A discussion of environmental education on the basis of diagnostics of four ecosystems in Brazil

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Abstract

This article brings the main results of a study called "An investigation of environmental education in five states and a biome in Brazil" carried out in four networks of environmental education. The study was commissioned by the Brazilian Network of Environmental Education, and was concluded in November 2004; it was based on data of the diagnostics performed by the following networks: State of São Paulo Network – REPEA (SP), Southern Network – REASUL (PR, SC, and RS), Aguapé Network (MT and MS/Pantanal Biome), and Acre Network – RAEA (AC). They all fed data into the Brazilian System of Environmental Information of the Ministry for the Environment (SIBEA/MMA) in the 2001-2003 period. The objectives of the study were to present a systematization of common categories researched in each network, to discuss the possibility of comparing the features of environmental education for the regions researched on the basis of the consolidation of the data gathered, and finally to highlight challenges, limitations and opportunities perceived in the development of environmental education. The analysis of the data emphasizes aspects such as: the institutions offering activities of environmental education are mainly public and of the civil society and, on a small scale, private; institutions of environmental education, educators/experts, and researchers are concentrated in Southeastern Brazil; activities are mostly of awareness/mobilization, followed by capacitation in environmental education; the concept of environmental education is not understood evenly across networks; there are more projects than programs of environmental education; there is a predominance of short duration courses in the training of environmental educators. The final considerations of the text analyze these tendencies in the light of the political and educational contexts, and suggestions are made for further reflection on the relations between environmental education and its social insertion.

Keywords

Regional data – Profile of Environmental Education – Networks.

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This article describes the main results of a study entitled "An investigation of environmental education in five states and a biome in Brazil", which was concluded in November 2004 as the final stage of the Project "Weaving Citizenship" (agreement 46/02) of the Brazilian Network of Environmental Education (REBEA) funded by the National Fund for the Environment (FNMA)[1]. Following the conclusion of the diagnostics, the data obtained were systematized and discussed with a view to producing an analytical reading of the whole, resulting in the above-mentioned study2 . In this sense, it is important to remark that the present study did not produce primary data, but analyzed data generated by the diagnostics, thus making use of those sources in its analyses.

The diagnostics were one of the goals of the projects elected for funding by the FNMA in support to the networks of environmental education, and had the purpose of increasing the knowledge about this subject in Brazil, as well as responding to the demand of the Ministry for the Environment for inputs to the Brazilian System of Environmental Information (SIBEA/MMA). Having followed its various stages, REBEA coordinated the process establishing, together with representatives of the networks, the methodological parameters for the diagnostics. They were, therefore, studies with a common methodological direction, carried out simultaneously by four regional networks within their respective areas of coverage.

The study had as its objectives: to systematize the common categories researched in the diagnostics performed by each network, to discuss if it is possible, from the consolidation of the data gathered, to compare the features of environmental education within the regions investigated, and finally to highlight emerging challenges, limits and opportunities in the development of environmental education.

It is important to emphasize the effort of the networks, whose aims are not academic, but of articulation and intervention, in carrying out the regional diagnostics, as well as the coordination role of REBEA, which developed this task carefully and competently, making use of the resources of the virtual community and with the help of some face-to-face meetings. However, we must also consider that such innovative situation, which, one could say, comes close to being a Networked Action Research, also has its limitations from the point of view of the methodological and theoretical articulation among the four studies. Despite the common methodological proposal, the large diversity of profiles among the networks and of conditions for the conduction of the diagnostics under each regional reality, as well as the fact that the monitoring of the research stages was predominantly made remotely, brought a certain heterogeneity to the data gathering strategies, a conceptual operation that has repercussions for the analysis of the results and places limitations to some generalizations.

Methodology

The methodology employed in the study "An investigation of environmental education in five states and a biome in Brazil", as well as in each of the regional diagnostics that gave support to it, can be described as that of an exploratory research representing a first systematic and coordinated attempt at a simultaneous assessment of the state-of-the-art in environmental education in four Brazilian regions. The data gathered were not delimited according to a statistical relevance criterion. They are data representative of the reality of environmental education allowing, in the first place, a qualitative analysis of the issue under study, and also its numerical expression within the researched areas, without actually constituting a sample such as this concept is defined in statistical analyses.

We shall now identify the parameters that have circumscribed the conditions and choices made, as well as the categories of

analysis established in conducting the diagnostics.

Areas of coverage

Based on the geopolitical and ecosystem boundaries of the coverage areas of the four regional networks, the regions showed in the table below were investigated. It is important to make clear that the concept of region was used as the area of coverage of the networks, leading to wide meanings that can include, for each network, different perspectives: as a state, a set of states, or as a biome. Applying the categories of "states" and "municipalities" over the regions of coverage of the networks yields the following:

from that region. The creation of a Northeastern network of environmental education is recent and took place after the start of the diagnostics. At any rate, even considering that the diagnostics do have quite a wide coverage and that they offer information for the analysis of environmental education related to a significant fraction of Brazilian regions and states, one must be careful not to generalize their results as constituting a full profile of environmental education in the country.

Finally, if a suggestion for the continuity of this research effort can be made, it would be that the diagnostics should be increased with the inclusion of new networks, to give a better idea of the reality of the country. This would mean carrying out new studies including the

Areas of coverage of the networks				
Networks/coverage	REPEA (State of São Paulo Network)	REASUL (Southern Network)	Aguapé Network	RAEA (Acre Network)
States	São Paulo	Paraná, Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul	Mato Grosso/Mato Grosso do Sul	Acre
Municipalities	Municipalities in SP, according to the Units of Water Resources (UGRH)	Municipalities in PR, SC, and RS	Ten hub municipalities in the ecosystem of the Pantanal and High Uruguai basin*	Municipalities in AC
Brazilian regions	Southeast (partial)	South (complete)	Midwest (partial)	North (partial)
Biomes/ecoregions	Atlantic Forest	Atlantic Forest/Araucaria Forest	Pantanal	Amazon Forest
*The ten hub municipalities researched by the Aguapé network were: Aquidanuana, Campo Grande, Corumbá, Coxim, Jardim, Porto Muritinho, Cáceres, Cuiabá, Santo Antônio do Leverger, and Poconé.				

It can be seen that not all Brazilian regions were fully represented in the areas of coverage of the networks. The Southeast was partially represented by the state of SP; the Southern region was the only one completely represented (states of PR, SC, and RS); the Midwest was partially represented by the Pantanal biome, which covers part of MT and part of MS, and the Northern region was partially represented, since the RAEA covers only the state of AC. It is noticeable that the Northeast was totally absent from the diagnostic. Such absence occurred because at the time of the announcement of the FNMA grant program that funded the diagnostics there were no applicants

Northeastern states and completing the states in the Southeast and North. This goal could serve as a guide for a research and data gathering policy on environmental education for REBEA/FNMA.

Categories and data gathering instruments

In order to guide the collecting of data in the diagnostics, four grand categories were defined based on the idea of mapping out the universe of institutional spaces, educative practices, professional profiles, and training courses in environmental education. In the

preparation of the questionnaires these categories were named: institutions promoting environmental education; environmental education activities conducted; educators/researchers and specialists in environmental education; environmental education courses.

Four questionnaires were prepared containing both open and closed questions, targeted at each one of the previously defined categories. The questionnaires received the following titles[3]:

• Getting to know the environmental education institutions;
• Getting to know the activities in environmental education;
• Getting to know the educators/researchers/specialists or "people connected to environmental education" (the latter is the phrase used by REPEA);
• Getting to know the environmental education courses[4].

In addition to the questionnaires, the use of other, complementary instruments by the networks was mentioned, such as bibliographical review and interviews. Among the latter, the following specific instruments were employed: answers via the Internet (SIBEA; network site); application of the questionnaires by researchers visiting the towns in the region; sending questionnaires by mail; linking the participation in state-organized seminars to filling the questionnaires; participation in meetings, seminars and events in environmental education to present the diagnostics and collect data; use of local radio stations and public spaces.

Data-gathering period

The data-gathering period included the application of the questionnaire, visits to the institutions, bibliographical research, and in some cases open interviews. This period varied for each network, and according to the calendar of local events and availability of the research team.

REPEA	REASUL
May to November 2003	October to November 2003
Rede Aguapé	**RAEA**
December 2002 to April 2003	October 2003 to February 2004

The numbers of environmental education for each regional diagnostic

We now present a synthetic table of the data obtained for each network. The following information, supplied by the networks, should also be considered regarding the universe of valid questionnaires: the REPEA assessment catalogued 2,105 filled questionnaires into the database. From these, 2,034 were validated, from which 431 had been completely filled out. REASUL fed the SIBEA system directly with the diagnostic data, and according to this network it obtained a total of 1,317 validated questionnaires. The Aguapé network submitted 400 questionnaires, obtaining 135 filled out answers. RAEA established as its universe for the study the institutions belonging to the network or to affiliated institutions, as they are referred to in the diagnostic.

Synthetic table of the data gathered by each environmental education network				
Research categories	**REPEA**	**REASUL**	**Aguapé**	**RAEA**
Institutions	435	263	36	11
Educators/Specialists/Researchers	592	685	60	73
Activities	202	369	50	143
Lato Sensu Graduate Courses	6	12	3	0
Stricto Sensu Graduate Courses	0	1	0	0
Other courses	77	27	14	8

3. The questionnaires prepared for the diagnostics are available in complete form as an appendix to the report: "An investigation of environmental education in five states and a biome in Brazil", which can be accessed at www.rebea.org.br.

4. The networks did not use the questionnaire targeted at the environmental education courses. The latter were assessed as one of the activities carried out in environmental education and therefore appear inside the "Activities" section. According to the guidelines given at the seminars with the networks in July 2004, it was decided that the courses to be included in the environmental education courses category were the graduate courses, either lato sensu (above 360 hours duration) and strictu sensu (master or doctorate levels), thereby giving priority to assessing the training profile of teachers and researchers involved in this area. The data from short-duration courses, specialization, continuing education or courses of technical level appear in the diagnostics under the "other courses" category.

Discussing the data

In addition to the synthesis presented above, the diagnostics produced a large amount of data broken up by municipality, state, and river basin, among other possibilities. Other information going beyond the categories defined in the questionnaires were also included in some of the diagnostics[5].

In the present article, however, we shall highlight only the main data corresponding to the four structuring categories of the questionnaires common to the network diagnostics (institutions, educators/researchers/specialists, activities, and courses), which therefore offer clues to the definition of a profile of environmental education in the studied regions.

The institutions of environmental education

The institutions of environmental education are in larger number in the State of São Paulo and in the states of the Southern Region

A total of 435 institutions of environ-mental education were identified by REPEA in the State of São Paulo, and 263 by REASUL in the three states of the South. The Aguapé network identified 38 institutions, and RAEA reported eleven institutions in Acre.

Institutions of environmental education by network		
Network	Institutions	Remarks
REPEA	435	SP
REASUL	263	PR, SC, RS
Aguapé	36	Hub municipalities in MT and MS
RAEA	11	AC

Let us now see how these data are distributed by state:

Institutions of environmental education by state	
State	Number of institutions
SP	435
RS	158
SC	61
PR	44
MT and MS	36
AC	11

A huge gap can be observed between the states of the South and Southeast and the State of Acre (AC). In this sense, one should take into account the difference in population and socio-economic density that characterizes Brazilian regions. As far as regions are concerned, as we all know, the South and Southeast concentrate population, and institutional, social and economic networks. Nevertheless, it is also worth referencing these data to a comparison with the diagnostic about the Amazon region carried out by the WWF-Brazil (Sato; Tamaio; Medeiros, 2002), in which the number of institutions and projects gathered for each state of the Amazon region is detailed. For example, that study identifies nine institutions and 32 projects of environmental education in AC.

Environmental education is public, civil, and to a lesser extent, private

A large part of the institutions promoting environmental education are public (federal, state, and city bodies; public schools of fundamental and secondary education; public universities), followed by social organizations (institutions of the civil society or mixed, such as councils and consortiums), and finally by private institutions.

The activities in environmental education follow the institutional density

Observing the activities in environmental education as distributed by network and by

Activities in environmental education by network	
Network	Activities
REPEA	202
REASUL	369
Aguapé	50
RAEA	143

5. Section II of the report "An investigation of environmental education in five states and a biome in Brazil" on which this article is based presents a complete view of the data collected and analyzed for each network.

state, as well as the institutions in the areas of coverage it is possible to see that there is a relation between the greater institutional density, understood as the presence of institutions that promote environmental education, and a larger number of activities in that area.

Activities in environmental education by network	
Network	Activities
REPEA	202
REASUL	369
Aguapé	50
RAEA	143

Classifying these data by state we have:

Activities in environmental education by state	
State	Number of activities
SP	202
SC	196
AC	143
PR	99
RS	74
MT and MS	50

The relation between institutions and activities in environmental education in the states

Institutions and activities in environmental education by state		
State	Institutions	Activities
SP	435	202
RS	158	74
SC	61	196
PR	44	99
MT and MS	36	50
AC	11	143

Considering the data classifying institutions and activities in environmental education by state, the concentration of projects follows the institutional density, with the exception of State of Acre. In this case, it is surprising to observe the large presence of activities and the small number of institutions identified by RAEA (143 projects for only institutions). Such result should be seen with reservation, because it reflects a very lax

classification criterion for the activities developed by the institutions belonging to the network, which includes activities such as environmental improvement and management.

Considering the internal situation of the states within the REASUL coverage, the State of Rio Grande do Sul stands out with the largest number of institutions (158) and the smallest number of activities (74). This result probably relates to the large number of institutes of education developing environmental education activities in this state – a pioneer in Brazil in offering higher education courses in this area – and to the fact that these institutes' target the production of knowledge in the form of monographs and dissertations. The latter do not count to the "activities in environmental education" category and, as usual, include in the same proportion actions of intervention, which in the case of universities would correspond to the actions of university extension. The State of Santa Catarina, whose ratio between institutes of education and institutions of intervention seems to be more balanced, is the one with the largest proportion of activities per institution (3) among the four states of the South-Southeast region (SP, PR, SC, and RS).

Environmental education is predominantly associated to sensitization/mobilization actions, and to capacitation actions

We present next the data related to the profiles of environmental education activities identified by the networks when they assessed the kinds of activities developed by the institutions within their areas of coverage.

As to the profile of activities identified, considering the diagnostics of all four networks, there seems to be a predominance of activities of mobilization/sensitization, followed by capacitation activities. Research activities in environmental education are the least mentioned ones.

Profile of environmental education activities according to REPEA	
Activities identified by REPEA	
Sensitization	189
Formal education capacitation	162
Mobilization	143
Non-formal education capacitation	128
Production of pedagogical material	120
Music and cultural manifestations	78
Newsletter	62
Other	11

Profile of activities in environmental education in REASUL*	
Types of activities identified by REASUL in PR	
Sensitization	36
Mobilization	26
Non-formal education capacitation	22
*The information related to the types of activities in RS are not present in the REASUL diagnostic.	

Types of activities identified by REASUL in SC	
Sensitization of groups of agents for environmental issues	16
Community mobilization	15
Formal education capacitation	13
Non-formal education capacitation	12

Profile of activities in environmental education in the Aguapé Network	
Types of activities identified in the Aguapé Network	
Sensitization	28
Mobilization	27
Formal education capacitation	15
Non-formal education capacitation	14
Production of pedagogical material	14
Other	04

Profile of activities in environmental education in REAE	
Types of activities identified by REAE	
Sensitization/mobilization/conscientization	79
Capacitation	23
Publicizing	12
Creation of councils, production of documents/policies and programs of environmental education	13
Research and diagnostic	9

There are more projects than programs in environmental education

The data presented below were collected by the networks, and are related to the types of activities in environmental education developed in their respective areas of coverage, considering how these activities are structured.

Activities in environmental education in REPEA	
Activities	**Number of activities**
Programs	15
Projects	67
Campaigns	5
Meetings	6
Courses	77
Researches	16
Other	16
Total	202

Activities in environmental education in REASUL				
Activities	**PR**	**SC**	**RS**	**Total**
Programs	18	26	10	54
Projects	61	139	50	250
Campaigns	04	04	-	08
Meeting/Seminar/Congress	06	02	06	14
Courses Stricto and Lato Sensu	01	04	08	13
Other courses	06	20	01	27
Other activities	03	-	-	03
Total	99	196	74	369

Synthetic table of programs and projects in REASUL (PR, SC and RS)		
State	**Programs**	**Projects**
PR	18	61
SC	26	139
RS	10	50

Activities in environmental education in the Aguapé Network	
Type of activity	**Number of activities**
Programs	03
Projects	31
Campaigns	01
Meeting/Seminar/Congress	01
Courses	14
Other	--
TOTAL	50

Activities in environmental education in RAEA			
Projects	**Programs**	**Other Activities**	**Total**
46	6	91	143

The REASUL diagnostic evinces for the three states the high number of projects (250), programs (54), and then activities such as campaigns, congresses, courses and others. The Acre network identifies 46 projects and six

programs. In the Aguapé network the projects (31) are also in much larger number than the programs (three). The same happens in REPEA, where 67 projects were identified against 15 programs, and where the qualitative analysis of the educators also stresses (REPEA, 2004, p. 11) the fact that the multiplication of projects was a means to provide working conditions in environmental education.

It is interesting to ponder to what extent the projects and programs items indicate a predominance of short-term actions over long-term actions. As we have seen previously, a large part of the institutions promoting environmental education are public. This leads to the thought that, even in governmental institutions, the projects are more common than the programs. Considering that programs would be actions more tailored to public policies, due to the characteristics of long-term actions and a deeper embedding in the institutional structure, this could point to a certain impoverishment of the public policies.

The Educators/specialists/researchers

In the data classified by state, Rio Grande do Sul and São Paulo stand out as the states with the highest concentrations of educators/specialists/researchers. Looking at the data by network, the large number of educators/specialists/researchers in REASUL is visible, followed by those in REPEA.

Classifying the data by state puts in evidence the large number of educators/specialists/researchers in Rio Grande do Sul, the leader in the number of institutions working in the area. These data suggest, besides the existence of lines of research in environmental education in several universities, the effect of the presence in this state of the only *stricto sensu* graduate program (Master Degree) in this field in Brazil, based in the town of Rio Grande at the Rio Grande University Foundation (FURG). This program is one of the links of REASUL and one of the centers responsible for registering the information on environmental education with SIBEA for the State of Rio Grande do Sul. Thus,

Educators/specialists/researchers by state	
State	**Number of educators/specialists/researchers**
RS	380
SP	592
SC	155
PR	150
MT and MS	60
AC	73

Educators/specialists/researchers by network	
Network	**Number of educators/specialists/researchers**
REASUL	685
REPEA	592
Aguapé Network	60
RAEA	73

both the training of specialists and graduates (researchers) in environmental education by FURG, and the systematic identification of institutions supported by SIBEA are factors that certainly contributed to place Rio Grande do Sul in evidence within the diagnostic.

There is a predominance of short duration courses in the training of environmental educators

Although the category "courses" was included in the methodology as part of one of the questionnaires planned as instruments of the research, the networks did not apply such questionnaires. The data on the courses appear in the questionnaire about activities in environmental education. In a second moment, after a working meeting about the research in July 2004, there was agreement around the proposal that the networks should complement that information with a new, more focused assessment, identifying only the academic graduate courses of the *lato sensu* (specialization, at least 360 hours long) and *stricto sensu* modalities. The data thus obtained are collected in the table below:

Graduate courses in environmental education by network			
Networks	*Lato sensu* courses (specialization 360 hr)	*Stricto sensu* (Master degree)	Other courses (short duration)
REPEA	6	0	77
REASUL	12	1	27
Aguapé	3	0	14
RAEA	0	0	8
Total	21	1	126

It can be seen from the table above that the short duration courses are the majority among those identified by the networks (126), and correspond largely to capacitation actions and brief courses given by NGOs, Municipal Secretaries for Education and Environment, schools etc. Specialization courses (21) represent only a small fraction of the possibilities for training in environmental education, and there is only one *stricto sensu* graduate course in Brazil, the one leading to a master degree at FURG (RS). Although there has been mention to lines of research in environmental education in several different *stricto sensu* graduate courses (master and doctorate) in various states of the country, such information was not subjected to a systematic assessment[6]. Comparative data for secondary and undergraduate education have not been obtained, but we could say that the presence of specific training in environmental education is small in those levels of education.

Further education or even professional training in environmental education still have a small offer when compared to the number of educators/specialists/researchers, and also when contrasted with the large public who have been attending regional seminars and national forums during the last years.

Final comments

As shown throughout this article, the data produced from the diagnostics contain relevant information about the presence and modalities of environmental education within the areas of coverage of the participating networks. A first comparative analysis of the data seems to reinforce, within the scope of environmental education, the existence of regional differences and inequalities, which are also known to us from other social indicators.

Despite some heterogeneity among regions in the conduction of the study, it is possible in these final considerations to observe a few convergences that signal to key points for reflection on the development of environmental education as an educative practice in these regions, but that are probably not restricted to these realities, calling for further research and reflection aiming at expanding these diagnostics, deepening and problematizing the clues that have emerged here.

Some questions for reflection emerging from the diagnostics

What is really an environmental education activity?

The comprehension of the criteria according to which an activity is either classified as of environmental education or else excluded from this sphere does not seem to be widely shared, or at least not sufficiently expounded and discussed, throughout the networks. For example, some activities that could be generically classified as of "environmental improvement" – that is, interventions to improve or better manage the environment, whose finality was not necessarily linked to an educative goal, and that therefore do not necessarily have environmental education as the reason for their existence, or that may even not include this dimension in their implementation – were in some cases regarded as equivalent to environmental education. This situation was made particularly clear in the diagnostic made by RAEA, but was probably not confined to this network, drawing attention to the fact that the concept of environmental education is still not stable in the extremely

heterogeneous universe of the practices and understandings in this area, lacking a consensus even within a single network.

In this sense, it would be interesting to further the debate with a view on building a shared concept of environmental education. Far from constituting a normative intent, constrictive of the diversity of possible environmental educations, which shall always include a multiplicity of emphases, methodologies, styles, and strategies of action, it would be productive to define a conceptual and dialogical field that would face up to this debate, and that would help transforming environmental education into an operative concept, substantial enough to create a community and support consistent educative practices capable of finding their own foundations, bringing forward and assuming their differences whenever the occasion arises. Establishing and sharing the reflection on the foundations of environmental education thus becomes more and more important in the scenario of strengthening and professionalization of environmental education in Brazil. REBEA and the regional networks are, in this sense, privileged spaces to include and foster this conceptual development within their education programs.

More projects than programs in environmental education: an invitation to reflect upon the interweaving of society's impoverishment and democratization processes

It is very noticeable that the "project"[7] modality predominates over the "program" modality in the activities of environmental education. This situation of having environmental education implemented largely through projects had already appeared in previous assessments, such as the one made public by the Ministry for Education at the 1st Conference on Environmental Education (1997) and, more recently, it had also been identified in INEP's 2000 School Census, which included

questions about the treatment given to environmental education in fundamental education public schools[8]. The results of the School Census showed that environmental education is dealt with by schools mainly in the shape of "thematic insertions" in the curriculum through the various disciplines. This type of approach covers 52.9% of the pupils of the initial series and 55.4% of the students in the later series. The second most employed form for the study of environmental issues is through "projects" that cover 26.8% of the pupils from the 1st to 4th series, and 29.6% of students from the 5th to 8th series. Apart from the school universe, where the modality of "projects" has been one of the strong devices for implementing environmental education activities, we can also suppose that, in the case of the diagnostics made by the networks, which are not restricted to schools, but also include other types of institutions promoting environmental education, another profile of activities joins in the number of school projects, activities structured as social projects, which in this particular case could be called socio-environmental. The latter can be defined as actions of socio-environmental intervention, planned according to objectives, with time and resources previously defined, usually proposed by entities of the civil society and supported by public or private funds, national or international.

It is appropriate here to problematize the wider picture of the social transformations that seem to be the backdrop to the strong presence of social projects as a means of carrying out actions, an existing tendency in several segments

8. In the educational field, the word "project" is often associated to the pedagogy of projects present in various educational methodologies. By speaking of social projects, we do not refer here to projects as a teaching-learning methodology.
9. The questions referred to the existence of some work in environmental education in the schools, and if so, three non mutually exclusive alternatives were given: a) through a specific discipline; b) projects; c) insertion of the theme in the curriculum. The results pointed to an expressive result: from the total number of students in fundamental education 71.2% are in schools that work in one way or another with environmental education. Among the students from the 5th to 8th grades this index is 73%, or 11.4 million students, and among pupils of the 1st to 4th grades it is 70%, corresponding to 13.8 million students (cf. MEC/INEP/Sala de Imprensa, 2002 and Mendonça, 2004).

of social policies – education included – that has been gathering strength since the mid 1990s. Within this period, we have witnessed changes in international cooperation policies and the crisis of funding that have reached both the entities of civil society and the State, and that have had as a consequence the focusing of public policies. The National State, sunk in debt and restricted in its capacity for regulating and right-universalizing actions, was severely stricken by the intensification of financial globalization and neoliberal policies. In the national and international economic scenario that paralleled the weakening of the Nation-State, the workplace crisis grows, with the loss of perspectives of job stability, rise in unemployment, impoverishment of labor and employability associated to the emergence of the informal market and of various forms of outsourcing. The convergence of these social processes seems to concur to increase the worth of the "social project" modality as an escape route to structure agile, low-cost, flexible actions of social intervention without the burden of creating fixed jobs and their associated costs.

Thinking under the perspective according to which social projects are a possible way out for action in times of crisis, we could ask ourselves to what extent the predominance of projects over programs of environmental education can be associated to the current condition of crisis of the State, flexibilization and impoverishment of labor in general, and of education in particular. This situation is illustrated in the REPEA diagnostic, which describes the large mobility of an important segment of environmental educators in the State of São Paulo, in their majority young and recently graduated, who move from project to project according to the availability of public or private funds to approve and support them.

One cannot but consider, nonetheless, that this same reality of strong presence of social – or socio-environmental – projects also reflects the capacity of the society to respond with proposals, and a State more open to the participation and dialogue with society. Thus, the wide acceptance of that modality of action can also indicate a high level of commitment of the civil society in proposing activities of environmental education. This analysis would be acceptable if we suppose an increase in the ability for action of the Brazilian society, and of its environmental awareness, as well as the democratization of material and symbolic resources (education, political and managerial autonomy etc) to intervene with proposals in the environmental field, in actions complementary to the public policies represented by the programs.

Probably, the predominance of projects over programs tells us of the crossing of both processes in the current socio-historical situation. In the Brazil of the 2000s we live at the same time in a society more robust in its ability for action and organization, and more fragile due to the processes of financial globalization that weaken the National State and reduce its capacity for the universalization of rights (such as education) through continual and long-lasting public policies. This process leads equally to the impoverishment of labor conditions, of institutions and of the stability of professional insertion. This leaves the educator, just like other social workers, adrift in a sea of projects as the dominant modality for the conduction of actions. As we know, social projects are very important actions in engendering innovations and pilot experiences. However, they are still punctual actions, in the sense of being restricted in time (short- or medium-term), of an innovative and complementary character, never capable of replacing the public policies.

These issues draw attention to the need to establish an agenda of discussions that can reflect the conditions of the practice of environmental education in the Brazilian society and within the current international context of globalization. This implies facing not just the operational, political and pedagogical questions internal to environmental education, but also problematizing it as a social practice within the current socio-historical context.

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