

Environmental History in Spain: Eyeing the Future from the Past

The research field of Environmental History in Spain has been developing for over thirty years, with special attention to three areas: environmental conflicts, common goods and social metabolism. These three areas of research are specified in the creation of the University Network of Environmental History (RUEDHA, <https://ruedha.hypotheses.org/tag/ruedha>) with headquarters in Granada under the coordination of the STAND Research Group (South Training Action Network of Decoloniality, <https://standugr.com>), which organises meetings every two years. The Research Teams at the University of Granada, Pablo de Olavide University, University of Barcelona, ICTA, Public University of Navarra and the University of Santiago de Compostela, among others, have been creating collaborative elements for many years to consolidate this line of research into Spain's contemporary history.

Interdisciplinary perspectives have addressed socio-environmental resistance to the disappearance of common property throughout history, the result of processes of metabolic transformation showing high levels of global and local unsustainability. The following publications sample recent results of this historiography, reflecting close collaboration with Latin America approaches.

Noteworthy Recent Publications

M. González de Molina and V. Toledo, *The Social Metabolism. A Socio-Ecological theory of Historical Change* (London: Springer 2014).

At this precise moment, anxiety for the future is a crucial theme of many books, reports and beliefs. Disequilibria are at such scales that no region in the world or sector of society can be beyond their reach. From its outset, this book offers a theoretical and epistemological approach directed toward localising and clarifying a new contribution to a history of the environment, while providing a detailed definition of the concept of social metabolism. The focus is on the exchange between society and forms of energy, matter and information in a territorial or spatial matrix across several scales, from local to global. Various chapters explore social metabolism in case studies, defined spatially. Material dimensions of social change are examined through the description and study of different metabolic regimes that existed throughout history. Three types of metabolism are presented, and considered as moments in development of humanity from a socioecological perspective: *cinegetic metabolism*, *organic or*

agrarian metabolism and *industrial metabolism*. Each type defines a social and ecological transmutation, becoming keys for understanding our contemporary situation. The result is to present a theory regarding the direction, mode and pace of socio-ecological change, especially by showing how one metabolic regime moves into another through *socio-ecological transitions*, especially those leading from organic to industrial regimes. The book concludes by proposing visions of an *alternative modernity*, offering elements of a truly sustainable society, especially by rethinking processes of transformation, circulation and consumption, possibly suppressing mechanisms of social inequality.

P. Corral Broto, *Protesta y Ciudadanía. Conflictos ambientales durante el franquismo en Zaragoza (1939-1979)* (Zaragoza, REA, 2015).

The Franco regime began by transforming the Spanish economy through a programme of national industrialisation. From the early years, this programme contributed dramatically to the pollution of rivers and air. In the 1960s, the idea of developing industrial clusters in cities led to an unparalleled urban and ecological crisis. Working class neighbourhoods in Zaragoza reacted to this double social and environmental transformation, demanding a right to clean air, green space and quality water. They also stood in solidarity with farmers fighting against nuclear power plants and large dams from 1975 until 1979, the last year considered by this author.

The product of an extensive doctoral thesis, this book reconstructs the stages of environmental protest, from the legal to subversive; it also analyses how, when and why the environmental norm of Francoism arises, understood as the regulation that the regime tried to apply to industrial activity. With little capacity or willingness to apply Francoist environmental law, especially the Regulation on Nuisance, Unhealthy, Harmful and Dangerous Industrial Activities (RAMINP, 1961), coupled with marginal enforcement by the Central Commission of Sanitation (1963), protests became radically more progressive. The publisher, Rolde de Estudios Aragoneses, places a high premium on the methodology of a regional history, one that is capable of analysing huge numbers of local conflicts and assessing responses at national and international levels.

This environmental history of Franco's regime shows that the 'right to the environment' created an environmental citizenship at a time of rising demand for a non-authoritarian political citizenship. In the early years of Franco's regime, the protests were legal, demanding application of the law that stipulated a minimum environmental standard. In the years of democratic transition (1975–1979), such protests demanded new environmental rights in terms of political citizenship.

Protest and citizenship, argues Corral, called attention to pollution, environmental risks and the 'plundering' of resources that accompanied the acceleration of industrialisation and urbanisation. He adapts to the reality of

Zaragoza, even if he defended his thesis at Paris École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales and the University of Granada. His broad divulgative style is supported by abundant graphic, cartographic and statistical information useful for bringing this very important episode of recent history to broad audiences.

A. Ortega Santos, 'Looking to the future. Dialogue and Environmental Knowledge in the Spanish Context', *AREAS Revista Internacional de Ciencias Sociales* 35 Historia ambiental en Europa y América Latina: miradas cruzadas (2016): 61–73.

This paper develops a critical view of the epistemology of Spanish environmental history over the last two decades. Management of the commons, socioenvironmental conflicts and studies of social metabolism have been the main strands of this new discipline. This historical field implies an interdisciplinary approach involving co-evolutionary relations between human societies and nature. In the case of Spain, this approach originated from agrarian histories that studied objects connected with transformation of ownership systems of property and natural resources, changes in management practices and increased attention to environmental conflicts originating from these changes. In this context, study of the commons played an important role in the course of Spanish environmental history. The main purpose of this work is not providing an overview of Spanish Agrarian History, but discussing environmental approaches from new and classical agrarian perspectives, born in the 1980s. Deforestation, impact of biomass extractive processes and extraction of natural capital within a global capitalist model are some of the phenomena lying beneath the territory, providing continuities and discontinuities in our contemporary age.

M. Cariño et al. (eds) *Evocando al Edén. Conocimiento, Valoración y Problemática del Oasis de los Comondú* (Barcelona, Icaria Editorial, 2013).

The oases of Mexico's Baja California were built in the eighteenth century by Jesuit colonists for developing new forms of agriculture. This project led to some of the largest transformations of this peninsula's socio-ecosystems. The resulting Mexican oasis landscape resembles oases of the Levant, North Africa, the Middle East, India and China. With the construction of complex irrigation systems and agriculturally diverse orchards in the wetter areas, together with extensive cattle raising, the local inhabitants forged an oasis culture approaching sustainability through complex adaptive socio-environmental knowledge. But since the 1950s, these oases have faced depopulation, environmental deterioration and cultural impoverishment. Why have these green islands been abandoned despite their endowment of natural resources that could offer

long-term productivity? How is it possible that such emblematic sustainability sites are disappearing while governments and activist organisations ignore this loss?

Beginning in 2006, these and other questions have led a group of us to form an Interdisciplinary Research Network for the Integral and Sustainable Development of the South Californian Oasis (RIDISOS), bringing together some thirty scholars from Mexico, Spain and the USA. *Evocando al Edén* is the main product of the multidisciplinary research of RIDISOS, collecting twenty chapters divided into three parts: ecology, history and society. The fruit of three years work, involving 35 authors and seven institutions, it surveys the biophysical, socioeconomic and historical characteristics of one of the most emblematic places of the New World. Its main objective is to contribute to a new appreciation of these Baja California landscapes, not only for their intrinsic historical and environmental values, but for their potential to demonstrate sustainability of a socio-ecological system.

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