



## **Women in small-scale boat fishing: notes on education, knowledge and socio-environmental conflicts**

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### **Abstract**

The reference that the world of boat fishing is eminently male is guided by a hierarchical or at least inattentive look that does not recognize the existence of women who practice fishing focused on catching fish. This article aims to present some reflections, based on an ethnographic research with fisherwomen in Lagoa Mirim and the Lagoa dos Patos estuary, considering the concrete experiences that point to contexts of permanent construction of knowledge and of themselves through shared learning and socio-environmental conflicts experienced.

### **Keywords**

Boarded fisherwomen. Education. Social and environmental conflicts.

### **Mulheres na pesca embarcada artesanal: apontamentos sobre educação, saberes e conflitos socioambientais**

### **Resumo**

A referência de que o mundo da pesca embarcada é eminentemente masculino se pauta por um olhar hierárquico ou ao menos desatento que não reconhece a existência de mulheres que praticam a pesca centrada na captura do pescado. Este artigo objetiva apresentar algumas reflexões a partir de uma pesquisa etnográfica junto a essas pescadoras na Lagoa Mirim e do estuário da Lagoa dos Patos, considerando as experiências concretas que apontam para contextos de construção permanente do conhecimento e de si a partir de aprendizagens compartilhadas e conflitos socioambientais experienciados.

### **Palavras-chave**

Pescadoras embarcadas. Educação. Conflitos socioambientais.



**Mujeres en la pesca embarcada artesanal:  
notas sobre educación, conocimiento y conflictos socioambientales**

**Resumen**

La referencia de que el mundo de la pesca a bordo es eminentemente masculino está guiada por un aspecto jerárquico o al menos desatento que no reconoce la existencia de mujeres que practican la pesca centrada en la captura de peces. Este artículo tiene como objetivo presentar algunas reflexiones basadas en una investigación etnográfica con estas pescadoras en Lagoa Mirim y en el estuario de Lagoa dos Patos, considerando las experiencias concretas que apuntan a contextos de construcción permanente del conocimiento y de ellos mismos a través del aprendizaje compartido y conflictos socioambientales experimentados.

**Palabras clave**

Pescadoras abordados. Educación. Conflictos sociales y ambientales.

**1 Introduction**

This article stems from reflections developed within research<sup>1</sup> with women in small-scale boat fishing<sup>2</sup> at some fishing areas at the Lagoa dos Patos estuary<sup>3</sup> and Lagoa Mirim, in the south of Rio Grande do Sul. The investigation is developed in the

<sup>1</sup> The data from field research presented here refer to the first author's Doctorate research, titled *Pescadoras artesanais embarcadas da Lagoa Mirim e do estuário da Lagoa dos Patos: educação, saberes e interligação dos espaços ambientais a partir de uma perspectiva comparada*, which began in 2018 with the Graduate Program in Environmental Education (PPGEA, in Portuguese) at the Federal University of Rio Grande (FURG).

<sup>2</sup> Chapter IV of Law n. 11.959/2009, in Article 8, classifies fishing as: "I. Commercial: a) *small-scale: when practiced directly by professional fisherpeople, autonomously or in a family economy system, with their own means of production or through a partnership contract; may use small fishing vessels*; b) *industrial: when practiced by a private individual or legal entity and involving professional fisherpeople, employed or in partnership through shares, using small, medium or large fishing vessels, with commercial purpose*" (our translation).

<sup>3</sup> *Lagoa Mirim* is part of the Patos-Mirim lake system, located in the south of Rio Grande do Sul, with part of its limit on the border with Uruguay. Settled on the coastal plains, it has approximately 3,750 km<sup>2</sup> of surface area, out of which 2,750 km<sup>2</sup> are in Brazilian territory and 1,000 km<sup>2</sup> are in Uruguayan territory. The Brazilian side encompasses the municipalities of Santa Vitória do Palmar and Rio Grande on the east margin and the municipalities of Arroio Grande and Jaguarão on the west margin; the Uruguayan territory encompasses the provinces of Cerro Largo, Treinta y Tres and Rocha (PIEDRAS et al., 2012). *Estuaries* are semi-closed coastal ecosystems that have a free connection with the sea and where sea water mixes with fresh water from sources in the land area. The *Lagoa dos Patos estuary* has an area of 963.8 km<sup>2</sup>, corresponding approximately to a tenth of the total area of the lake. It has a volume of 1.67x10<sup>9</sup> m<sup>3</sup>, with a shallow environment, with an average depth of 1.74 m. Around 76% of its area is less than 2 m deep. The estuary has an important social and economic function for the communities that live nearby, where there are many small-scale fisheries, a few fish industries and a powerful industrial hub. It also functions as a corridor for river distribution of the internal production of the state and the country through the Super Port (one of the biggest in exportations of Latin America) (SCHWOCHOW; ZANBONI, 2007).



dialogue between the fields of Environmental Education and Anthropology, whose objective is to understand the meanings of living the fishing, aiming to observe how these women acknowledge themselves and are acknowledged as boarded fisherwomen, in an effort to understand how the knowledge related to their work practices, territorialities and, in a broader sense, way of life is formed, updated and transmitted in educational processes, as well as to understand mainly what are their strategies to confront other rationalities.

Stating that these women work aboard small-scale fishing boats implies that they work in catching fish in small fishing vessels typical for these lake regions called dinghies and skiffs (wooden boats with or without motors), measuring around 3 to 10 meters long. They go to the lake and return to land daily or camp in the boats, staying for a few days on water searching for fish and crustaceans. They work in a family economy system, begin fishing at 8/10 years of age, with parents, siblings, husbands, children, relatives and friends, and some work by themselves.

Thus, they contradict the reference that the world of boarded fishing is eminently masculine, a concept based on a hierarchical or at least inattentive look that doesn't acknowledge the existence of women who practice fishing centered in the capture of fish. They exist! They are on the lakes on their boats, dinghies or skiffs. However, for them, fishing seems to extrapolate the notion of productive work, it also brings a series of ontological questions about the Brazilian fisherwoman.

The lake is a desired and learned place, fish are allies, the Moon, the Sun, the tides are companions and the land tends to appear as a challenge. It is these questions that this text deals with, emphasizing that the construction of being a fisherwoman has a lot of elements and reveals that it is based on the categories *education* and *work* that they exist and guarantee their subsistence and autonomy, in order to achieve their aspirations and face challenges and conflicts.

The investigation uses the ethnographic method of qualitative investigation, privileging participant observation through intense and profound interaction with the interlocutors and their realities. The field work encompassed so far the definition of the researched localities, the discovery and contact with seven fisherwomen with observation of fishing and daily routine of these workers.

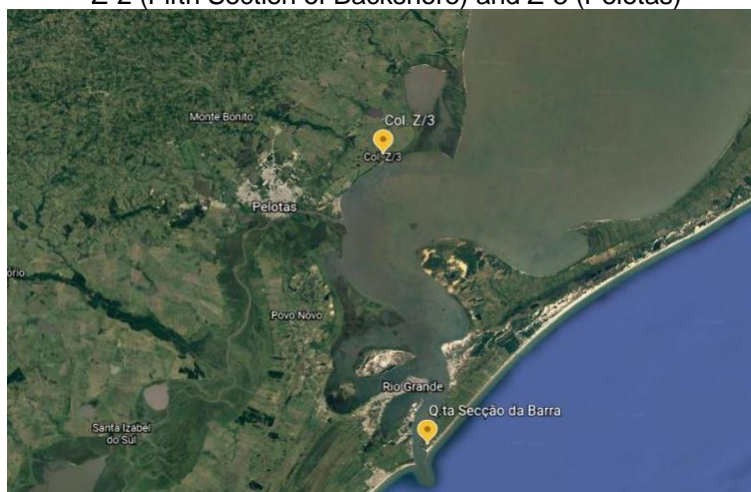
**Image 1** – Márcia on her vessel at Lagoa Mirim catching guitarfish



**Source:** Author's archive (2020).

Meeting the interlocutors happened through the recommendation of colleagues and friends who noticed or heard of those workers fishing on boats at lakes in Rio Grande do Sul. The researcher, with that information, sought to locate these workers, finding them in many places, but the methodological cutoff required the definition of only a few fishing zones, which are: fishing colonies Z-3, in Pelotas, Z-2, in the Fifth Section of Backshore at São José do Norte, both located at the Lagoa dos Patos estuary, Z-16, at the Port of Santa Vitória do Palmar, and Z-25, in Jaguarão, located at Lagoa Mirim.

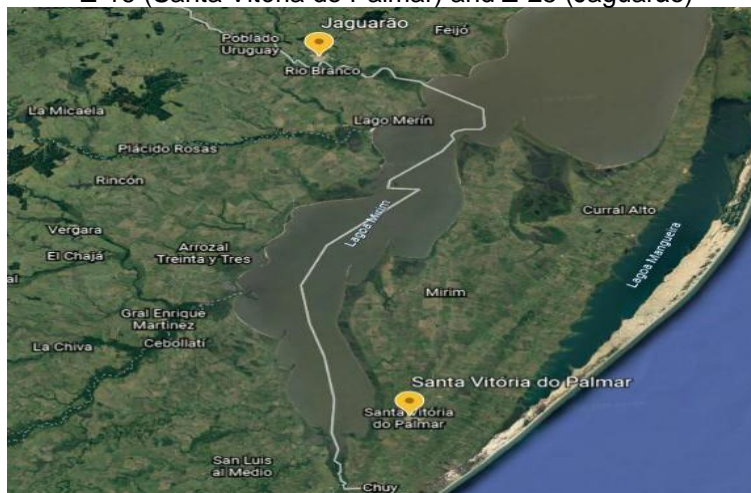
**Image 2** – Lagoa dos Patos estuary – Research locations: Z-2 (Fifth Section of Backshore) and Z-3 (Pelotas)



**Source:** Google Earth.



**Image 3 – Lagoa Mirim – Resarch locations:  
Z-16 (Santa Vitória do Palmar) and Z-25 (Jaguarão)**



Source: Google Earth.

## 2 New paradigms: delineating concepts

When we discuss human education and look at the small-scale fishing system in Brazil, we find ourselves facing a cultural phenomenon in which knowledge and practices are transmitted through generations, guided by abilities learned and developed according to the dynamics of life and living. Ingold (2010) points us toward what he calls *Education of Attention*, which, according to the author, consists of the crossing of life's paths that interchange through the ways of living and the abilities developed through concrete experiences.

This learned and transmitted knowledge, according to several authors, such as Adomilli (2003, 2007), Gerber (2015) and Pieve, Kubo and Coelho de Souza (2012), is closely related to symbolic concepts regarding the resources of fauna, flora, natural phenomena, human and non-human relationships, and to the practical concepts of knowledge concerning environment management and the appropriation of its resources, such as the development and use of specific and suitable technologies according to their availability in the environment.

According to Ingold (2010), knowing is fundamentally an ability that we acquire in our relationship with other organisms and beings that inhabit the same world, and not a human prerogative that would be processed in the restricted space of the mind as a rational operation. From that stems the epistemological turn proposed by several authors

from different discipline backgrounds and different theory options, in the common effort to overcome modern dualities, such as nature and culture, individual and society, body and mind, artificial and natural, subject and object.

In an effort to deconstruct such dualities and put into symmetry humans and non-humans, these authors propose, through conceptual clues, what Steil and Carvalho (2014) call *Ecological Epistemologies*, which are necessarily plural, since they consist of a convergence area for new horizons of understanding; they reclaim the materiality and autonomy of the world, rethink the statute of reality, counter the representational perspective, freeing knowledge from the human mind and focusing on action. According to Ingold (2011), in this perspective, observation stops being the opposite of participation and becomes a condition for knowledge, because the world given us for observation is a moving world.

In the face of that, the symmetry issue appears as central in knowledge production, no longer “about”, but “with” the other, being, thus, a fusion of human history and natural history. “The observer doesn’t watch from a body situated as an independent totality of the flows of light, sound and textures of the environment, but, on the contrary, they are traversed by those flows, which give them the possibility to understand the world” (STEIL; CARVALHO, 2014, p. 168, our translation).

Therefore, instead of considering nature only as a resource, we propose, in the interface between Anthropology and Environmental Education, considering it as a space of learning, in which the boarded fisherwomen’s everyday knowledge would be connected to a territoriality, what we call, according to Little (2003), *Social Territories*, which encompass the diversity of human groups that show different forms to appropriate the space; in a cosmologic perspective, it enables an approach concerning the living in/inhabiting the world.

We also point out that the notion of environment goes beyond the dimension initially described by ecology; this notion, now in a broader sense, contemplates the human beings and, thus, seeks to relate nature and culture, understanding, likewise, that there is an expansion of the notion of education, going beyond, for example, the school space, especially if we think of the relationship between education and culture as foundational forms that involve teaching and learning in human societies (SOUZA *et al.*, 2008).



We turn, then, to the new paradigm of ecological epistemologies, rescuing, thus, the fisherwomen's practical knowledge and their participation, along with the beings and things that inhabit their worlds, in the production of a new synthesis, acknowledging distinct forms of doing science and considering multiple relationships with the economic and political interest of the groups involved in the environmental issue. There resides the defense of the comparative exercise in Anthropology and the return to a transcultural historical concept, since the evolution of human beings tends to complexity through the accumulation of information, which makes that concept, "[...] in the face of the accumulation of gradual change, lead to another structure, original, though arbitrary, and rooted in the ecological and social legacy of previous generations" (FOLADORI; TAKS, 2004, p. 336, our translation).

Therefore, the strength and power of education are evidenced in this process of constitution of social subjects and, consequently, of society. How do we understand the world? What do we privilege and what do we remove in learning and teaching? Who teaches and who learns? What idea of environment and society do we defend? And, finally, what does it all have to do, after all, with the context of exclusion and invisibility experienced by boarded fisherwomen in Lagoa dos Patos and Lagoa Mirim?

### **3 Learning and visibility of boarded fisherwomen in small-scale fishing in Rio Grande do Sul**

There is no doubt that being a fisherman or fisherwoman is an *ethos*, a way of living supported by work in a family chain, that is, linked to family relationships, relations of solidarity and temporality (ADOMILLI, 2007; DIEGUES, 1983; WOORTMANN, 1991). In this sense, in the dynamics of experiences, the fisherwomen of this research learned to fish with their families, usually their parents or grandparents and, in some cases, with husbands and other relatives. The learning relationship, which would happen from woman-woman in other social contexts, starts to happen also from man-woman in boat fishing, i.e., it is inter and intragender.

This process is traversed by the learning that begins and continues in everyday repetition and imitation, as well as in its transformation; while it molds bodies and builds subjects, it strengthens family bonds, that is, learning how to fish, who one learns with, is closely interwoven with family relationships. This continuous learning builds these subjects, constituting them as fisherwomen in an unending process of construction and duration (BACHELARD, 1994).

*I learned how to fish with my father when I was 8 and today my 4-year-old son is already in the dance; he already started learning how to fish: it's amazing.* (BETINHA, fisherwoman from the Fifth Section of Backshore).

*I never stop learning, I began as a child and until now I learn every day. Each fishing trip is different, every day I learn.* (MÁRCIA, fisherwoman from Santa Vitória do Palmar).

**Image 4** – Fisherwomen from São José do Norte, Fifth Section, Lagoa dos Patos



**Source:** Author's archive (2020).

They learn, construct themselves as fisherwomen, stay in that existence fishing, wake up early, face the elements, circumvent prejudices and leave in their boats for the lakes. They have been doing that for many years, learn about new technologies, adapt when faced with challenges and socio-environmental crises, reinvent themselves constantly and learn to survive and fight in a society that excludes them, that pretends not to see them. What is this process that makes them learn to fish and subsequently fight for recognition?



Literature about fishing and, more specifically, gender and fishing highlights that this activity constitutes a type of work that has been and still is symbolically associated to the tradition of our patriarchal culture as a kind of practice that demands courage and strength, and therefore would be masculine.

Field work leads us to deconstruct that assertion based on a series of experiences described ahead, which lead us to understand that one needs strength to fish, yes, just as we need strength to live and fight in the face of the government, society and culture, which insist on keeping women in a field of invisibility and exclusion. “*I was born fishing and will die fishing, it’s what I like to do; and, even with the difficulties, here we are, surviving*” (MÁRCIA, fisherwoman from Santa Vitória do Palmar).

According to Souza and Marinho (2017), current Brazilian legislation aimed at regulating political and fish production relations in Brazil tends to reinforce the idea that fishing is a “man’s activity”, because it assumes as natural in the law the culturally established masculine meanings. This assertion can be supported, according to the authors, by the occupation categories relative to fishing present in the Brazilian Classification of Occupations (CBO, in Portuguese), as well as in legislation about fishing both on a federal and state level (Law n. 15.223/2018), which use a masculine category in identity representation for the occupation: *professional fisherman*.

This naming convention may seem of little importance, but the lack of feminine options in the construction of professional categories both in CBO and in legislation on the activity reveals the invisibility and entails concrete and economic damages in women’s lives.

Contrary to the understanding present in the Brazilian imagination, literature in the Human Sciences field about the theme of fishing and gender indicated that women’s participation is and has always been fundamental for the development of the small-scale fishing activity in Brazil, some examples are the studies by Beck (1979); Gerber (2015); Hellebrandt (2017); Maneschy (1995); Motta-Maués (1977); Woortmann (1991). According to these studies, it is evident that women are present in the different stages of fish production (catching fish, storage, processing, commercialization and distribution of fish), evidencing the importance of feminine labor, which goes beyond mere participation or help in the fishing sector, since they are protagonists and agents of social action (GIDDENS, 1995).

However, research has shown that their invisibility can be explained based on the established sociocultural organization and, consequently, the practical correlation between social reproduction and social and political recognition. Social reproduction because it is related to the fact that women simultaneously embrace activities in two different contexts: fishing activities and family and domestic activities.

Now they begin to change that scenario: in Rio Grande do Sul, for example, since the 2000s, they began to seek rights and fight for visibility. Regarding that fact, the research interlocutors positioned themselves:

*Women do fish! Nobody knows we exist, but we've been here a long time, since my great-grandmother. I take care of the house, the family, and fish, but I like fishing best, it's what I like to do, but the woman has to do everything.* (BETINHA, fisherwoman from Fifth Section of Backshore).

*Now I'm home because my daughter is on vacation from school, but I'm dying to go back to fishing.* (MICHELE, fisherwoman from Jaguarão).

In social and political recognition, invisibility and exclusion take place based on the access they have to places of speech and power and, subsequently, to labor and social security rights and public policies, such as unemployment insurance for small-scale fishing, used in the closure periods. That insurance is paid to professional fisherpeople in the months when the activity is forbidden by government entities responsible for controlling the use of the Brazilian sea and coastal space and constitutes the most important social right for people who practice fishing. The exclusion of fisherwomen from legislation and the invisibility generated by the field impairs their access to that right and to social and political recognition as a whole.

It is important to note that all research interlocutors have fishing licenses issued by the Brazilian Navy, as well as registrations, because they already benefitted from the political action of Brazilian fisherwomen movements, for example, the National Fisherwomen Articulation (ANP, in Portuguese), founded around 1970 in Pernambuco. The documents have a sacred and sacrificial meaning (SCHAVELZON, 2010) and constitute a victory for them as a consequence of the fight of women. As an expression of that feeling, all of them, with no exceptions, made a point of showing them during the interviews.

**Image 5** – Betinha at home – Fifth Section of Backshore, São José do Norte



**Source:** Author's archive (2020).

#### **4 Socio-environmental conflicts: fishing for strategies**

Boarded fisherwomen, who are involved since the stage of capturing fish, are also subjected to other conflicts in a socio-environmental context that directly affect them. In the immersion of field work, we notice a series of orientations, knowledge, strategies and challenges of those who are directly and routinely involved in the use of natural resources, making us notice the articulation of that practical knowledge and the contingencies in the ecosystem and social life.

We bring here some challenges faced every day by fisherwomen at Lagoa Mirim and Lagoa dos Patos: policies and studies carried out without the fisherwomen's input; lakes understood as homogenous spaces, whose guidelines don't consider the particularities of the spaces; facilitation for large-scale fishing; shortage of fish supply; endangered species; forms of fishing and dimensions of fishing tools determined by law and regulations that aren't updated in the face of fishing dynamics; dynamics adopted considering men and the broader community.

Another factor that should be emphasized is that, in order to account for that devaluation and lack of recognition of the political fight in the face of conflict, the research interlocutors, workers in boat fishing, are in social movements of the fishing sector since their first meetings, in the middle of the 2000s, in Rio Grande do Sul, where they started the movement for the social and political recognition of the fisherwomen's work.

They entered the political arenas of confrontation of inequality and recognition of women's rights, filling positions in the presidency of associations and colonies, actively participating in Forums of Lagoa dos Patos and Lagoa Mirim, contributing actively to the political movement of women in small-scale fishing, with many of them constituting the group that currently fights actively against predatory fishing in Rio Grande do Sul, seeking social justice.

Rozi, from Santa Vitória do Palmar, won the 2019 elections for president of the Fishing Association of that city; for the first time, the association is led by a woman. Rosa, fisherwoman from the city of Jaguarão, founded the Fisherwomen Colony in 2007 and is now president of the Council of Lagoa Mirim and an active member in meetings of the fishing sector in Rio Grande do Sul; throughout her trajectory, she contributed and continues to contribute to the recognition of fisherwomen by public entities, such as the National Institute of Social Security (INSS, in Portuguese), Ministry of Fishing, among others. Márcia, Alessandra and Adriana, fisherwomen from Lagoa dos Patos and Lagoa Mirim, obtained training with the Landless Workers' Movement (MST, in Portuguese) and still participate in the movements of social fight.

*I trained a lot of women here and always taught them that, if we like it, we should wear lipstick and nail polish. Being fisherwomen and living on boats or with fish in our hands isn't a reason not to take care of ourselves. INSS has to respect us as we are. (ROSA, fisherwoman from Jaguarão).*

*My training was all in MST; Alessandra took me there. When I went to live in the barracks, I learned my rights as a woman and as a fisherwoman. From then on, I had the strength and courage to buy my boat and fish by myself. I supported my children and built my life. Now I want to go back to the Movement; I miss fighting for fishing; we need to unite, because they only want to destroy the small [small-scale fishing] and make the big, rich fishing industry giant, end the lakes and the fish, they only want more and more profit. (MÁRCIA, fisherwoman from Santa Vitória do Palmar).*

Catching fish and rights, they have been on the lake waters of Rio Grande do Sul for a long time. The fight for recognition took place with them, as well as the right to keep

fishing in an activity socially and culturally seen as masculine. What we need is to give attention, look and see those workers in the daily fishing activity and therefore understand the processes that constitute them and that constitute Brazilian fishing. Conflicts arise and are necessary for subjectivities and differences in points of view to be revealed and negotiated.

It is necessary to negotiate, this is the verb that seems to govern the fisherwomen's lives in Lagoa Mirim and Lagoa dos Patos. Anthropologist Hellebrandt (2019), when researching fishing in colony Z-3, in Pelotas, wrote about that issue and titled her article "Negotiating with men and submitting to God", which reveals the relations of power between genders and the faith necessary to continue practicing fishing.

**Image 6** – Márcia pulling the net on her vessel



**Source:** Author's archive (2020).

According to Leff (2001), the development of environmental knowledge leads to a dialogue and amalgam of knowledge, and it is in that convergence/divergence of different subjectivities that conflictive processes are born, and here the Social and Environmental Sciences have a fundamental role of analysis: the spaces of socio-environmental conflicts as field of investigation.



Small-scale fisherpeople from the localities researched have already appropriated the scientific discourse to legitimize a new discourse of preservation and renovation of the fish supply, where they are protected by policies focusing on profit at any cost.

*We need to preserve the environment with sustainable and self-productive fishing.* (FISHERMAN, president of the Forum of Lagoa dos Patos).

*The fault is always ours; what about mining? And the pesticides from farms that are dumped in the lake?* (BETINHA, fisherwoman from the Fifth Section of Backshore).

*We depend on the sea! We need to recover the supply avoiding the predatory fishing carried out by the Catarinas<sup>4</sup>.* (ROSA, fisherwoman from Jaguarão).

It is evident, therefore, that what is in socio-environmental conflicts is the confrontation between rationalities, as a general rule, in the field of social and political fights between the power of the government and private institutions and local fisherpeople with their technical knowledge and local practices, and fisherwomen, also plural, are placed on the base, hit more aggressively by social, political and environmental inequalities of the sector.

## **5 Environmental Education: revelation of the ways to learn and relate to the environment**

According to Sauv  (2005), by approaching the field of Environmental Education, we can realize that, despite the common concern with the environment and the acknowledgement of the main role of education in the improvement of the relationship with the latter, the different authors (researchers, teachers, pedagogues, associations, organisms etc.) adopt different points of view about Environmental Education and propose different ways to conceive of and practice educational actions in that field.

We corroborate the fact that the notions of environment and education are based on interdisciplinarity, since the extent of the theme couldn't be approached only from the point of view of one discipline or field of knowledge in an isolated way. Agreeing with Sauv  (2005, p. 35, our translation), we defend that Environmental

<sup>4</sup> "Catarinas" is how they call fisherpeople from the state of Santa Catarina who fish in big trawlers, devastating the spaces of the sea and the lake.

Education shouldn't impose a worldview, since it is necessary to consider the culture of reference of the populations or communities involved, since "[...] the ethnographic current proposes not only to adapt pedagogy to different cultural realities, but also getting inspiration from pedagogies of different cultures who have other relationships with the environment".

In this context, field work reveals those pedagogies and, as taught by Freire (1983), in the dialogical encounter gives us clues to understand from the inside and from them this way of life, the knowledge and learning that take place in the close relationship with their social territories.

It evidences an environmental knowledge shared by these fishing workers, who, far from constituting a homogeneous group, share knowledge and ways of life and, especially, of surviving characteristic of those who depend on natural resources. The forms of fishing on the lake are varied, because each fish requires a way to be caught, each lake has a rhythm and time, each type of vessel has its own dynamics, each fisherwoman is unique, fisherwomen who, in this research, are seen in their individuality and experience.

For that end, ethnography, method developed in this study, privileges contact and places the researcher as a link between cultures through their experience in both. That knowledge and competence are mobilized in describing and explaining the culture studied (WAGNER, 2010). By experiencing the fisherwomen's culture, we learned of the complex network in which they are involved, which is woven by them and also weaves them, that is, a network that constitutes a big fabric (INGOLD, 2011) which encompasses all the dimensions of life, with knots and tangles, which are the chance, uncertainty and the unimaginable that cross each other and give other meaning or path. Thus, we encounter creativity on all levels of life, resisting the adversities of a world whose thought is in a crisis, focused on planetary destruction, patriarchy, the dichotomous and alienated perspective.

*Now we are fishing guitarfish, but because we don't have the others anymore, such as tiger fish, mullet, and many others; fish are disappearing, and we need to learn new things. Nobody fished guitarfish, but now it's what we have; I had to learn how to fish it: it's very different. (MÁRCIA, fisherwoman from Santa Vitória do Palmar).*

Thus, based on the foundations of Environmental Education, we privilege and defend an Environmental Education that identifies and acknowledges the close connection between nature and culture, which brings the cosmologies shared by the groups engaged in the environments where they live, i.e., privileges the valorization of the social and cultural dimension of their relationship with the environment, so that, this way, we can effectively understand the different practices and meanings of actions and, from there, contribute, with the subjects, to the understanding and confrontation of the socio-environmental crisis.

*We have a way of fishing that was taught to us and that we teach, and we also learn new things. What makes me furious is that who decides how we should do it are people who never stepped foot on a boat or caught a fish. (MÁRCIA, fisherwoman from Santa Vitória do Palmar).*

## 6 Final considerations

Having as an object women in small-scale boat fishing, we sought to understand the educational, social, cultural and political processes that construct those workers and, at the same time, support the paradox ingrained in the condition of invisibility: how can boarded fisherwomen be classified as invisible if they act as agents? Which factors contribute to produce and maintain this invisibility?

As we saw, the research data point to issues found partly related to the fact that women simultaneously take on activities in two different contexts: house and boat, consequently, access to social rights and to recognition is hindered and constitutes, historically, one of the main dimensions of social inequality, as well as of the social conflict in contexts marked by normativity and institutions of modern social politics (DIEGUES, 1979).

Thus, the objective of this study was to shed light, based on categories such as woman, work, environment, education, culture, nature, knowledge and conflict, on the processes and contexts that produce and reproduce the invisibility and exclusion of women in this sector. We made an effort to seek to achieve a broader perception of the issues concerning inequalities in society based on the fishing context in Lagoa dos Patos and Lagoa Mirim in the state of Rio Grande do Sul.

The theoretical framework and ethnographic experience point us to a look that unveils and, moreover, overcomes reductionist symbolic representations that currently guide the reproduction of exclusionary practices and sociocultural understandings, arising the production of equality policies in the work field of women in this branch of small-scale fishing activity.

Education and, more precisely, Environmental Education function in this process as a revelation of the ways of learning and relating in the environment based on the fisherwomen's experience, constituting a context of interlocution with different knowledges and practices shared by groups that live in and inhabit the lake environment. Thus, the subject notices and becomes aware that they are simultaneously the product and producer of culture, which awakens potentialities and mobilizes their ability to opt, decide and choose (within the conditions given by the system), obtaining as a result not only the change in the world surrounding them, but also in their position on the world.

The fisherwomen in the research show us how the development of human beings is grounded on the experiences and learning that are acquired along the process and that the latter is unending, dynamic and paramount to resist and fight in critical times of setbacks.

In the process of being in the world, aware that they are agents of social action, fisherwomen are transformed and thus transform their worlds in a complex movement of constituting themselves as social beings, citizens and consequently awaken possible knowledge, in order to contribute to the confrontation of unequal and alienated social relations, defining themselves in the movement of clarifying and overcoming the environmental crisis as an expression of social crisis.

Their participation in the fishing activity and increasingly in fishing management in Rio Grande do Sul reveals the transformation grounded on a perspective of the recognition and valorization of the woman, of community knowledge, of experience and diversity. Realizing the specificity of these fisherwomen's work, their meanings and actions results in the expansion and complexification of the notions of education, environment and conflict.

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