscience) made up of living beings (Collingwood 1945), where the ecosystem appears as a number of organs composing the “natural body”.

Following Descartes’ and Bacon’ writings among others, the metaphor explaining Nature changes toward a mechanistic one, where the ecosystem is interpreted as a clock gear³⁴. In this interpretation of Nature a person should not feel compassion for a machine; they should not feel remorse for attacking and exploiting the natural environment (Thomas 1983). By this time, there are writings saying, for example, that animals are not able to feel pain, and Bacon points out that for Nature to reveal its secrets it must be tortured (Merchant 1983). Very likely, these ideas were not shared by people in rural areas – closer to animals – and some pagan behavior more ecocentric, in current terminology, would remain. The attitudes toward Nature begin to evolve to more respectful ones with the industrialization and growth of cities in the XVIIIth century in the United Kingdom and in the XIXth in the rest of Europe. With urban development, many times too rapid as to prepare basic infrastructures – adequate sewage – new problems and social conflicts emerge (or at least on a large scale) which produce a nostalgia about country life. New artistic and social currents come about as in the case of Romanticism, producing an idealization of both Nature and rural life. The nineteenth-century nationalist movements point out the

³⁰ For that, rituals to calm down the spirits are celebrated when hunting or foresting.

³¹ The “desert fathers” are the first hermits in wilderness, ranging from the IIth century AD. They are usually involved in stories with animals (Bratton 1988).

³² Fear to wilderness can be trace back in ancient Greece as well. The word “panic” comes from the god “Pan”. Pan was a god of Nature who used to stroll all around the forests and kill the human beings he met. He was considered to have animal instincts too. The agriculture goddess, Demeter (her Latin name was Ceres, and it is the root of the word “cereal”) was depicted as a more friendly being.

³³ The word “pagan” comes from the Latin “pagus”, that means village.

³⁴ God would be the clockmaker.

importance of the natural environment for the community identity³⁵. Sociologists devote an important part of their theoretical production in the time to treat urban problems, where the city is considered a source of conflicts³⁶ and of social and moral disorders. Wealthy people devote more and more of their time and money to rest in spa resorts located in natural areas; more gardens are designed in urban spaces and rural territories of the aristocrats; the first national parks are created³⁷; tourism to natural areas is developed for middle class sectors; and the number of pets increases – phenomena that condition the ulterior sensibility toward Nature.

The existence of pets (animals with no utilitarian aim) in human communities is old. The dominant classes had the custom of having pets, behavior more common among women³⁸. With the emergence of colonialism, buying exotic animals (mainly colorful birds and monkeys) becomes the fashion among the aristocracy and high bourgeoisie. This development of pet commerce takes place at the end of the XIX century, following the increasing consumption power of the urban social class. “Today the scale of Western European pet-keeping is undoubtedly unique in human history. It reflects the tendency of modern men and women to withdraw into their own small family unit for their greatest emotional satisfactions. It has grown rapidly with urbanization; the irony is that constricted, garden-less flats actually encourage pet-ownership. Sterilized, isolated, and usually deprived of contact with other animals, the pet is a creature of its owner’s way of life; and the fact that so many people feel it necessary to maintain a dependent animal for the sake of emotional completeness tells us something about the atomistic society in which we live. The spread of pet-keeping among the urban middle class in the early modern period is thus a development of genuine social, psychological, and indeed commercial importance.”(Thomas 1983: 119).

With the run of industrialization, the only contact with animals for many urban people were their pets, which were characterized by being sociable and dependent from humans, contrary to the majority of animal species. The development of roads and the generalization of the automobile in industrialized societies, together with postwar economic growth, produced mass tourism. As a consequence, leisure space is considered as a common good (see for example Schmithüsen et al 1998). Tourists think they have, as users, the right to have the natural environment they “consume” in good quality. Thus, there is a conflict on the interpretation of the physical environment between the rural inhabitants (mainly a productive one) and the urban groups who have more access to tourism. Some current public policies on the environment, designed from cities, are the expression on this idea, where the main emphasis is on limiting rural activities in order not to affect the idea of Nature held by the urban sphere.

Environmental concern takes the shape of a human stewardship of Nature. This view interprets the environment as a communal space belonging to mankind. Thus, Human society considers itself to be the manager of Nature for its own sake, interprets Nature as the new communal, and turns it into a natural park. Nature, like a natural park, is a space deeply affected by human activity. The development of industrialization has direct or indirect consequences on the whole planet. The social and economic activity of human beings affects the global ecosystem, either through deforestation or toxic emissions into the atmosphere. Even the most distant animal species show traces of human action, such as chemical substances in blood (Cronon 1983), although some ecosystems have been more

³⁵ An example in Navarre is the article by the Navarrian thinker Arturo Campión “El último tamborilero de Erraondo”, analyzed in López (1996).

³⁶ Nevertheless, Marx thinks urban conflict as a necessary step to achieve a higher social level. According to this, urban conflict can be positive.

³⁷ The first national park is Yellowstone (USA), created in 1872.

³⁸ Hunting dogs can not be considered pets.

affected than others. The difference between Nature and a natural park relies on the different character of human influence. In Nature, human influence is a side effect of economic development, whereas human action in a natural park is part of a planned strategy of environmental management. Destruction and (more or less) radical alteration of environment are the traditional human actions on Nature, transforming an ecosystem into a more economic productive territory (e.g. a wheat field or a fabric). The opposite process takes place in a natural park, where human action aims to develop a new Nature. By doing this, a new space dependent on the human community is created, and the plants and animals dwelling there are pets in a natural environment. A natural park is a zoo without cages. Animals are prohibited to be fed by visitors in zoos, so as they in natural parks. This tendency to feed wild animals (as well as other similar behaviors) is the consequence of idealized interpretations that visitors share about zoos and natural parks. These interpretations of what Nature is and what are its processes shape a hyperreal Nature (following Jean Baudrillard). A hyperreal Nature means a more perfect Nature than its original model. Hunting individual animals when it was needed was the way in Yellowstone³⁹ to control the number of the herbivorous community until the 70's. Similarly managers tried to erase the depredator population (mainly wolves) that would act as a natural demographic control of herbivorous animals⁴⁰. Hyperreal Nature implies a re-creation of Nature following a human interpretation guided by biological criteria but also by hidden social criteria, as any other human interpretation.

Social perception of Nature and environmental concern changes in time and space as a consequence of the different definitions of Nature held by human beings. Although it might look otherwise, Nature is a social construction and an elusive concept with no clear borders⁴¹. Human beings need to categorize the outer world in order to behave in an efficient way. One of the elements of the outer world societies interpret and categorize is Nature. Human populations mark the boundaries of the concept "Nature" and project a positive or negative feeling on it, in order to guide individual behavior. Environmental concern takes place when a given society starts valuing Nature in positive terms. In any society there are subgroups that can hold opposite ideas about what Nature is and how to deal with it.

Western society has traditionally distinguished two realms in its analysis of the world: Society and Nature. From the Ancient Greece through our days, philosophers and social scientists have developed a whole range of concepts and categories that are derived from this very first dichotomy: artificial and natural, human being and animal, civilization and barbarism, tamed and wild, etc. This categorization of the world has allowed (and pushed) the supremacy of rationality by identifying reason as the proper human attribute which distinguishes human beings from animals. This dichotomy has supported western civilization's supremacy and has legitimized imperial practices. Nature is the 'Other' against which 'We' define ourselves. Western society uses the concept of Nature to define itself. If Nature is understood as the space of wildness, material, danger or animal, human society (as it's opposite) is understood as civilized, intellectual, spiritual, a safe space, and what is truly human. As Merchant (1983) shows, this definition of Nature is linked with femininity, as a space creator of life, and a passive force⁴², which needs human action to develop. This dichotomy of natural and human world creates two pure poles of the human

³⁹ Yellowstone has been taken as an example of park management all around the world.

⁴⁰ This policy stopped in 1972, but could perfectly be applied again. This policy created an example of hyperreal nature.

⁴¹ Loveloy distinguishes sixty different meanings of "Nature" in English (Loveloy, 1935).

⁴² The passive conception of Nature overlooks the aggressive part of plagues, storm, natural fires, earthquakes and so on. Likewise, the interpretation of feminin gender as passive is biased by the patriarchy.

and natural realms. Following this interpretation, the purest human space is the city, and its opposite is wilderness, as the purest form of Nature.

Anthropologists show that the very concept of wilderness does not exist for some human groups (Evernden 1992). Many communities of hunters and gatherers do not make any conceptual difference between tamed and wild Nature because they do not harvest the land. For this people, human society belongs to Nature. Nevertheless, for other groups wilderness is of great importance. USA and Australia, for example, have interpreted their creation as countries in terms of struggle against wilderness. This conception of wilderness is rooted in their idea of nation. In USA appears the myth of the “frontier man” (a person who lives in isolation and constant struggle against Nature), which has an important role in the development of a “national character”. In Australia a special “bush ethic”⁴³, linked with independence and freedom (Nash 1982) takes this place. The British colonists interpreted the existence of vast territories in Africa as the evidence of the laziness of African folk. This “laziness” showed the superiority of the British culture and was used as a legitimization of conquest (Short 1991). The concept of wilderness is rarely applied in Europe. In Europe the cattle raising tradition and the alteration of the environment as a consequence is very old. Agriculture, first in the Mediterranean basin and then in the rest of Europe, was very important and deeply transformed the territory to such an extent that it is now difficult to find wilderness. From this point of view, the European colonists in America, Africa or Australia perceived the environment as truly wilderness. They did think of the native folk as “environmentally neutral”. At first, this conception of local folk as “environmentally neutral” was pejorative, it was considered to be the evidence of their underdeveloped culture. Nowadays, the myth of the “good ecological savage” is a positive idealization that overlooks the impact of social practices on their environment, which has altered their territories for thousands of years.

Wilderness as the purest form of Nature is a social construction. In the definition of Nature a process of projection (of fears and desires) of the human community takes place. “As we gaze into the mirror, it holds up for us, we too easily imagine that what we behold is Nature when in fact we see the reflection of our own unexamined longings and desires. For this reason, we mistake ourselves when we suppose that wilderness can be the solution to our culture’s problematic relationships with the non-human world, for wilderness is itself no small part of the problem”(Cronon 1986: 69). Nowadays the idealization of Nature is a guide for the social relations of society itself. Following this idea, social relations must imitate natural principles, like equilibrium or harmony that it is said to exist in Nature. By doing that, a more properly human community would result, as well as a more environmentally sustainable society. This point of view is based on the false assumption that a natural way of social organization exists, and that it is possible to know it through Nature. On the one hand, it is based on a social discourse of Nature in terms of harmony and equilibrium, when in the natural world these elements coexist with their opposites, being all of equal importance for the ecosystem. In fact, if human communities organized following the example of animal communities, there would not be a place for environmental concern, because living beings tend to multiply and colonize the maximum space available regardless to sustainability.

Nature is an objective reality as well as a social concept. Reality exists beyond social interpretations. Nature has been altered materially so that a social construction of Nature in material terms exists as well as a Nature socially constructed in conceptual terms. Human beings have affected environment and they still do. Every society has had an impact on its environment (although this impact depends greatly on its technological level). The first deforestation can be traced back to Neolithic times, and some authors think that most of the actual savanna is a consequence of human actions (for example, Sauer 1963). Likewise, the

⁴³ The “bush” is the most typical Australian landscape.

first human massive extinction of animal species took place in the Pleistocene, when human technology developed greatly (Martin and Wrigth 1967). Before the rise of humankind other massive extinction happened. It must be taken into account that animals and plants alter the environment too. The difference between human and animal alteration of environment is that human beings are the most extended species on Earth and that our technological capacity has enabled us to affect the whole planet in an intense and short timed way.

Because of this, many idyllic landscapes are the direct consequence of human action. “He [Aldous Huxley] was discoursing on a favorite topic: Man’s unnatural treatment of nature and its sad results. To illustrate his point he told how, during the previous summer, he had returned to a little valley in England where he had spent many happy months as a child. Once it had been composed of delightful grassy glades, now it was becoming overgrown with unsightly brush because the rabbits that formerly kept such growth under control had largely succumbed to a disease, myxomatosis that was deliberately introduced by the local farmers to reduce the rabbit’s destruction of the crops. Being something of a Philistine, I could be silent no longer, even in the interests of great rhetoric. I interrupted to point out that the rabbit itself had been brought as a domestic animal to England in 1176, presumably to improve the protein diet of the peasantry.” (White 1967: 1203). Social relations affect Nature, because the distinctions between natural and social are merely conceptual.

Natural environment, like commodities, hides the social relations that have created it. This hiding of the social production of Nature has a consequence: the “naturalization” of this very place of Nature, overlooking the social structure and social processes that have shaped a particular environment⁴⁴. The “naturalization” of Nature takes place when the historic processes are not taking into account. Then, Nature is imagined by society as a space in eternal equilibrium, historyless, where natural processes guarantee harmony in the ecosystem. It is a similar explanation to that of the “invisible hand” of Neoclassic Economy. But Nature is, like the market, a reality in constant change. In fact, the more equilibrated an ecosystem is, the more dependent is. A good example is lawn, a space in almost perfect equilibrium, but at the same time a space very dependent upon human care. Natural spaces managed by human beings used to be places with a high level of equilibrium. Equilibrium means the control of forces inside a system, and this means that this system is unable to evolve. Equilibrium is a human concept very appreciated in modern society. The idea of equilibrium in society as well as in Nature is an unreal conception that is based on a teleological view of life. Social discourses based on these principles use the idealized example of Nature to legitimize their social goals.

Social practices are part of the environment and the forces of its evolution, although sometimes, human community uses its influence to prevent changes in a given environment. This is an important fact to be taken into account in the management of natural areas. “And if we pretend to preserve the state that some interesting environments present in a given moment, we are in certain way taken an antiecolological decision, because Ecology implies change and constant evolution. This is why for some people simple protectionism of natural areas is very distant ideologically from ecologism. Ecologism pretends (rather than doing Archeology) to assess to the future generations their right to use, enjoy and overall, *producing* this planet. In reality, this *capacity for production* is the essence of protected spaces. But Amazon jungles and other inhabited territories, in the rest of the places, their actual shape is the consequence of interactions of human communities that have dwelled and exploited during hundred or thousand of years. Only very special spaces such as mangrove swamps or coralliferous atolls could be the exceptions that prove the rule.” (Bangor 1999: 104). If a natural area is to be preserved, an analysis must be made

⁴⁴ The English enclosures, for example, are the result of a reorganization of land property that has as a consequence a process of proletarianization of rural peasants.

as to the human dependence on this territory. Usually, local communities shape their natural surroundings unconsciously through their everyday social practices, mainly work and leisure activities. Changes in social or economic structure of these communities, or new legislation (such as the creation of a natural park) have consequences for the environment, which can affect the appearance of this space. The usage of a particular natural space by its human community defines part of its physiography. Because of this, changes in the “consumption” of a natural space must be analyzed carefully in order to avoid unintended consequences that affect negatively the environment. On the other hand, it is not acceptable that any human action on the environment is correct just because the environment is a product of it. The toxic emissions of human activity affect the environment too, like cattle rising or agriculture, but not all of them are equally legitimate. The criteria with which to evaluate different actions are social. It means that different social groups can think of economic affairs as more important than biological sustainability when evaluating the necessity of altering a natural space. It is very difficult to take into account the interests of Nature, because Nature is a social construct resulting from social projections. Every kind of animal has its own interest different of others. The legitimization of the human actions on Nature is the consequence of a social consensus, i.e., which has changed from the past and will change in the future. Nowadays there exists a growing social pressure that takes shape in the ecological discourse and tries to deslegitimize human activities such as hunting or intensive exploitation of land or the creation of new power plants whose emissions can damage the environment. The practical decisions of the ecological doctrine have consequences on the natural environment and imply the selection of a natural landscape among many others.

There exists a common cultural model of Nature in western industrial societies. The globalization process exports lifestyles and a socioeconomic structure that tends to homogenize social discourse. Mass media and cinema productions have an important role in this globalization of thinking, the definition of the environment and its problems. The international summits help to develop the official environmental discourse and legitimize certain policies. Part of this knowledge filters down to society. For example, the concept of sustainable development has been very popular since the Rio Janeiro UN Meeting in 1992. On the other hand, the new social movements have their own view of environmental problems and a particular proposal for a new relationship with Nature. The new social movements have an important role integrating lay society in environmental matters. Social Sciences also are a source of the definition of environment that society holds. Although it might seem that the influence of Social Science’s theories about the environment is scarce, some theories and authors have got to affect the public interest. Arne Naess’s writings (a philosopher), for example, have shaped the tendency known as Deep Ecology that has influenced greatly the environmental movement (see Naess 1994). Also a social scientist such as Murray Bookchin has been read and given attention by the lay society. His writings have helped to create the movement known as Social Ecology (see Bookchin 1988). The Gaia hypothesis developed by James Lovelock has created a popular conception about nature (Lovelock 1983). In Sociology, Ulrich Beck’s lay version of his Society of Risk now is in political agendas all around the world as well as in the public domain (Beck 2002). A very well known concept of Social Sciences related to Nature is that of “the ecological footprint”, designed from a pedagogical perspective (Wackernagel and Rees 1996). Important contributions of Asian cultures, mainly from China and India, are disclosed in the environmental discourse of current industrialized societies. From the 60’s European interest in Asian topics has increased, ranging from Buddhism to music. In the 70’s the movement known as New Age linked with environmental movements, shows this Asian influence. But this interest in Asia does not mean a connection with their know-how, but a partial translation of their interpretation of Nature; it merely isolates some useful aspects.

The social perception of Nature represents the way in which people interpret what previously has been defined as Nature or natural. The cultural models of this definition of Nature offers a guide of what items must have a place to be considered nature. The social perception of it is structured in concentric circles. The inner circles contain well-established conceptions of Nature that a society holds. For this reason, these conceptions are “naturalized”. Some of the conceptions of these inner circles are based on local toponyms or climate conditions, as the ideas of Nature of a society depend to some extent on the physical make up of its surroundings. Beyond these inner circles there are others whose explanations of Nature share a more recent character. They emerge from a debate about Nature that replaces the old understanding. Because of its novelty, this discourse is not totally “naturalized”, as it would be if it were in the inner circle. It is likely that the two, the new and the old, will struggle for supremacy. The outer circle is made of individual opinions derived from personal experiences, traits of character, peer groups (which includes social, cultural or political affiliations), emotional reactions to recent news relating to environment issues, and the psychological process of minimizing risks.

An important factor influencing social perception of the environment is the specific toponym of a place where a person has been socialized, or where they have spent the recent years. The interpretation of a space is made out from other similar experiences. A person, then, compares a particular natural space with other natural spaces he or she has known in his or her life. If the new space to be assessed is similar to the one a person has been socialized in, the probability of a positive evaluation is higher. This positive reaction is due to the fact that a known environment enables a person to handle the situation. Sometimes familiarity is not a decisive factor to assess a positive social perception by the population with respect to a natural setting. Persons must integrate the physical environment in their cultural universe. When a person does so, then part of his/her identity depends on this landscape and a higher valuation is likely. When the symbolic contact with a natural setting (animal species, vegetables, and mountains...) is high, the value of Nature for a given human community increases. This happens because the interpretation of Nature becomes a self-interpretation when a community has interiorized it. Nature has stopped being the *Other* and becomes part of *Us*.

Case Study: social perception of the environment as a common good in Navarre (Spain)

The perceived problems⁴⁵ define aspects of the environment for a given community. What is to be conceived as the environment is a complex issue that changes in time and space. Because of this, it is important to analyze the environmental problematic of local communities, for this will provide clues to understand both their conception and social perception of the environment.

Navarre is a northern province of Spain on the border with France. The population is around half million inhabitants, most of them living in the capital, Pamplona. The extension of the province is 50.357 square kilometers. Although the province is small in size, it has one of the highest incomes per capita in Spain and held considerable importance in the Middle Ages. At this time Navarre was an independent kingdom. Because of its small size, the feudal structure did not have a great hold on Navarre and most of the land belonged to the king rather than the aristocracy, and rural villages had big extensions of territory as common pools. In fact, almost half of the land in Navarre is communal (common pool in Ostrom, 1977, terms). We can distinguish four different geographical areas in Navarre. 1) The Ribera Navarre is in the south. The climate is dry; the villages are bigger (around 1.500 inhabitants) and mostly agrarian. 2) Middle Navarre is a more humid territory and the most industrialized part of the region. 3) Villages in Northern Navarre are

⁴⁵ There exist some other problems that are not perceived by the population but still affect them, of course.

smaller (at about 300 inhabitants); it is a forested area where people mostly work in the primary industry. 4) Pamplona, the capital of Navarre, where half of the population of the province dwells.

In the Ribera Navarre (southern Navarre), the most important problematic is related to water, given that there is a high probability of droughts which affect the water quality. Desertification is a major issue, as well as water waste or the failure of reforestation policies. Therefore the environmental concern is mostly identified with water. Another major issue for this community is noise impact. Close to these populations there is a military base that is a source of noise that people are bothered by.

The area is characterized by being a windy area, which has resulted in the location of a fair amount of wind turbines to produce electricity⁴⁶. The visual impact of these turbines is high, and the social perception of these aeolic farms is twofold, a negative and a positive one. On the one hand, many people (belonging to Ribera Navarre) think of wind turbines as a drawback for the visual landscape and as noise polluters. For the young people these wind turbines do not save energy but just produce more. At the same time, they are opposed to wind farms as they feel their location has not been negotiated with the local population⁴⁷. On the other hand, wind turbines are positively interpreted because Navarre is a leading region in Spain in wind energy production. Wind turbines are seen by this population as another evidence of human action on the environment, as is the case with roads.

To sum up, in the Ribera Navarre the common good par excellence is the water. Landscape is thought by many people as part of their common good, and for that they are opposed to the development of wind farms.

In Middle Navarre there is a strong presence of wind farms too. This is interpreted as being mainly an aesthetic problem as in the Ribera Navarre. In Middle Navarre there is far more vegetation than in the south, for this reason (and because it is quite close) it is a weekend destination for many tourists from Pamplona, the capital of the region. The people of Middle Navarre see tourists as an element of disturbance and consider them dirty and noisy. Alongside with this, they show concern about the situation of the forests, which are becoming a “rubbish dump” due to a lack of clean up. This shows that the Middle Navarrian population thinks of the forest clean up as a responsibility of the national administration. On the contrary, in Northern Navarre (Navarrian Mountain) people show more concern about their forests and think they have a responsibility to take care of them.

Economic growth in Middle Navarre is due in part to closeness to Pamplona. This growth has negative consequences on the environment. People see this negative influence, but on the other hand, they think of factories as a very important factor for their welfare. A value conflict takes place between environmental and pro-development values. The result is a desire for a moderate but continuous development. The older population of the area stresses the importance of environmental education aimed at the young population and the negative consequences of modern development. They have worked in agriculture, and therefore they show more concern about environmental issues than young people who work in factories and share an urban way of life do. In fact, wind farms are interpreted by a portion of the young population as a chance for more job opportunities.

The people from the Middle Navarre do not show any special concern for a common natural good. The common good that the landscape represents can be affected if the economic consequence is great. The lack of a clear idea of common natural good has as a consequence that the rate of environmental concern is the lowest in Navarre. The interest in

⁴⁶ Navarre is the region in Spain with the highest production of wind energy.

⁴⁷ Nevertheless, no one says anything about bird mortality caused by wind farms as a reason to oppose wind farms, as ecologists do.

waste recycling is high, but this is not a result of the concern in preserving the natural common good but of a particular life style.

The environmental problems perceived in Pamplona (the capital) are different, mainly due to the size of the city and the concentration of services and important infrastructures. The problems of public transport are considered as environmental problems. It is thought that deficiency in public transport has negative consequences on the environment because it means a higher rate of toxic emissions to the atmosphere. If public transport were more efficient, people think a higher percentage of Pamplonese would stop using private cars. Thus, toxic emissions and noise would drop in Pamplona. Noise pollution is one of the major themes for Pamplonese environmental issues. Also urban cleanness is an important environmental issue. The Pamplonese population considers that the city is quite clean, but this is due to the fact that many resources are spent in its cleaning rather than being the result of a popular concern for it.

In the surroundings of Pamplona there are many wind turbines too. Here the public interpretation is negative on visual terms. But unlike other areas in Navarre, in Pamplona people also talk about the bird mortality these wind turbines cause. This might be a consequence of the vast number of environmental organizations in Pamplona.

A success for the City Council in environmental issues is the rehabilitation of the river Arga. It was very dirty before, and now the population acknowledges the bettering of the situation. The natural common good for the Pamplonese population is the city as a whole. Air, noise, clean streets, and the river are elements of Pamplona's environment. The original idea of interpreting Nature as a common pool is an urban one, and because of it we can find such a holistic interpretation of the Pamplonese environment. It is the only population in Navarre that stresses the importance of clean air as an important environmental factor⁴⁸. In addition to Pamplona, the Pamplonese population considers distant areas as part of its environment. This is due to the tradition of visiting rural places on the weekends. Natural parks are in part the result of urban pressures and as a leisure alternative for urban groups. The Pamplonese population thinks that the role of television should be more important in creating an environmental concern.

People from Northern Navarre hold a high degree of environmental concern. This is an area of large forests and high mountains (the Pyrenees). Forests belong to the symbolic universe of local communities. They respect and are proud of them. They share a high degree of environmental information and a critical judgment of the administration environmental management. Hunters make the woods dirty, although they are considered far better than urban tourists (*dominguero*⁴⁹) are. Recycling is considered here in a different way than in the rest of Navarre. In the rest of Navarre people consider that the management of wastes is efficient and that they are leaders in Spain. On the contrary, the people of Northern Navarre think that the measures are not efficient and more work must be carried out. As the research shows, this area presents the highest rates of recycling in Navarre. Another aspect of Nature as a common good is the concern for green areas in towns. Some groups consider it a necessity to develop green areas, whereas others think there are enough green areas in the surrounding woods and for that investing financial resources on this issue would be a waste. The first group of people wants to develop a typical urban infrastructure to "raise the status" of the village. The other group thinks that instead of bringing green areas inside the town or the village, people should take more care of the surrounding Nature, and bring it into town by reinforcing the town's links with Nature.

⁴⁸ And this is not a consequence of a bad air quality. On the contrary, Pamplonese population stresses the quality of its air.

⁴⁹ "Dominguero" is a word that comes from "domingo" (Sunday). A *dominguero* is a person who only visits places on Sundays.

The link between Society and Nature is made explicit in some areas of Northern Navarre. This is a consequence of the growing number of natural parks in the area. The rules of these parks do not allow local people to exploit the forest as they have traditionally. These new rules are not legitimate from the point of view of these people. In this sense, they ask Administration to consider human beings also as part of the environment. They say, for example, that cattle keep paths clean, and timber cutting is a way to avoid natural fires. On the other hand, they say that sustaining rules like these is an economic disaster for the people living around natural parks. Natural parks are a common good for the Navarrian population as a whole although it might negatively affect to local people. It is a conflict between common and particular interest. This conflict can be analyzed from another perspective. It is a conflict between different views of a common pool, between a traditional communal and a new communal. It represents different ideas about how to manage common pools. The problem is far from easy to solve.

Northern Navarrans are proud of their environment and consider it a privilege to live there, although their economic development is slower. The common natural good for this population are in the first place their forests and in second place their rivers. They complain about the state of their rivers.

A decisive factor in the social definition of the environment is the ranking of priorities that society develops about the environmental problems that perceive. In a postindustrial society, problems are worldwide. Beck's Society of Risk is a society worried by issues that traditionally science used to solve. Nowadays these issues are out of control.

Legitimacy of social actors involved in environmental issues is important, as well as legitimacy of social institutions designed to deal with these problems and the environmental policies that result. Legitimization processes are very complicated. Social institutions gain or lose influence and legitimacy in society. In the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church could have had the legitimacy to deal with an environmental crisis like ours, but now its perspective of the problem is not important for the overwhelming part of the population. The role of Science has overcome that of the Church. However, Science has lost part of its legitimacy, creating a conflictive situation where there is not an institution that can take control of the situation. This is one of the factors of the crisis of postmodernity in advanced societies. On the other hand, scientists are increasingly asked to express their opinions on environmental issues.

Summing up, the cultural background of a given society affects the social perception of people about Nature. Culture is a set of concepts useful to deal with the world on the whole and with nature in particular. Culture also stores all knowledge of previous generations about Nature. The contact with other cultures can bring an interchange of knowledge that can affect the conceptualization of Nature and a culture's material interaction with the environment. Culture plays an important role in categorizing and defining the environment. Obviously, this categorization affects their way to perceive the environment. Social agreement about natural beauty also affects social perception about Nature. Some landscapes can be considered awful and frightening and some centuries later an example of beauty. The Ribera Navarre has traditionally been considered a poor landscape⁵⁰. Now its dry landscape summons tourists from all over Spain and France. Culture also can affect people to think of their environment only in economic terms.

The material relation that a society keeps with its environment is an important issue to explain the social perception of Nature. Human communities establish a good relation in symbolic terms with their source of resources. Many farmers (especially old people) feel emotion about their lands and keep on tilling a poor land (as in the case of Ribera Navarre) partly because of this. This is the case of Ribera Navarre and its dependence on water.

⁵⁰ Selfportrait of Navarre.

The mode of production of the society influences the way people perceive their physical surrounding. In a hunters and gatherers society, the relation with Nature tends to create an interpretation of a logical continuity between Nature and Society.

An example of the interaction between industrial societies and Nature is the location of a factory in the rural setting or in a place nearby the city. In Ribera Navarre to locate factories in natural settings is seen environmentally negative. People think companies are not environmentally concerned as they only seek their direct economic benefit. Their proposals always stress on the necessity of raising “green fees” that “ecologically bad” companies should have to pay.

The people of the Middle Navarre hold a very different environmental perception about companies. This area is increasing its income through investments and factory production. Because of this, people accept more easily an environmental harm as a trade off for job opportunities. Even so, they think companies should be both monitored and given incentives not to pollute instead of limiting factory production. In this respect, people also distrust transgenic products for the resulting dependence on multinationals.

In Pamplona people think that some foreign firms located in Navarre, like Volkswagen, are cleaner. To accomplish the goal of companies being more environmental concerned, they propose developing a “green market”. They think the government should help companies to become “greener” rather than penalize them.

The people in Northern Navarre hold a high environmental concern and for that the important issue relating factories is their location. In this area, environmental issues are more important than economic development. They think that the environment has improved greatly in the last decades. Nowadays there exist more environmental rules helping to improve the environment. Northern Navarrans think of managers as individuals that only seek personal benefit, lacking environmental concern. They do not count on companies to defend the natural commons of the local community because their only goal is to produce economic benefits. This population trusts in the government to deal with environmental issues and guarantee the protection of their common natural good. They think that the institution in charge of the territory must seek everybody’s interests rather than particular benefits, since the territory offers common benefits to the whole community. To say the least, they do not share Hardin’s conception of management.

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