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Unravelling environment and politics in the Spanish press. From Franco's dictatorship to democracy

Abstract

The 1970s and 1980s were key years for the consolidation of environmentalism and environmental communication. In Spain, the special political situation during General Franco's military dictatorship conditioned the coverage of environmental issues, as did the transition to democracy. The Albufera Natural Park (Valencia, Spain) was a particularly significant case in this context, since it was involved in one of the first environmental protests to protect a natural area covered by Spanish media. In this paper, we study opinion articles published in the Valencian newspapers *Las Provincias* and *Levante*, in order to analyze the evolution of the environmental discourse in Spanish society from the dictatorship to the first years of democracy. Hence, we analyze and compare opinion articles about this natural space in two specific periods: the campaign against the urbanization project for the forest of Devesa del Saler, in the Albufera, from 1973 to 1974; and the reaction of the Valencian press between 1986 and 1990, when Spain was already a democracy and after the area was declared a natural park. Our research uses framing theory to include both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Results show there is an evolution concerning the perception of environmental protection: while it was seen as a citizen vindication of the public space during the dictatorship, in democracy it entered the sphere of policy management.

Keywords

Environmental communication, environment and politics, framing, opinion genres, Spanish journalism

1. Introduction

The media are an important source for the study of environmental protests, since they are a meeting space for environmentalists and urban developers, thus playing an important role in the configuration of the conservationist debate (Hutchins & Lester, 2006). Citizen and environmental protests regarding particular issues –defending the

protection of natural areas or preventing nuclear power plants or dumping sites from being built, for instance– are behind the origin of environmental communication and they have always been closely linked (Taylor, Lee & Davie, 2000). Different theorists have situated the birth of environmental journalism at the same time as the environmental movement (Lester, 2010), initiated with the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in the 1960s (Kroll, 2001).

That is why the origin of environmental journalism is linked to local and regional media and cannot be explained without the evolution of environmentalist movements. In Spain, these groups emerged mainly during the last years of General Francisco Franco's dictatorship (in the first half of the 1970s). Back then, environmentalist protests were the only lawful means to overtly disagree with the regime (Varillas, 1991). Therefore, this movement spread massively and inspired the creation of politically charged groups in Franco's last years. This is the case of AEORMA, a political opposition apparatus that involved almost exclusively anti-Francoists (Costa Morata, 2011). Thus, we could say that politics and environmentalism were very close back in 1970s Spain.

The dictator's death in 1975 gave way to a period known as "democratic transition", a very intense political period for Spain. When political parties were legalized, many of the members involved in ecological movements joined them (Varillas, 1991). Throughout the 1970s, and especially from the second half of the 1980s, environmental protests increased – as did their relevance in the press– (Jiménez, 2005). However, paradoxically enough and despite this newly acquired relevance of environmental issues in the Spanish press (Fernández Sánchez, 1995), the average of participants in these protests decreased dramatically from 1980 on (Jiménez, 2003). The arrival of democracy coincided with the consolidation of environmental communication and of conservation movements, but also with a general depoliticization of Spanish society. In the field of nature conservation in Spain, the 1980s turned out to be a decade of change, which is especially noticeable in the gradual increase in the number of protected areas (Morillo & Gómez-Campo, 2000).

In this article, we study a case that exemplifies the change in the perception of the environment in Spain from the 1970s to the 1980s, using opinion articles published in two local newspapers as the corpus of study. In particular, we study opinion pieces regarding the Albufera (a natural park near Valencia, Spain) published in *Las Provincias* and *Levante*. Focusing on opinion journalism enables us to directly observe the discourse, arguments and devices related to the protection of nature. Op-ed pages are particularly interesting to study the viewpoint of a particular newspaper with regards to social transformations (Day & Golan, 2005), since they act as an indicator of the subjects and issues to which the media want to devote a special attention (Sommer & Maycroft, 2008). As Mitman, Nikolaev, and Porpora (2012) explain, "the opinion pages of the press are also one major forum in which public debate takes place". This is especially true in the case of Valencian op-eds (Domínguez, 2010).

We also take into account pieces from other genres of journalistic opinion. The letters to the editor section, written by the readers of the newspaper, has a set of features that make it different from the rest of opinion articles. Nonetheless, they also play an important role in the way the media reconstruct important topics. Jorgensen (2002) argues that the letters to the editor section follows a series of criteria; for instance: relevance of the topic. Therefore, analysing these reader's contributions, we can get to know better the editorial line of the newspaper better. Accordingly, Young (2013) analyzes the role of the letters to the editor in constructing climate change narratives. For Young, "letters to the editor advance very different themes, narratives, and logics about climate change than are found in other reporting (news articles, features, and even other opinion-page content such as editorials and columns). Provocatively, letters appear to be means of inserting otherwise taboo, unacceptable, unproven (and unprovable) arguments into the mass media landscape." In the

field of opinion, there is also a place for press cartoons. It is a relatively unexplored genre but, due to its characteristics, it is useful to analyze the reception of scientific and environmental issues in a given social and cultural context (Giarelli, 2006; Domínguez & Mateu, 2013). To recapitulate, the opinion pieces in a newspaper allow us to draw conclusions about their ideology and priorities (Blanco Castilla *et al.*, 2013).

In this article, we analyze the opinion articles from framing theory. Research on environmental information from this point of view has been discussed at length by many authors (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Nisbet, 2009, 2010).

One of the most quoted definitions of a frame is the one by Robert Entman (1993: 51): “The frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation*” for the item described”.

The media often contribute to communicating different social behaviors, thoughts and models. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) talked about “interpretative packages”, which shape media discourse by constructing meanings over certain issues. At the same time, the internal structure of these interpretive packages consists of frames or ideas that make sense of an issue (see also Nisbet & Lewestein, 2002). According to Hannigan (2006), “frames, like new angles, are organizing devices that help both the journalists and the public make sense of issues and events and thereby inject them with meaning”. Through these frames, the media constructs reality around a series of priorities and interests, be they political, economic or of any other type. Frames then become mental or moral schemas. Analyzing environmental frames in the press can help us to understand existing narratives and interpretations regarding environmental issues in society at a particular time. Applying this theory to a particular case study, we intend to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1: What is the evolution of the environmental discourse in Spain, from the last years of the dictatorship to the early days of the democracy?
- RQ2: What were the most prominent environmental frames used in the opinion articles about the Albufera? How did these frames in opinion articles change in relation to the political situation in Spain?
- RQ3: Did the new democracy lead to a change in the attitude of the Valencian press regarding the protection of the environment?

2. The Albufera: from an urbanization project to the natural park

The Albufera Natural Park (Figure 1) is one of the most important wetlands in Spain and it constitutes one of the most important SPA areas (Special Protection Area for Birds). In 1990, it was also included in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance (Soria, 2006). The park, very close to the city of Valencia, extends over more than 20,000 protected hectares, 2,000 of which belong to the lake, 1,000 to the Mediterranean forest area known as El Saler or Devesa del Saler (El Saler Pasturelands) and the rest to rice fields. Ever since its creation, the complex situation of the park has made it difficult to manage: it borders twelve municipalities and there is an important pressure on it coming from industrial, agricultural and tourism sectors (Rodríguez Victoriano, 2002).

¹ In italics in the original.

Figure 1. Map of the Albufera Natural Park and its situation in Spain

In the first half of the 1970s, before it was declared a protected area, the current natural park was the object of the first important media campaign in Spain and Europe for preserving and protecting a natural area (Mateu & Domínguez, 2011). The mobilization for the defense of Devesa del Saler between 1973 and 1974 represented not only one of the first citizen protests to promote the protection of a natural area (Fernández Sánchez, 1999; Costa Morata, 2011), but also the increase of environmental awareness in the media and society. The protest stopped an urbanization project that would have meant the destruction of more than 800 hectares of forest and would have broken the fragile ecological balance between the Devesa del Saler and Albufera ecosystems (Folch, 1988). The protection of the Albufera in 1986, which was the product of popular pressure and of the protectionist trends of the 1980s, cannot be understood independently from the citizen movement and the media campaign of the 1970s.

It is necessary, though, to provide a brief context of the Valencian media scenario during the 1970s and 1980s. By the end of General Franco's dictatorship, *Las Provincias* was the only private newspaper in the area of Valencia. This meant that it was partially independent of the regime, which explains its involvement in an initiative that opposed urbanization plans in Valencia sponsored by the local government, directly dependent from the regime. General Franco's dictatorship was nearing its end but censorship in the press was still common (Bordería, 2000). On the other hand, Franco's military regime had ownership of several newspapers, which were included under the "Prensa del Movimiento" seal (The Movement Press). *Levante* belonged to this governmental press and during the dictatorship it was tightly controlled by the regime (Xambó, 2012). It was, therefore, inconceivable for these newspapers to hold an editorial stance contrary to the official

discourse of the dictatorship, which in this case promoted the urbanization of Devesa del Saler. On the other hand, *Las Provincias* was subject to the dictatorship's content control but, during the last years of the regime, the newspaper was marked by the arrival of new journalists and contributors from intellectual circles, who showed a certain degree of detachment and criticism towards the regime (Viadel, 2006).

Franco's death in 1975 and the subsequent transition to democracy completely changed the Valencian press environment. *Levante* became a private newspaper in 1984, and started to move closer to more progressive sectors of Valencian society, whereas *Las Provincias* prioritized political issues and became the representative of the Valencian regional right (Flor, 2011). Therefore, during the 1980s –the area covered by this study– *Las Provincias* actively struggled against the socialist regional government (PSPV), while *Levante's* opinions were closer to the government's actions.

3. Methodology and Objectives

The research strategy behind this study is to investigate the daily flow of opinion articles about the Albufera and Devesa del Saler in two different periods of time: the end of General Franco's regime and the first years of Spanish democracy. The first analyzed period covers 1973 and 1974, a period of social protest against the urbanization project of Devesa del Saler. The second period spans from 1986, the year when it was declared a Natural Park, to 1990, when the special plan to preserve the park was sanctioned.

We have chosen a seven-year period with the objective of analyzing a substantial span of time, instead of studying just a single, specific event. According to Hansen (2011), longitudinal or diachronic studies enable us to show “not only what ‘drives’ environmental coverage, but also, and more importantly, in terms of throwing light on how different meaning-creating forums and agendas interact”. In this case, studying this period will allow for an analysis of the evolution in the use of environmental frames in the opinion pages of newspapers. For the selection of texts, we manually searched the newspaper archives for opinion pieces (articles, columns, letters to the editor, and cartoons) published in *Las Provincias* and *Levante* that included information about any of the areas of the current park: the Albufera, Devesa del Saler, or the rice fields. In total, 373 texts were found in both newspapers, as detailed in the results section.

The analysis of the articles was carried out combining both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. We were interested in learning about the stances taken in the op-eds in the 70s and 80s regarding the urbanization project. In order to know about the evolution of these arguments throughout the decades, we chose to carry out our analysis based on framing theory. For this analysis, we used previously existing typologies for science and environment framing studies (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Nisbet & Lewenstein, 2002; Nisbet, 2009, 2010). However, taking into account the historical, geographical, and thematic features of the analyzed pieces, an open codification was also used in the analysis. This would establish new frames, absent from previous typologies, following the work diagram proposed by Van Gorp (2010): a primary inductive stage where both frames and framing devices are defined, and a secondary deductive stage where these inductively reconstructed frames are validated.

Firstly, the articles were analyzed in order to explore the general stances of the newspapers and the main resources and characteristics of the texts. For this section, we took into account the framing devices suggested by Gamson and Modigliani (1989): metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, and visual images. With cartoons, apart from textual elements, we also had to take into account the use of visual metaphors, one of the favorite mechanisms of many cartoonists (Edwards & Ware, 2005; Schilperoord & Maes, 2009; Bounegru & Forceville, 2011). According to Anderson (2014), the analysis of framing

devices can be useful “to develop an in-depth appreciation of how particular appeals are constructed”. Thus, establishing the common devices among different pieces would help us with the next step, grouping them by their frames. The resulting frames set, which was used to classify opinion texts, can be found in Table 1, where the interpretation of nature stemming from each frame has been recorded. The table also includes the main framing devices characterizing each frame, which were used to classify all texts. When codifying the articles, researchers chose one main frame per article or cartoon.

Table 1. Main frames present in the corpus and in the discourse on nature in which they are framed

A FRAMING TYPOLOGY APPLICABLE TO ENVIRONMENT

Social Progress: Nature appears opposed to the idea of progress. While progress is seen as a positive issue, nature receives negative connotations. Progress civilizes nature in a necessary way, so people can enjoy it. Nature is then conceptualized as wild, dangerous, and uncomfortable for human beings.

Beauty: Nature is idealized, and its value is given by its beauty. Natural areas provoke admiration and have value for its esthetic pleasure. Evocative adjectives and descriptions are often used to create visual images of the natural space. The use of terms belonging to the semantic field of beauty is common (e.g., the beautiful lake of the Albufera).

Economic Development and Competitiveness: Nature is understood as a source of resources and its value depends mainly on its economic perspectives: agriculture, hunting, tourism, etc. Plenty of concepts referring to economic activities and its semantic field are used: way of life, right to property, jobs... This frame implies that a society has the right to exploit nature to achieve its goals. For that reason, nature is always subject to people's interests.

Citizen Right: Nature is considered as a citizen right. In this sense, nature is an issue of public policies and the natural area is considered as a public good. This frame understands nature as an element for citizen leisure and enjoyment. Accordingly, there is a defense of the natural space, but at the same time certain ecological policies collide with the total enjoyment of nature by people. The motto *El Saler per al poble* is one of the most remarkable examples of this frame. On the other hand, the texts where this frame is present refer to popular areas, public heritage, public use, etc.

Public Accountability: Environment is considered an intrinsic part of politics. This frame accepts and demands that politicians look after the environment and design specific policies to manage it, always considering it a citizen right. Texts within this frame use many law and administration-related terms (the council and councilors, the bill...), and they also appeal directly to politicians.

Ecosystem Value: Nature conception from a scientific point of view that gives value to the ecosystem and the need to protect and preserve it. It is a scientific basis stance, but it can be adopted by other groups such as, for instance, environmentalists. It is remarkable for its use of scientific lexicon, especially biology-related, as well as for its scientific descriptions and technical vocabulary. The texts containing this frame sometimes introduce or quote a scientist as an argument of authority.

Science as a Solution: Science and technology are presented as the only answer to the environmental problem. It is quite an optimistic frame regarding the future of environment, since it trusts scientific advances will solve any problem.

Conflict/Strategy: Battle of personalities or groups. Discourse polarization. Opposition to conservationist or environmentalist stances, which are consistently ridiculed or criticized. Conflict Science vs. Environmentalists. In these texts, the use of war metaphors and vocabulary is noteworthy, as well as the presentation of dichotomies such as the “us versus them”.

We thus proceeded to analyze the items combining quantitative and qualitative methodological tools. In addition to coding the frames, we analyzed whether or not the texts openly showed strong opinions about the protection of the studied natural spaces. We were particularly interested in this point, because each frame, as Matthew Nisbet (2009) reminds us, may include points to both support and attack a particular position (as well as neutral ones). Therefore, the predominance of one frame or another in a text does not determine its stance on the topic. We can only deduce the mental or ideological frame of the text. Thus, we took into account whether the articles of the first period were for or against the urbanization project, and whether the ones in the second period were for or against declaring the area a protected natural park.

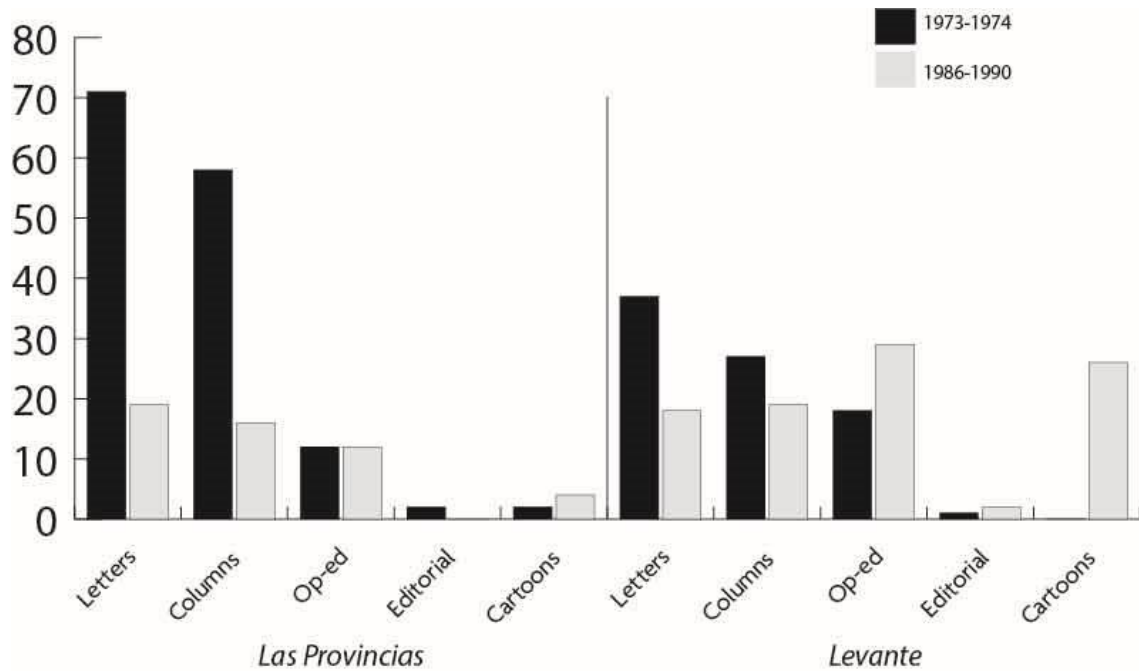
This allowed us to find conservationist or environmental consciousness in those pieces, and if particular frames were more present than others in pro-conservation texts. We believe that the study of a specific case of environmental communication allows us to establish an environmental frame typology to serve as a model for further research on environmental communication.

4. Results

In this section, we introduce a short summary of the quantitative results and then an analysis of the different frames present in each newspaper's texts regarding the Albufera Natural Park in each particular period. For the analyzed span of time, 373 opinion texts were collected. Most of them (228) were published between 1973 and 1974, while 145 were published between 1986 and 1990.

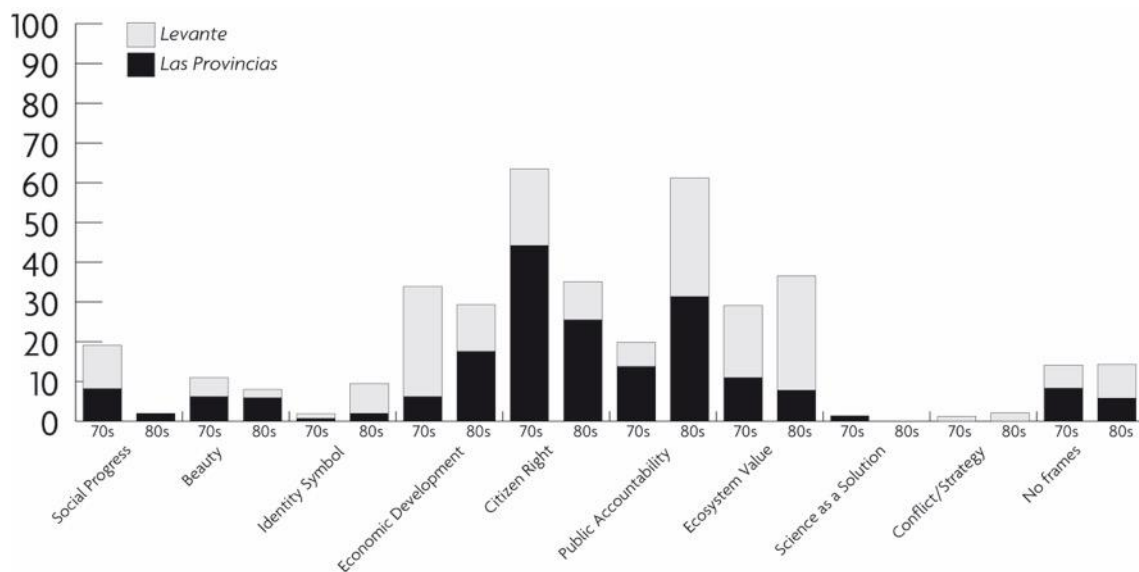
Throughout 1973 and 1974, *Las Provincias* devoted 145 articles to the urbanization project of Devesa del Saler and the Albufera. Most items (86) opposed the urbanization plan, while 20 supported it. The rest did not take a clear stance. On the other hand, *Levante* published 83 opinion articles on that same topic. This time, 29 articles were against the urbanization plan, while 26 were for it. The rest did not adopt a particular stance. It is worth noticing that, in both cases, there is a high number of letters to the editor compared to other genres (Figure 2), a reflection of the society's concern about this situation.

Figure 2. Opinion genres used by the two analyzed newspapers, *Levante* and *Las Provincias*, during the two studied periods



A decade later, between 1986 and 1990, *Las Provincias* published 51 articles. Regarding the positions taken about the Natural Park, 18 were for it and 5 were against it. This time, *Levante* focused its attention on the coverage of this issue, publishing 94 articles (Figure 2). Support to the Natural Park status to the area was found in 47 of them, while only 7 of them were against it.

Figure 3. Comparative view of frames in 1973-1974 and 1986-1990 (in percentages)



Regarding dominant frames (Figure 3), which will be analyzed in detail below, we found that during the 1970s, in general, the Citizen frame and the Economic Development and

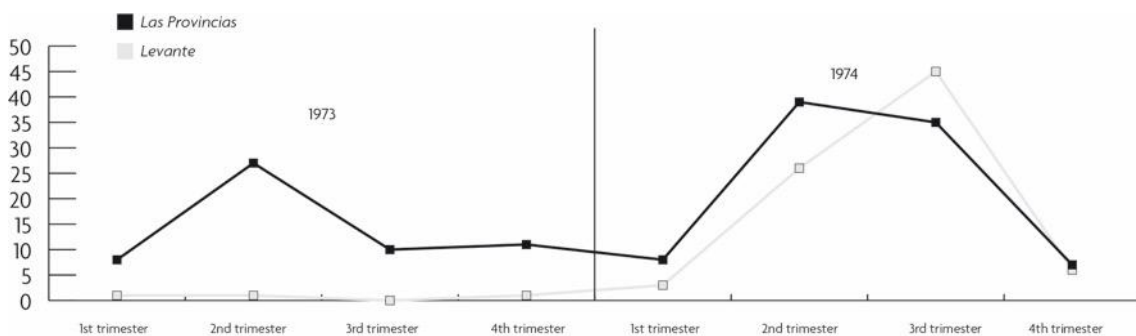
Competitiveness frame were the most widely used, whereas during the 1980s this trend shifted and the Public Accountability and Ecosystem Value frames became the most popular.

4.1. The 70s and the urbanization project of El Saler (1973-1974)

In the 1970s, the articles about Devesa del Saler focused on the urbanization controversy that led to a polarization of the texts regarding this topic –for or against urbanization. *Las Provincias* led the defense of the natural area of Devesa del Saler. The newspaper welcomed the participation of environmentalists and scientists that provided different reasons to defend the natural area. Most authors who were against the urbanization plan belonged to the Valencian intellectual sphere. They were people who would later play a key role in politics during the transition to democracy and who overtly opposed to Franco's regime.

The main difference with *Levante*, as we have already seen, was the number of texts published: *Las Provincias* published 145 pieces in the first period and *Levante* 83 (Figure 4). Regarding urbanization plans, 59.3% of the articles in *Las Provincias* were against it, while just 13.8% supported it. *Levante* showed more balanced figures: 31.3% for and 34.9% against urbanization.

Figure 4. Distribution of published news about El Saler and the Albufera during the trimesters of 1973-1974 in the two analyzed newspapers



The dominant frames in these texts show a certain correlation with their stance towards urbanization. Thus, texts that supported the urbanization plans, both in *Levante* and *Las Provincias*, used the Social Progress and the Economic Development and Competitiveness frames.

Articles framed within the Social Progress discourse hide a negative conception of nature, understanding that, by protecting nature, progress is slowed down. Forests were thus equated with a primitive and undeveloped state of the environment, while urbanization represented progress, understood as something positive and unquestionable. Nature also has “wild” and “dangerous” connotations that are contrasted with “civilization” and “progress”, both of which are represented by urbanization. These texts showed an anthropocentric conception of the environment, i.e., a utilitarian understanding of nature which only values it in terms of the benefits humans can get out of it (Verhagen, 2008), whether they are economic, social or cultural.

Also with an anthropocentric component, we find a conception that understands the environment as a source for wealth and resources (Economic Development and Competitiveness). Agriculture, the promotion of tourism or even hunting in the area would be some of the arguments used in these texts. Tourism as a source of wealth for Valencia was a particularly recurrent idea used in the defense of the urbanization project. The 1960s

and the 1970s were the years of the tourism and real estate boom in Spain, and urbanizing an area of the sort in Valencia was understood as a necessity by many sectors of society.

On the other hand, the texts that opposed the urbanization plans (most of them) in both newspapers used different frames, especially Citizen Right and Ecosystem Value. The former understands nature as a right and was the most widely used by defenders of Devesa del Saler: the argument present in this frame was that the forest was a public area and the citizens had the right to enjoy it. The motto used for this campaign was based on this idea: “*El Saler per al poble*” (“El Saler for the people” in Catalan language). In this group, we find articles that defend El Saler as collective heritage belonging to all Valencians, as well as articles defending the citizens’ right to enjoy nature as a leisure and entertainment resource. Therefore, many of the articles focused on the right to enjoy a beach or trekking day in Devesa del Saler.

Along with this defense of public property, new concepts arose, which would be used later on for the defense of territory and landscape. The Ecosystem Value frame appeared in 30 different texts. In most cases, authors had a scientific career and the arguments used against the urbanization plan were based on science and the conservation of nature (ecosystem value, biodiversity, close relationship between the forest and Albufera ecosystems, etc.).

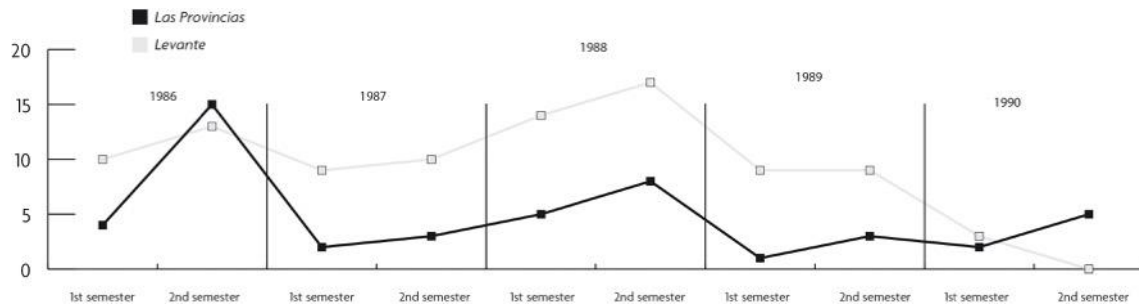
Other frames used in this period were Beauty and Science as Solution. Texts framed within Beauty focused their argumentation on the wonder of the natural space. This frame is somewhat linked to the idealization of landscape. Science as Solution, on the other hand, was only used during the first period, with a very low percentage of occurrence. It implied the trust in science as an answer to all society’s problems. However, entrusting science and technology with the solution for environmental problems might imply inaction and a *laissez-faire* attitude. Even if it is a common theme in texts that defend the environment, it may sometimes cause the opposite effect.

In general, in the articles published by *Las Provincias* during this period, we find a defense of the area as public heritage, avoiding other considerations such as the conservation of a natural area or the need to protect ecosystems. That is, both in the defense of urbanization and of the forest, a human component measures the benefits of each option and, in general terms, both groups support their stance alluding to what is best for society, but not from an environmentally aware position. In *Levante*, the defense of the natural area as a source of wealth prevailed: tourism and progress came together thanks to urbanization, and the natural area was a secondary issue.

4.2. The 1980s and the declaration of the Albufera Natural Park (1986-1990)

In the 1980s, and since the Albufera was declared a Natural Park in 1986, articles in the press reflected the social and political complexity surrounding this natural area. We also found a new feature, not present in the 1970s. In that first period, stances were clearly defined and opposed, but ten years later, the conservation of nature is a widespread idea and, therefore, society widely embraces and acknowledges the need to protect the environment. Thus, contrary opinions are not as convincing or at least not as clear as they were in the 1970s. In fact, as we have already seen, most articles supported the protection of the environment, and only a few were overtly against the Natural Park. In *Levante*, 50% of the texts supported the park, whereas only 7.4% were against it. *Las Provincias* support was lower than *Levante*’s (35.3%) while their disagreement rates were slightly higher (9.8%). Consequently, we observe how newspapers inverted their roles, also regarding the number of articles published (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Distribution of published news about El Saler and Albufera during the semesters of 1986-1990 in both newspapers



Analyzing the content and using the frames coded for each article, we will be able to detect people's perception of the Natural Park and nature conservation. Most of the texts supporting the Natural Park in *Levante* focused on the Ecosystem Value and Public Accountability frames. In *Las Provincias*, the frames were more balanced but, even so, all the texts that supported the Natural Park focused, in order of importance, on the Public Accountability, Citizen Right and Ecosystem Value frames.

The articles that focused on Ecosystem Value frame emphasized the necessity to protect the Albufera Natural Park from a scientific point of view, highlighting the ecological value of the park. These articles stressed the need to raise the ecological awareness of the citizenry in order to protect the Albufera and nature in general effectively. As in the 1970s, more often than not, there are scientists or biologists behind these texts, and now environmentalists join their line of reasoning.

Regarding the Public Accountability frame, these articles defended that the government had to manage natural areas. Therefore, behind this frame, there is a conception of nature as a public matter; therefore, its management should depend on the politicians. It is a logical evolution of the Citizen Right frame and could, therefore, point to the environmental press acceptance of nature as a publicly managed area. This evolution can only be understood if we take the early democratic context into account. Those sectors which, during the dictatorship, thought of nature as a public area started considering environmental management a part of politics when democracy arrived. Although this management did not always relate to the same interests: we find texts that supported their protection from their own perspective, while others supported an economic expansion; but, in both cases, nature is understood as a public good that must be regulated.

The articles that opposed the Natural Park status mainly fall under the Public Accountability frame, similarly to the 1970s. But while tourism was the main focus then, this time they emphasized how nature is an important source for agriculture and hunting. Farmers were one of the most critical sectors against the Natural Park status. The delimitation of the protected area included, besides the lake and the Devesa forest, the marsh areas dedicated to rice production. Protection implied restrictions for the owners over the products and pesticides used in their crops, as well as an end to the projects for transforming the rice fields into more profitable activities or using them for other non-agricultural purposes. The farmers' economic harm would become the main argument used against the Natural Park by the Valencian Agrarian Chamber. These texts underlie an implicit rejection of the conservation of nature and a lack of environmental awareness when it is at odds with the citizens' economic and leisure interests. Contrary to what had happened in the previous period (during General Franco's dictatorship) we find strong criticism towards the government and the managers of the park. This criticism appears in both newspapers, but *Las Provincias* adopts a more aggressive tone.

Las Provincias sided with the farmers, portraying them as victims of the decree of protection of the Natural Park and showing the economic harm that they would suffer. The rest of the published texts that supported farmers were written by rice farmers themselves and sent to the letters to the editor section. These letters insisted on the great harm the decree meant for agriculture, depicting politicians and environmentalists as people detached from the park, who were not aware of reality and the problems of agriculture in the area.

The Conflict/Strategy frame can be found in a few texts and covers the polarization of the debate, with two opposing stances. Texts analyzed within this frame reflect the news in terms of confrontation between politicians and environmentalists, scientists and environmentalists, etc. We found that some of the texts that highly criticize environmentalists (most of them from the agrarian and hunting community, but also from the scientific community) would even present science and the environmental movement as opposing sides. There is also another frame appearing very rarely in both periods: Identity Symbol frame. Its main idea is based on a conception of the natural space as the emblem of a group of people. Nature as symbol is not only found in specific natural spaces but also linked to animals –as is the case with the eagle in the United States (Domínguez and Mateu, 2014). In this case, the Albufera is reflected in the texts as an identity symbol for the country of Valencia, a scenario and referent for popular culture and Valencian folklore.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The protection of the environment met opposing views in Spain, especially in the Mediterranean coast, where tourism is one of the main economic resources –a fact that ended up deeply damaging the coastline. The environmental discourse in the media partially reflects this conception and polarization concerning the protection of the environment. It is true that a number of economic, social or cultural factors affect this discourse, but the analysis of the press using frames can help us understand different environmental attitudes better, because it goes beyond the mere analysis of political stances on a particular environmental issue. It allows us to go deeper into the interpretive schemes of an issue, i.e. into those arguments and considerations that prevail over others.

Just as Hutchins and Lester (2015) defended, an article about environmental degradation or the support of a journalist to a particular topic can sometimes trigger an environmental conflict. In the case of El Saler in the 1970s, the newspaper *Las Provincias* was the catalyst for the mobilization against the urbanization of Devesa del Saler. With columns and op-eds, *Las Provincias* gave voice to biologists, environmentalists and journalists, as well as the citizenry, thanks to the letters to the editor section. The newspaper pages became, thus, a forum to express the opinion for or against any given claims.

This mobilization stage concerning the natural space, along with the support of regional media, also occurred in other locations of the country –like the defense of wetlands in L'Empordà (Catalonia) or Sa Dragonera (Majorca)– and shares some common traits with the studied mobilizations during periods of democratic transition after other European dictatorships, such as those in Portugal or Greece (Kousis, 1999). The relevance of neighboring movements organizing these mobilizations, as well as the underlying opposition to the regime (Jancar-Webster, 1998; Jiménez, 1999), gave these early environmental mobilizations a political viewpoint, rather than an environmental one. More than a movement to preserve a natural area, it was a citizen mobilization to defend the public space of El Saler at a stage in Spanish history when the anti-Franco opposition glimpsed the end of the regime. Parties and political associations were completely forbidden and environmentalism was one of the few channels Franco's opposition could lawfully use.

But its role in the birth of Valencian environmentalism and in the subsequent protection of natural spaces in Spain must be recognized.

This media campaign resulted in the end of the urbanization project that would have destroyed the Mediterranean forest and would have endangered the Albufera lake. The people's protest for the defense of El Saler was the spark that led to the protection of the area in 1986 —when it was declared a Natural Park. However, during the 1980s, with a consolidated democracy and with other political priorities, *Las Provincias* changed its position regarding the Albufera. Taking into account only the number of texts published, we can already notice a remarkable difference: more than a hundred texts published in a span of two years during the El Saler mobilization, versus the fifty articles published between 1986 and 1990. While it is true that the general discourse assumes the acceptance of the Park, we find a change of stance in the newspaper. In general terms, *Las Provincias* backed away from environmentalist postulates, which they had previously supported. We infer this from the criticism against the movement found in some articles. *Las Provincias* was in favor of environmental protection as long as private property was not threatened —i.e. rice fields— or the people's enjoyment of the area was not hindered. In the 1970s and 1980s, the defense of the environment from an environmental point of view had a small influence, since they founded their discourses on nature as a right and as a source for wealth, the former being more widespread in the eighties.

Most articles support the protection of the Albufera, or at least the preservation of the environment, which evidences that the environmental discourse permeated society and the mass media. However, in most cases, we can consider this stance a “politically correct” discourse, behind which there are disguised arguments against the conservationist discourse and even direct attacks to environmentalists. In this regard, there seems to be some contradiction between some articles that openly defend the environment while their predominating frames declare nature to be dependent from other interests, such as progress or economy.

In our case study, we find a noteworthy increase of the Public Accountability frame in the second period, proving that perception of the environment as part of governmental policy has indeed increased with the arrival and development of democracy, and that this connection has been accepted by the media. The Ecosystem Value frame has also spread, and the defense of the environment includes more scientific argumentation.

However, among the frames used in the second period, we observed a decrease in the use of the Citizen Right frame, from which we deduce a decrease also in the conception of nature as a citizen right. The interest in this frame moves to Public Accountability, so we may say that once democracy arrives and the natural space is definitely saved, the citizens lose interest in this natural area and think of it as only important for politicians and scientists.

In the case study, we take into account the particularities of a changing political landscape, with Spain coming out of a dictatorship. It is true that, during the first period, there was strong citizen and media involvement, but we have to consider the particularities of the dictatorship period, which did not change until the arrival of democracy after the death of the dictator in 1975.

The substitution of the Citizen Right frame with the Public Accountability frame may be explained by the transfer of environmentalist activists towards political parties during the transition period from the dictatorship to the new democracy. Political parties integrate environmentalist claims, and governments accept the protection of the environment as part of their political responsibility. El Saler and the Albufera go from endangered spaces to a single protected Natural Park that depended on the government.

We might expect the press, after the campaign to protect Devesa del Saler, would become completely engaged in the defense of the area and its declaration as a Natural Park

in the 1980s. Instead, we find a weaker presence of the topic in columns and letters to the editor, which shows that it is not the people's main concern anymore. In contrast, it is largely used to overtly criticize the regional government –in charge of the park's management– since they were now free to do so. Once the space is safe, the citizenry realizes that the protection of the Albufera clashes with other particular rights, because it restricts the actions of farmers or hunters. This fact forces a change in perspective as well, from environmental protection as a citizen right to the right to exploit economically and recreationally the natural space. These political and social changes that affect the social perception of the environment are reflected in both newspapers, particularly visibly when analyzing the environmental frames used in opinion articles.

This is a complex situation that might benefit from further analysis, but this communication study offers results that effectively evidence the change in attitude towards the environment with the arrival and consolidation of democracy. Therefore, we must ask ourselves whether the citizen consciousness was actually moved by environmental interest at the moment, or it was just a political response to the dictatorship. The subsequent evolution during the Spanish real estate boom and the destruction of the territory and the Valencian littoral, favored by Valencian urban legislation during the 1990s and 2000s, may indicate that there was not really an ecological conscience or, if there was, it was limited to those first steps in the protection of natural spaces during the seventies.

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