

# **Environmental public policies and public awareness in Portugal: a scenario of contradictions**

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*(Please do quote with the full reference\*)*

**Abstract:** Environmental issues in Portugal show historical traits distinctive from other post-war Western countries. These traits inherently belong to a society that maintained its rural status until the mid 1970s within the context political dictatorship. Thus, there was a prolonged absence of environmental public policies in the country. With the accession of Portugal to the EU (in the mid 1980s) changes were introduced through the creation of policies and legislation, mainly by transposing EU directives into national regulations. However, this process of implementation was in many cases ineffective. That is, it was enshrined in national policy frameworks, but with a low rate of enforcement. The State belatedly assumed its role and responsibilities in policy enforcement. This lack of commitment in enforcing environmental policies and measures is now apparent through the poor environmental indicators that the country shows in several areas. In addition, the process of socialization of the general public regarding environmental issues was flimsy. After more than two decades of the implementation of environmental policies, the social impact achieved is still weak: despite increasing public environmental awareness (apparent through public discourse and the population's concerns), there is a lack of materialization of this awareness in both everyday practices and civic participation/mobilization. Compared with other European countries, Portugal is at the crossroads between northern and eastern European countries where democratic information and participation practices arrived much later. This paper discusses the persistent unsuccessful implementation of environmental policies, looking at two related problems: the weakness of environmental movements and the absence of information and communication strategies by the State. The paper's empirical work is based on survey material produced by Observa (Observatory for Environment, Society and Public Opinion) over the last 10 years, taking into account some environmental problems/sectors as paradigmatic cases.

**Key words:** Public Opinion, Environment, Public policies, Public awareness, and Environmental problems

## **Introduction**

Since the 1970s, environmental sociologists have developed theoretical perspectives to explain the environmental crisis and its relationship with different institutions, the latter seen as both responsible and as part of the solution for environmental deterioration. Amongst varying approaches, ecological modernisation theory has become paramount, particularly in Europe (Mol and Sonnefeld 2000; Mol, Sonnefeld and Spaargaren 2009). This approach is

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often framed within reflexive modernisation (Beck et al, 1994) and is deemed by Borinelli (2007) to be an optimist account, in contrast with a more pessimistic view rendered by Beck's risk society (1992). Its optimist character is explained by its potential for opening up the possibility of an environmental reform of modern institutions, taking the environment as the trigger for systemic changes in society. Ecological modernisation entails a greening process that encompasses the economy, state and social movements all together. According to Mol (2001), environmental reform requires a set of essential institutional characteristics. One can highlight, amongst others, an open and democratic system; public awareness on environmental issues; organised environmental movements; a trustworthy environmental data monitoring system; a market economy that oversees consumption-production processes; and an interventionist and legitimate state with an advanced and diversified socio-environmental infrastructure.

Authors on ecological modernization acknowledge that this analytical framework or model is inadequate for analysing developing countries that do not enjoy these ideal institutional characteristics as, for instance, some northern European countries do. Yet, when some of these aspects of ecological modernisation are found in developing countries, they might produce positive consequences, as they trigger changes towards progressive environmental reform (Borinelli 2007).

A similar analytical framework on the prerequisites, development and effects of environmental policy is offered by Weidner (2002) with his environmental capacity building approach. Capacity building in environment is related to the "abilities of a society to identify environmental problems and solve them, that is, the process by which those abilities are developed" (Weidner, 2002, p. 1342). This environmental capacity building depends on a multifactorial process. Thus, a country with high environmental policy and management capacities would have a "well-organized environmental player groups with well-established cooperative interorganizational relations; comprehensive and accessible monitoring and reporting systems; a high degree of environmental awareness amongst political elites, the general public, and the mass media (...); comprehensive and effective regulations, instruments, and well-resourced institutions (...); a flourishing, innovative environmental business sector and a modern industrial structure; committed and strategically skilled actor groups (...)" (Weidner, 2002, p. 1344). These would be some of the ideal conditions for the success of environmental policy. Weidner also claims that "democratization and strong democratic structures and procedures are the *sine qua non* for an environmental policy that

goes beyond pollution control and towards achieving ecological modernization” (Idem, p. 1358). This process is apparent in new democratic systems, for example the case of Portugal (which celebrates 35 years of democracy in 2009) and also, in latecomer democracies such as former Eastern block countries.

These two analytical frameworks (Mol’s and Weidner’s) are complementary and overlap in some respect, it being the combination of the two that will serve as a starting point to unpack and analyse the Portuguese environmental public policies. Departing from this combined analytical framework, this paper addresses three questions: (1) how does the Portuguese case fit this model? (2) given the recent democratic system in Portugal, what has been the role of the State regarding the implementation of environmental public policies and in ensuring institutional mediation? (3) how has the process of socialization of the general public regarding environmental problems been conducted by the State.

To answer these questions, and framed within the context of the aforementioned combined model, two important aspects are covered: the level of organization of the legal and governmental institutions and the environmental awareness and participation of Portuguese society. Thus, the paper has two main objectives: (1) an assessment of the environmental policies by stressing the unique aspects of the Portuguese case within the European context; (2) a critical appraisal of the persistent lack of success of the environmental policies, basing it on the one hand on the insubstantial role of the general public and, on the other hand, on the absence of State based communication and information strategies.

The pertinence of studying the Portuguese case is justified by its interesting and contradictory features, as it is made up of specific characteristics rooted in particular social, cultural, political and historical contexts, which might explain the failures and successes of environmental policies. In the light of the combined model set out above, the analysis of a set of indicators reveals some shortcomings that governmental authorities have faced in the implementation of environmental policies. However, this analysis also points towards other relevant factors that go beyond the model.

The paper has three main sections. Firstly, it will make an assessment of the evolution and configuration of environmental policies spanning the 1970s until the present, looking specifically at the history of environmental policies with a focus on State and technological organization; secondly it will offer an analysis of public opinion on environmental issues over

the last 10 years, notably the degree of engagement of the general public. The results of 12 years of OBSERVA<sup>2</sup> research will inform these sections. Finally, a critical appraisal of the combined model is offered in the light of the analyses of historical and survey data set out previously. A conclusion follows which reflects on the persistent unsuccessful implementation of environmental policies.

## **1) An historical overview of environmental public policies in Portugal**

Environmental issues in Portugal exhibit historical traits distinctive from other post-war Western countries, which intrinsically belong to a society that maintained its rural status (until the mid-1970s) inherited from a closed and peripheral dictatorial political context.

The country reached the 1960s with economical, social and ecological conditions rather different from those in the majority of its Western European partners. Very briefly, the predominance of a traditional rural model (with 40% of the active population working in agriculture) and delayed and tentative industrialization (with national industries protected by the state through control of imports) are observed.

Two other crucial phenomena cut across the sixties in Portugal: a long colonial war from 1961 to 1974, and a migratory exodus of the rural population with one million departing to Europe and another million to the region of Lisbon, the latter resulting in a chaotic suburban explosion of population and infrastructure, which aggravated land use planning.

At the same time, high levels of illiteracy remained (26% in 1970), the championing and growth of the middle-class were stifled, and the dictatorial regime kept a hold on civic participation, while censoring all media. The censorship extended to the environmental sector, its discussion was repressed for being politically inconvenient, as it would damage Portugal's image (Schmidt 2003).

In this context, the country's identification with the environmental strategic objectives, which were being debated and framed in most Western countries at the time, was difficult.

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<sup>2</sup> OBSERVA is a Portuguese social research centre on environment, society and public opinion, founded in 1996. It was pioneer in the development of a research programme on environmental sociology in the country. It results from a protocol between the Institute of Social Sciences, an independent public university (Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e da Empresa – ISCTE) and a governmental institution (Instituto do Ambiente).

Even when Portugal – marginalized in the United Nations due to its colonial policy – was able to participate at the Stockholm Conference of 1972, it was only with the military coup in April 1974 that environmental policies got official status for the first time. A State Sub-Secretary for the Environment was institutionalized and a fundamental right to the environment was enshrined in the 1976 Constitution.

The main task at the time had to do with basic sanitation around the capital city – Lisbon - where vast slums with no water or sewage systems were being assailed by cholera. In 1974, only 18% of the country was served by disposal systems. And only half of the population was served by the water supply. However, focusing mostly on issues of justice, equality, freedom, political rights and decolonization, the revolutionary period treated the environment as a minor concern. Previous environmental policies were put on hold and the country's condition worsened. Interestingly this aspect runs contrary to Weidner assertion regarding Eastern European countries and Latin American dictatorships when it is argued that “significant capacity building and environmental effects occurred only after a change in political system” (2002, p. 1356). Indubitably, a change of political system in Portugal has facilitated the opportunity for ecological modernization, but it was far from being a significant, rapid or solid establishment of environmental capacity building.

For these reasons one can argue that the country suffered from a prolonged lack of environmental public policies. Basic services improved, notably water, the electricity supply and some sewage systems, but one can say that it was with the accession of Portugal to the EU in 1986 that changes were effectively introduced through the creation of policies and legislation, by transposing EU directives into national regulations and creating institutional structures. As rightly put by Weidner (2002, p. 1350) “those wishing to accede to the EU are required to attain certain levels of environmental institutionalization”, and thus, are put under pressure from the EU to make changes towards demanding environmental standards. This was the Portuguese case.

Accompanying regulatory and institutional changes, there was substantial financial support for basic infrastructures, which gave new impetus to these measures. Listed below are the main documents that proliferated at the time: the Basic Law for the Environment (*Lei de Bases do Ambiente*) approved in 1987; laws on a variety of environmental problems were established such as air, water and noise pollution, waste management, coastal protection and protection of species. From 1987 to 1992 more than 70 ordinances were published. General

reports of the state of the environment also became mandatory from 1987 onwards. It was what one can call the ‘golden age’ of national environmental policy.

Regarding the general public, a new Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) law led to the creation of three national NGOs. The first popular movements around environmental conflicts emerged, notably protests concerning a nuclear dump in Aldeadavilla (1987) and the blanketing of vast rural areas with eucalyptus trees (1989).

In short, since 1986, financial resources from the three Community Support Frameworks fostered an important cycle of public and private investments in sectors such as roads, water supplies, sewage networks, treatment of residual waters, the building of sanitary landfills, and so forth. Moreover, European Directives were transposed into national law and, the Environment Ministry was created (1990) with an enlarged remit and powers.

However, this process of implementation was, in many cases, ineffective. That is, despite being enshrined in national policy frameworks, its rate of enforcement was poor. The State belatedly assumed its role and responsibilities on policy enforcement. If externally the EU constituted an important trigger, compelling action both at legal-administrative framework and financial and technical support, internally there was inertia and some resistance.

Some explanations for this inertia can be put forward. Firstly, what could be called the “political zigzag” factor, that is, environmental policies were barely taken up by decision makers and no lines of continuity were established in crucial areas; public policy changing with each new office holder in the ministry. Besides, environmental policies never acquired the crosscutting, integrative status they demanded, remaining essentially confined to each sector. A lack of political weight – or better, “intervening state role”, to paraphrase Mol (2001) - in this portfolio led to the establishment of a sort of tacit consent in the matter of infringement of environmental law.

Secondly, the environmental and nature protection measures were decided on and imposed from the outside and top-down, with no real internal anchor, no effective participation or democratic ripening, that is, no social basis of support (Schmidt 2008).

This lack of commitment in enforcing environmental policies and measures is now apparent through the poor environmental indicators that the country shows in several areas. Despite the

growing administrative apparatus and a sizeable body of legislation, as well as the widespread availability of European funds, the failure of environmental policy was, and remains, a fact.

According to successive reports in 1990, 1995, 2000 and 2007 (APA 2009), the strong external impetus has had weak internal results. A good example is the basic sanitation sector: after four billion Euros of investment within the three CSFs from 1986 to 2000 (in sewers and water-treatment plants), a report showed that 39% of the water's rivers were still seriously polluted – even today 34% still are (SNIRH 2008). Only 64% of treatment plants were working in 2005. The last 2007 report about sanitation shows that the targets are similar to the ones established in 2000, which were to equip 90% of the population with public systems for treatment of residual waters (PEAASAR II) (Schmidt 2007). Another good example is hazardous industrial waste: since 1985, the year of the first regulation, five different monitoring reports on the waste situation have been published along with five different plans and various technical proposals. However, TIR policy has not achieved consistent implementation. Only after 33 years of continual inefficacy in waste monitoring and planning is the government starting to solve this problem.

Final examples are the Urban Development Plans (PDMs): though mandated by law since 1978, only after an EU warning, threatening financial cuts to local authorities, did the process accelerate and the plans were created in a rush. The result was a patchwork of plans, poorly conceived, ill thought out and with no participation despite regulatory requirements for engagement of stakeholders. An OBSERVA survey carried out in 1997 revealed that only 20% of the Portuguese population had some vague knowledge of what a PDM was.

To a certain extent, this indicates low environmental literacy amongst the general public. Though democratic, the state remains essentially closed to the public, even in areas where effective public consultation and participation are legally mandated, as is the case regarding plans for several sectors. Studies on environmental perceptions and attitudes show the low level of general environmental culture across the Portuguese population, apart from a few social groups.

## **2) Public Opinion and the Environment**

In this section Portuguese public opinion on the environment is drawn from empirical material from three main sources of data. The two national Observa surveys conducted in

1997 and 2000 on environmental representations and practices of the Portuguese population<sup>3</sup>, and the Eurobarometer 2007, which surveys the 27 countries of the European Union on environmental issues<sup>4</sup>.

Observa's surveys included a set of questions on environmental representations, attitudes and practices; information and knowledge about the environment; attitudes towards the role of the state in solving environmental problems; citizenship and environmental justice, amongst others<sup>5</sup>.

### *Environmental concerns and everyday practices*

According to the Eurobarometer 2007, almost all Europeans consider the protection of the environment to be highly important; 67% of the Portuguese population claim it is very important to protect the environment, above the European average (64%). The two national Observa surveys have already indicated this high level of concern by the Portuguese population.

However, Portuguese environmental practices do not mirror this high level of environmental concern, tapping into the usual gap between representations and practices. The national surveys of 1997 and 2000 reveal a low take up of environmental practices and this still continues if one examines the results of Eurobarometer 2007. Despite this, the Portuguese show great willingness to take up particular environmentally friendly practices, even at the expense of a higher cost, notably to pay more for organic farming products: 70% of respondents were willing to purchase organic products, yet, only 7% claimed to buy them frequently. Therefore, this shows a considerable hiatus between 'willingness' (which is a proxy for environmental concern) and 'practice'.

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<sup>3</sup> In 1997 and 2000 the Observa team carried out, respectively, the 1st and 2nd Surveys on the environment and public opinion on the Portuguese population. The data was collected by the National Institute for Statistics (INE), the questionnaire was administered on a face-to-face basis with respondents upon a representative sample - of 2450 inhabitants in Portugal (in 1997) and of 1844 (in 2000) - aged over 15 years, and distributed through several regions of the country.

<sup>4</sup> See the full report of this survey in European Commission (2008).

<sup>5</sup> The results of the two surveys were published in the form of two books. See Ferreira de Almeida (org.), 2000 and Ferreira de Almeida (org.), 2004.



These Observa results have not changed much since 2000. In the Eurobarometer 2007, Portugal is ranked in 24<sup>th</sup> position amongst 27 European countries regarding the average of number of actions taken for environmental reasons (table 1).

**Table 1: Have you done any of the following during the past month for environmental reasons (multiple responses)?**

	Portugal (%)	Europe 27 (%)
Separated most of your waste for recycling	54	59
Cut down you energy consumption	35	47
Cut down water consumption	36	37
Reduced the consumption of disposable items	18	30
Chosen an environmentally friendly way of travelling	17	28
Chosen locally produced products or groceries	11	21
Bought environmentally friendly products marked with an environmental label	7	17
Used my car less	8	17
<b>Average of actions*</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>2.6</b>

Source: Eurobarometer 2007.

\* The average of actions is calculated by adding up the number of actions each respondent has done and then dividing this figure by the total number of respondents.

This position at the lower end of the scale indicates that the Portuguese population shows a continual low take up of environmental actions, compared to other European countries (including Eastern European countries). This low take up rate of environmentally friendly practices exhibits one of the main constraints faced by environmental policies that require public engagement in environmental issues, which goes beyond a basic environmental concern.

### ***Environmental problems and governmental measures***

However, and contrary to the results on environmentally friendly practices, Portugal is much closer to Europe's average results on the type of environmental problems most stressed.

If we look at the data from Eurobarometer 2007, the three issues that the Portuguese are most worried about include: climate change, water pollution and air pollution. With a noted similarity to Europe, Climate Change heads the environmental worries of the Portuguese. This results from the huge amount of international media and political attention, most of all in 2006-2007 with the tripartite task force "Al Gore, the IPCC and the Stern Report". But, if we

discard the current hot topic of climate change, what distinguishes the Portuguese is the focus of their worries on ‘water pollution (seas, rivers, lakes)’ and ‘air pollution’, which are the only two problems with values above the European average (Table 2).

**Table 2: Please pick the five main environmental issues you are worried about from the following list...**

	Portugal	Europe 27
Climate change	54	57
Water pollution (seas, rivers, lakes)	46	42
Air pollution	49	40
Man made disasters (oils spills, industrial accidents)	35	39
Natural disasters (earthquakes, floods)	34	32
The impact on our health of chemicals in everyday products	28	32
Depletion of natural resources	25	26
Growing waste	22	24
Loss in biodiversity (extinction of species, loss of wildlife and habitats)	24	23
Agricultural pollution (use of pesticides, fertilizers, etc.)	18	23
The use of genetically modified organisms in farming	13	20
Urban problems (traffic jams, pollution, lack of green space)	11	15
Impact of current modes of transport (more cars, more motorways, more air traffic)	5	12
Our consumption habits	8	11
Noise pollution	9	8

Source: Eurobarometer 2007.

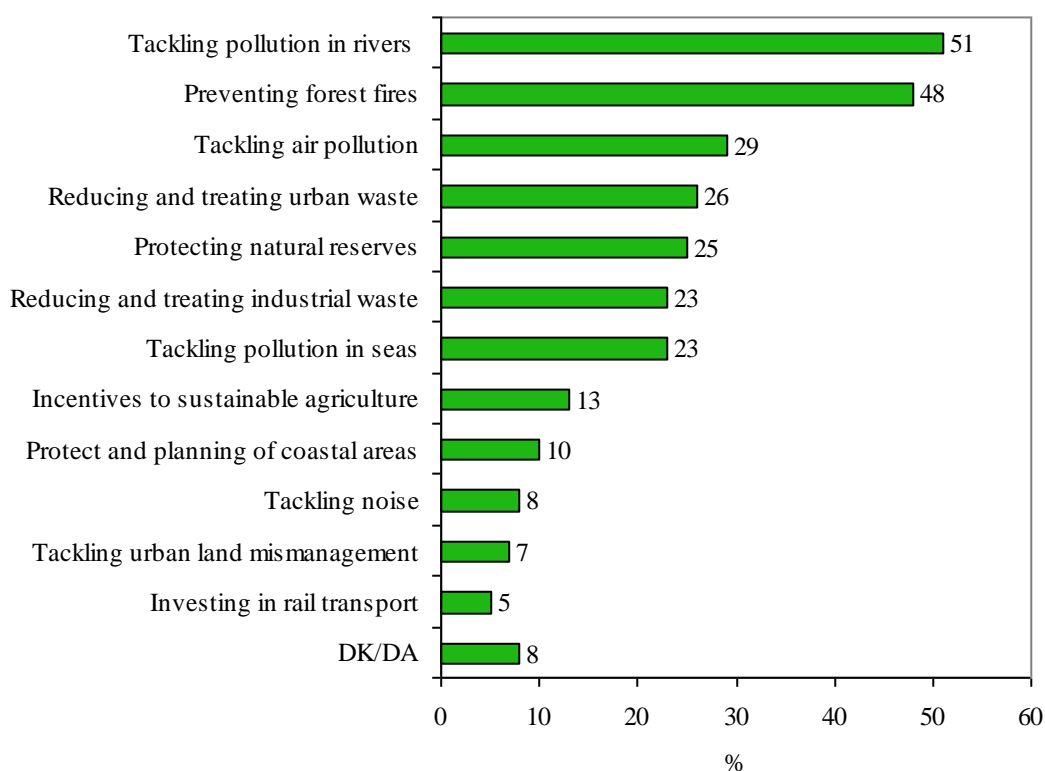
These results follow the ones found in 1997 and 2000 surveys. Concerns about water (mainly river) pollution and air pollution were high amongst the Portuguese population. In the 1997 Observa survey, the Portuguese indicated that ‘forest fires’ were the most serious environmental problem in the country (74% classified it as ‘very serious’), which is linked to some special characteristics of the country, namely the incidence of a still very present rural heritage and its Mediterranean geographical location (prone to seasonal forest fires). Water pollution encompasses the following categories in many forms: 61% consider ‘untreated urban sewage’ to be ‘very serious’ – a basic sanitation problem with direct consequences for water pollution, 60% indicate ‘industrial waste’ – associated with systematic illegal dumping in rivers – and further, 59% point out ‘river pollution’ itself.

In the same survey, air pollution was also considered a serious problem that affects everyday life and is mainly associated with traffic pollution in urban areas and foul-smelling industrial

plants located in some areas of the country (e.g. cellulose plants, oil refineries and swine processing plants).

Translating these environmental concerns, in 2000, when the Portuguese were asked about the main environmental measures the government should implement in relation to a list of problems, “tackling pollution in rivers” (51%) and “preventing forest fires” (48%), were ranked top priorities, followed closely by “tackling air pollution”. These are the problems that the Portuguese want to see eradicated from the country’s environmental scene and on which they demand urgent action by the government (Graph 1).

**Graph 1 – The main environmental measures the government should implement**



Source: Observa 2000.

Over the years, the rivers and their pollution feature recurrently as central aspects of environmental concern for the Portuguese. The general public requires a speedy solution to this issue by official bodies, as they feel powerless to solve this problem on their own. The rivers are natural links for the Portuguese. They are the elements that cut across diverse social and territorial fabric, revolving around concerns for the “common good”: the rivers are seen as a unique heritage that not only cannot be lost but also must be recovered. This sensitivity and concern about river pollution again arises from the prevalence of the country’s rural

heritage, even present in a large part of the population that lives in urban areas. Thus, what one could call “river nostalgia” manifests itself. What has happened to the rivers in the last 20 years has created obvious and real restrictions: the rivers, a space for traditional leisure, can no longer be enjoyed as such, due to the negative impacts caused by some economic and social agents and by the lack of control and ineffectiveness of the public authorities, as we shall see below. (Schmidt, Truninger and Valente, 2004)

### ***Relationship between state and citizens: accountability and trust***

In the context of analysing the factors that explain the success or lack of success of public environmental policies, the relationship between the general public and the State and citizens’ appreciation for the State’s actions, cannot be ignored.

One of the questions put in the Observa’s 2000 survey, asked the respondents to indicate which type of measures the Government should take to resolve environmental problems. A typology of actions was built up encompassing three types of actions: type 1 - stricter legislation, financial and legal penalties, type 2 - support and financial incentives; type 3 – awareness, information and raising the level of participation. The Portuguese favoured type 1 measures (37%). Type 2 measures drew 27% of responses and, type 3 measures, 24%.

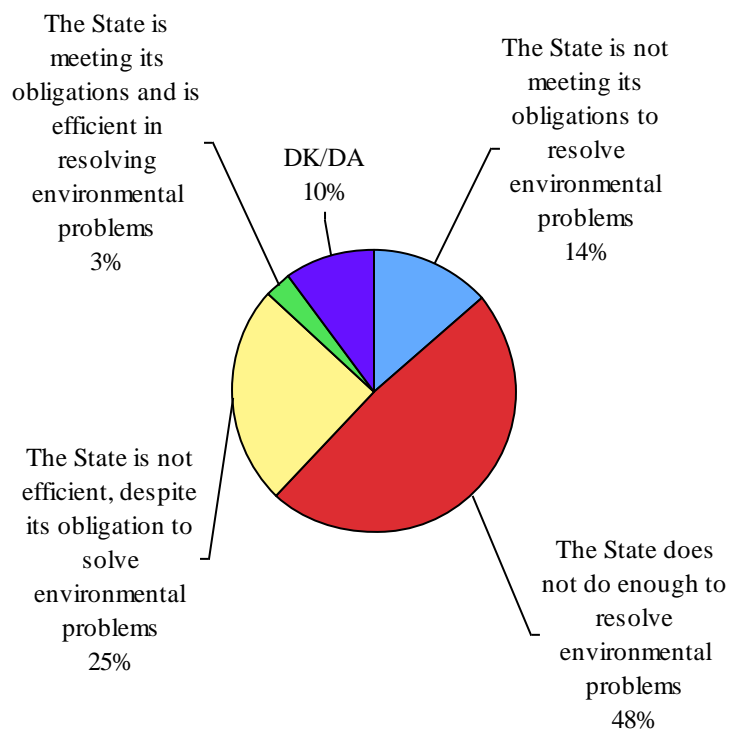
In the Eurobarometer 2007, a similar question was posed on the most effective ways of tackling environmental problems. In the Portuguese case one can observe two types of actions that are on a par: again, the introduction of heavier fines for offenders (37%) and providing more information on environmental issues (36%).

On the one hand, these recent results reinforce the importance given to type 1 actions – where the State is required to assume a stronger and more interventionist role – and, on the other hand, the Portuguese stood out as expressing a greater need to receive information on the environment from the State, presenting an average above the other European countries (30 % European average).

The Portuguese expect the main contribution to tackling environmental problems to come from central and local authorities. Interestingly, despite this high expectation of State action and accountability in advancing environmental solutions, 14% of the Portuguese claim that the State is not meeting its obligations to resolve environmental problems. 48% feel that “the

State does not do enough to resolve environmental problems”, and 25% declare that “the State is not efficient, despite its obligation to solve environmental problems”. If we add these three parts together, this means that 85% of the population has a very negative view of the State’s actions (Graph 2).

**Graph 2 – State action and accountability in resolving environmental problems**



Source: Observa 2000.

Despite this critical view of State action, the Portuguese do not excuse the State from playing a role in intervention in and control over environmental matters. In fact, the Portuguese know that the State has the political obligation and the legal and administrative tools to tackle environmental deterioration. However, the State is inefficient in this respect. For the Portuguese, this creates a feeling of lack of trust and lack of belief in the State’s efficiency and ability to act in the defence public environmental property.

Perhaps because of this, public opinion shows a desire to intervene more and more in the taking of decisions on environmental questions. Confronted directly with this question, the majority, (63%) defends the right to participate in the decision-making processes, even when the subject does not have direct implication for their personal or daily lives. Only 13% believe that decisions of this type should be left to the State, which has the authority and competence

to make decisions on this material. When we take into account age groups and academic background, the distribution of answers takes on a new form insofar as it becomes clear that the younger groups (75% of the respondents under 29) and better educated (90% of the respondents who have higher education) are those who have a greater willingness to participate in these decisions, expressing a generational difference in attitudes to environmental participation.

However, this desire to have a role in decision-making in decisions is nothing more than an “intention” which is not put into practice. It can be seen that in this area the Portuguese have a predominantly passive attitude: in the low level of involvement in day-to-day environmental practices (see above); in the low level of environmental membership; in the choice of mass media and post as preferential ways of receiving environmental information; in the great demand for State accountability and intervention.

Furthermore, this passivity is not exclusive to the environmental question as it can also be seen in the level of participation in political and social life. In these areas, the Portuguese have low figures and attitudes that reveal this inertia. Confronted with a set of forms of intervention, the items that appear to have some consequence are based essentially in practices of democratic expression that do not involve costs or demands for individual initiative – voting in elections, remaining informed about social and political questions and making donations (table 3). This situation confirmed in 2000, is corroborated in other more recent studies that reveal a hardening in the lack of civic participation by the Portuguese population (Cabral, Vala and Freire 2003).

**Table 3 - Forms of participation in public and social life practiced in the last 5 years**

	Observa 2000 (%)
Making donation to institutions	38
Membership of professional associations	7
Blocking roads	1
Participating in public discussions	7
Participating in demonstrations	11
Keeping up to date with social and political issues	54
Contacting institutions and services	15
Going on strike	10
Membership of civic associations	6
Signing petitions	18
Contacting newspapers, radio or television	9
Membership of a trade union	13
Voting in the national elections	81
Belonging to a political party	7

Source: Observa 2000

Civic environmental participation in Portugal is characterised by being passive and short term, interrupted from time to time by popular reactionary actions when there is a localised problem. The Nimby – not in my back yard – cases that have taken place in Portugal are indicative of this type of isolated attitude, without consistency or reflex in a more engaged and continued participation (Gil and Fonseca, 2004). We can say that the situation has not yet moved from the NIMBY effect to the NIABY - not in anybodies backyard - effect.

### ***Environmental knowledge: attitudes towards media and science***

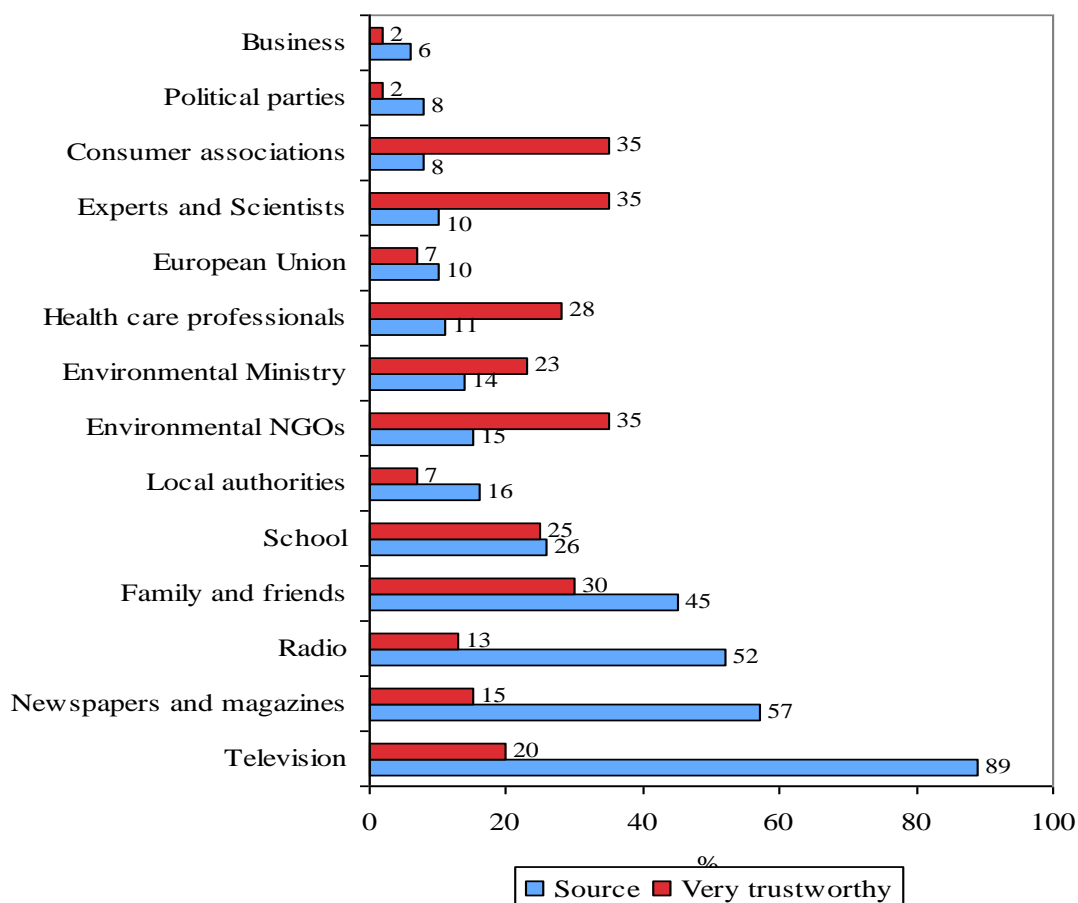
In 2000, 89% of the population stated that television was its primary source of information on the environment, thereby confirming the communicational hegemony in the country (Schmidt, 2003). This situation was also observed in Eurobarometer 2007, where in relation to European media Portugal stood out for the weight it gives to TV news.

But effective sources of information are not always the same as those which are most trusted. The most flagrant cases are the experts (NGOs, researchers) – who have little expression as informative sources but who excite the highest level of trust.

In the 1997 Observa's survey, three groups of sources with high levels of trust stood out (85%-92%): experts, social networks and media (TV and radio). In contrast, economic and

political organisations convey the least amount of trust to the public on environmental questions (Graph 3).

**Graph 3 – Information sources and degree of trust**



Source: Observa 1997 and Observa 2000.

Greater influence in national public life is required from science and the university, as well as from organised civil society - NGOs and professional associations. The relationship with science is peculiar as scientists are assumed to have the role of heralds, sanctifying the truth. The confidence placed in them in relation to environmental matters is extreme, but also in relation to old and new risks (Gonçalves et al, 2007). This confidence in scientists (greater than the European average) is even greater even when there is neither ingrained scientific culture nor any environmental literacy which enable the complexity of environmental questions to be understood.

When the Portuguese are questioned about the reasons for their low level of participation, it is precisely the lack of environmental information/knowledge which comes up as the main reason. This vicious circle of inertia which they themselves recognise (“I don’t know,



therefore I don't participate, and, if I don't participate, it's because I don't know") becomes difficult to break.

Already in 1997, the Portuguese had more confidence in civic intervention by other Europeans than they did in themselves and recognised that others are better prepared to deal with the environmental problem: around 79% of the Portuguese agree that the citizens of Northern Europe have more respect for the environment than their compatriots. The reasons put forward to justify this opinion centre on greater access to education and information – around one third believe that the citizens of the North have more civic education and 26% are better informed than the Europeans of this southern country (Schmidt, Valente and Pinheiro, 2000). It is also noted that the Portuguese are self-conscious about the discrepancy in environmental capacity building in relation to northern Europeans.

Ten years later, in Eurobarometer 2007, and in comparison with the rest of Europe, it was confirmed that the Portuguese consider themselves to be among those who are least informed about the environment, below the European average (39% to 55%), coming in 24<sup>th</sup> place in the Europe of 27, similar to their position on environmental practices referred to in table 1.

The level of environmental information and knowledge built up in the OBSERVA 2000 Survey based on cognitive dimensions, confirms this low level of literacy. Through a set of information indicators on some environmental problems relevant to the domestic and international scales, it is noted that the lack of knowledge and misunderstandings emerge for the greater part of the population. Also in this case, it is the younger generations and the better-educated groups (minorities in the population in general) who have higher levels of environmental information and knowledge (Nave and Fonseca, 2004).

It is from the combination of the results on the dimensions - information and knowledge, daily practices and civic involvement – that we can affirm that the people of Portugal in general have a low level of “environmental culture”. This situation has apparently changed little between 1997 and the present.

To summarise, deep environmental concerns correspond to sparse knowledge, sparse practices and sparse civil participation. The assessment that the population makes of State action is negative regarding its inefficacy and insufficient intervention. In parallel, the population delegates a more active role in the transmission of knowledge to science/scientists

and universities. Even when they consider the role of individuals to be important and they demonstrate a desire to intervene in decisions, in general, the Portuguese do not know what to do or how to do it. By their own admission they are poorly informed on environmental issues, when compared with other countries and their justification for this lack of action (inertia) is both the lack of information and lack of civic education.

This low level of environmental culture has an impact on the efficacy of environmental policy. On the one hand, because the people do not organise themselves and they do not know how and on whom to put pressure in political terms, and on the other hand, because they know little about the State's laws and policies, which establish the right to consultation and public participation.

### **3) Final Comments**

Departing from the question 'How does the Portuguese case fit the combined model' this last section will offer some critical comments and observations, taking into account all the analytical insights provided thus far. At first glance, the Portuguese case appears to exhibit particular specificities that indicate some limitations on the model for its full application.

According to the combined model set out in section 1, environmental reform requires a set of institutional characteristics. If it is true that we have an open democratic system (though recent) and if, since our integration into Europe, we have come to have an administrative, legislative and institutional apparatus allied to the application of technical solutions, this has not brought enough improvements to our environmental performance.

This poor environmental performance is revealed not only through the State political actions, but also through the everyday life environmental practices of the population. At State action level, for example, there is no comprehensive and consistent environmental data monitoring systems; there is no advanced and diversified socio-environmental infrastructure and, the State does not ensure that regulations, instruments and administrative resources are effectively implemented. At the public opinion level, the awareness on environmental issues is not enough to enable the take up of environmentally friendly practices and participation in environmental movements.

Thus, on a formal level, the Portuguese case presents practically all the components of the model. However, at a deeper level, flaws in these components are revealed, some of which only exist formally to answer to external European demands. The clearest example is the transposition of innumerable Directives into domestic legislation, many of which end up being neither applied nor policed. This translates the inconsequence of the legal-administrative apparatus, to a great extent, imposed externally. Thus, more than listing the components of the model which are present or absent in the Portuguese case, we must carry out an analysis of the structural flaws of the poor environmental performance in Portugal. In this way we can identify the three principal factors that help to explain this framework of failure of environmental policies in Portugal.

Firstly, the economy still largely prevails over the environment. Environmental regulations can always be bypassed and ignored in order to promote economic growth. In the domestic context the economic dimension is supreme and this is also related to the so called “Portuguese backwardness”, which passes through the prevalence of rural society model until very recently, given that it was only in the 80s that we boarded the market economy train. This need for economic growth at any cost means that environmental laws are continually violated to favour investments and measures with an almost exclusively economy based logic – the case of civil construction is illustrative and registers a heavy weight in the impact on land disorganisation and on the consequent environmental deterioration. Looking at the coastal areas alone: the European Environmental Agency says that between 1990 and 2000 Portugal was the European country where the coast was more quickly taken over, with a 34% growth in developed areas (EEA 2006) and an urbanization rate of about 50%, qualified as “endemic urban sprawl” (EEA 2002).

This prevalence in the economic dimension reverberates, on the one hand, in the constant violation of environmental laws – seen as impediments to the idea of growth; and on the other hand in a growing feeling of inadequacy on the part of the common citizen - since environmental laws are not applied equally to all people, yielding in the face of the great economic powers. In this case, the State is not performing its role as regulator, overseer and “dealer”, in other words, as guarantor of the balance between all in the eyes of the law.

Secondly, there is a problem in communication between the State and the people. On the one hand, the recent democracy has not yet created a tradition of public participation and intervention by the people and, on the other hand, the State has not developed mechanisms to

enable public participation and to give feedback to those involved in the processes of public consultation. We can say that the democratic system is not equipped to put policies of participation into practice since it exists in the paradox of being obliged to accept public participation because it is imposed by European directives, but without knowing how to integrate the benefits of this participation.

The State's ineptness breeds a lack motivation and lack of trust and these are accentuated by the failure to guarantee fairness, and the judicial system is a case in point. The studies on justice in Portugal and the relationship with the State reveal a great slowness in the administration of justice (Santos 2005) and a huge lack of trust in the political system of justice (Cabral, Vala and Freire 2003). In the case of the environment, the difficulties and constraints in implementation of Agenda 21 Local are an archetypical case of this factor in blocking the success of environmental policies (Schmidt, Nave and Guerra 2006).

This tardiness (and also lack of action) in the Portuguese judicial system very often hinders action by the public and by environmental movements. Thus begins a process leading to apathy and possible even giving up – in participating in both the debate and the decision-making processes of environmental problems. Only those with great economic, social and cultural resources seem to be capable of overcoming the restraints, which emphasises and reinforces the inequalities that the system legitimizes. The better-organised environmental movements themselves have economic and procedural difficulties in taking judicial action.

Thirdly, a low level of environmental culture was observed through the surveys analysed. The general public is marked by a superficial and media influenced level of environmental awareness; and by low rates of literacy which even today place Portugal at the tail end of Europe (it is Portugal that demonstrates the greatest failure in relation to secondary education).

The poor level of environmental knowledge/information allied to the lack of tradition in social participation weakens the role of the public. This fragility, linked to what could be called “backwardness trauma” which sees in nature conservation a symptom of this lateness, has led to the permissiveness of destruction of common environmental heritage.

In this context, the State did not make a great investment in environmental information and communication. Environmental education has only recently been integrated into the education

system itself, which, in the main, will have an effect on the younger population. Moreover, Portugal is one of the few countries in the EU that does not have an Environmental Education Strategy nor an Education Strategy for Sustainable Development (despite the fact that the UNESCO Decade of Education for Sustainable Development is currently taking place). This lack of investment in training does not help to promote the consolidation of an environmental culture, nor does it enable the creation of a social base for support for environmental movements. The Portuguese show themselves as having recourse to, more often than not, the NIMBY phenomena that act as timely reactions related to close and local problems. Yet, these NIMBY type reactions do not evolve to a “second level” where the continuity and consistency of a social movement capable of building an internalised and enabling environmental culture appropriate to an empowered society is promoted.

These three related problems: the overpowering of the economic sector over the other societal sectors, conducive to imbalances; the inefficiency of a slow legal system which stifles environmental movement ability to act; and a low level of environmental culture in the Portuguese population in the context of an absence of information and communication strategies by the State, contribute to explain the failures and contradictions of environmental public policies and public awareness in Portugal.

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