

## Journalism and environment: the distant proximity between Brazilian and Portuguese studies

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**Jornalismo e ambiente: análise de investigações realizadas no Brasil e em Portugal.**  
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### RESUMO

Esta resenha apresenta o mapeamento de estudos sobre jornalismo e meio ambiente no Brasil e em Portugal desenvolvido por Antônio Teixeira de Barros e Jorge Pedro Sousa. “*Jornalismo e Ambiente: análise de investigações realizadas no Brasil e em Portugal*” é uma contribuição inédita nessa área de estudos, discutindo paralelos e especificidades históricas, temáticas e metodológicas de investigação nos dois países. O presente texto mostra os aspectos centrais da obra e comenta as principais conclusões.

**Palavras-chave:** Jornalismo Ambiental; Campo Jornalístico; Meio Ambiente; Brasil; Portugal

### ABSTRACT

This review presents the mapping of studies about journalism and environment in Brazil and in Portugal developed by Antônio Teixeira de Barros and Jorge Pedro Sousa. “*Jornalismo e Ambiente: análise de investigações realizadas no Brasil e em Portugal*” (Journalism and Environment: analysis of investigations carried out in Brazil and in Portugal) is an original contribution to this field of study, discussing historical parallels and specificities, themes and methodologies in both countries. This text presents the work’s central aspects and comments its main conclusions.

**Keywords:** Environmental Journalism; Journalistic Field; Environment; Brazil; Portugal

In *Jornalismo e Ambiente: análise de investigações realizadas no Brasil e em Portugal* (Journalism and Environment: analysis of investigations carried out in Brazil and in Portugal), Antônio Teixeira de Barros and Jorge Pedro Sousa propose to reflect upon the geography of ten reference works about the theme, five from each country. Brazilian and Portuguese researchers draw parallel lines and, for that reason, they don’t meet, despite the affinity of their studies, which are indicated in the book. Thus, the publication shows itself to be a necessary map, though not a definite one. In this text, the book is presented as well as some reflections about the paths indicated for the research on the field of journalism and environment.

The number of works that analyze the journalistic approach of the ecological theme has increased in the last decade. An increase that has the will to explain the periodic

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thematization of the global environmental discussion, unfolded in different sections: life, style, politics, trade, business, science, civic sector. The group of works that are base to the study allows the perception of agendas outlined by meaning disputes between different Social Fields, agendas that provide substrate to nourish journalistic coverage. And to evaluate this coverage is the great motivation of research on the subject.

When thinking about Brazil-Portugal relations it is tempting to incorporate the poet Fernando Pessoa's eminent sentence: "to sail is necessary"<sup>2</sup>. It is indeed, because it lacks crossing the Atlantic, as it is well pointed out in the final part of the book. To find affinities that allow us to talk about a "distant proximity", the authors sought the most cited works in events, scientific journals and books. In both counties, the initial demarcation is the half of the 1980s, when investigations about Environmental Journalism began to be published. The research was complemented by investigators' suggestions, surveys, and categorization of the most relevant works, followed by a selection, which is result of crossing the data mentioned above. Besides the ten main references, other 40 recurrent titles help to form a more general panorama.

Among the ten main works, five from each country, both studies prior to the year two thousand are from Brazil. This is the direct reflection that different international events had on journalism and, consequently, on research. The first remembrance is the influence of Rio 92, which took place in Rio de Janeiro. Afterwards, 1997, with the signature of a commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the Kyoto Protocol. It is, however, Rio+10 (in South Africa, 2002) and the disclosure of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports (2003 and 2007) that cement a "mediacentric" model (p. 50-53), anchored in official documents, facts and emblematic agreements and aligned with environmentalism's own reorientation, with new forms of covering ecological themes.

*Jornalismo e Ambiente: análise de investigações realizadas no Brasil e em Portugal* is divided in six chapters. In the first one, the focus is on journalism's records about ecology in each country. International events and historical redefinitions of environmentalism ethos are due notice. In the following chapter, we are presented with a polysemic conceptual set on environmentalism, connected to the previous panorama. The book marks events with important discursive value, which helped define some key movements concerning ecology in a planetary scale. As they reconstruct historical processes, the authors circle the important

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<sup>2</sup> Available in: <<http://www.dominiopublico.gov.br/download/texto/jp000001.pdf>>. Access in: jun. 25, 2010.

turn on the approach of national and local themes, that begin to be incorporated in a global problematic (such as causes of and solutions for climate change, for instance). It is the same context that allows grasping the advent of the Complex Thought, as formulated by Edgar Morin, as a fundamental axis to the debate about ecology and to the construction of definitions surrounding the concept of Environmental Journalism itself. Concluding the first part of the book, the authors discuss how environmental issues have found, in the heart of neoliberal capitalism, its conditions of emergence as a rationality. Environmentalism is outlined as a polynuclear field of power in which communication is also an agent.

From the third chapter on, the studies about Journalism and Environment are more systemically presented. At this point, it is highlighted the phases of coverage in each country – topic that will be unfolded throughout the fourth and fifth chapters –, that contribute to the comprehension of the shaping process of Environmental Journalism as a subfield and its thematizations in Brazil and in Portugal. In a relational form, that discussion considers the socio-historical interaction of at least five actors with the Journalistic Field: the scientific community; the Estate and its institutions; social movements; political parties, fundamentally the “green” ones; and environmentalists’ non-governmental organizations.

The text is conducted in a way that allows to find an original network in the panorama suggested by the ten base studies, under three hypothesis: the first, the predominance of scientific discourse as the most relevant framing concerning environmental themes on the journalistic coverage; the second, affiliated to a multifactor paradigm for the comprehension of news (SOUSA, 2000 and 2006), considers the influence of a global agenda in the journalistic action about the theme; the third, the (confirmed) presence of Content and Discourse Analysis as the preponderant path chosen by researchers of both countries in their studies.

The sixth chapter is where the possibility of thinking about an environmental public sphere is discussed. As said, keeping in mind both countries specificities, the global themes urge Brazil and Portugal to be spaces of convergent approaches of the media on the ecological, with a strong part of journalism in framing a possible “environmental agenda”, especially from 2002 onwards. Before, this agenda was imprecise and non-systematical. More recently, it is outlined, in the terms of the authors, a contemporary *ecosphere*, based on the interactions mediated by communication.

The mapping presented in the book provides opportunities to the interested in the theme. That is because, as it shows in the research's conclusions, the studies developed in Brazil and in Portugal don't reference each other, despite theoretical and methodological affinities and similarities in the formation of national agendas. Another point to highlight is a noticeable broader theoretical approach of the Portuguese, while Brazilian researchers are more focused on the relation between empirical object and specific theoretical assumption, when it comes to the problem being investigated.

The traveled journey serves a great deal to Brazil, we point out, for its good use of two studies of recognized value in Portugal, and yet with no equivalents published here, being it in terms of broad historical periods and the role of television, as in *O ambiente no ecrã* (SCHMIDT, 2005) (The environment on the screen), or in the discussion about the consolidation of non-official sources as reference voices, as it is done in *A Quercus nas notícias* (PEREIRA ROSA, 2007)<sup>3</sup> (Quercus in the news). The presence of both authors in various passages of the book doesn't damage the reflection, on the contrary. It encourages thought about the potential horizons of debate and the circulation of knowledge, necessary to foment new attempts. The binomial Journalism and Environment, as suggested in the conclusion of the work, must be labored in new fronts, completing the details of the first map.

The authors highlight the need to broaden the criticism about journalistic practices in face of the ecological problematic. At the same time, they wonder about a potential demand of Environmental Journalism for more complex processes. Open horizon, our perception of the issue suggests a bifurcation. First: what is the signification weight of the expression Environmental Journalism? It doesn't seem to have a conciliatory definition yet and it even seems to be distant of the "sheer" journalism "about the environment", the most trivial format observed. To many, Environmental Journalism suggests a "committed" practice, different from what is conventional, in a more or less peaceful way, in other specializations. It is a point to solve or to affirm, something that is possible to be inferred from the conclusions of the study. In the book, the Complexity perspective is highlighted as theoretical axis to this definition, but without the intent of settling the issue. Secondly, although in consequence of the first point argued, there is the necessity of further entering the ground of newsrooms to

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<sup>3</sup> Schmidt (2003) investigates, with a sharp sociological look, 40 years of approach on the environment in Portuguese public television. Pereira Rosa (2006), with the journalistic practice as center for the reflection, perceives the displacement that turns into sources diverse social actors, in special, the environmentalist NGO Quercus.

understand the “thought” and the labor of journalists in face of the challenges that the problematic imposes.

Barros and Sousa highlight the innovative potential, from the academic point of view, that research about Journalism and Environment can bring to the Field and to the understanding of contemporaneity. A time when the ecological issue is constantly present in the account of social life, materializing itself not only in the factual force of everyday events: it is present in special supplements, in series of reports, in editorial policies of big conglomerates, in journalistic websites and blogs; there are different intentionalities, but they are all in sync with the ambivalences of the present.

Support and rebuttal, certainties and uncertainties season, progressively, the journalistic action in this hot weather, such as it has been registered by climatologists in the last decades. The studies presented in *Jornalismo e Ambiente: análise de investigações realizadas no Brasil e em Portugal* indicate an important ground, resource to different incursions, including the crossing of the ocean more often. Having this cartography in hands, we are presented with the chance to build dialogues and productive proximities.

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