Problemy Polityki Społecznej. Social Policy Issues 2025, 70(3): 1–18
https://doi.org/10.31971/pps/205746

Submitted: 2025-02-04/Accepted: 2025-05-30

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Sustainable production models in rural Galicia: environmental challenges in community forest management

Abstract

The article analyses the Common Forest Lands in Galicia, exploring their role in promoting environmental sustainability in response to challenges such as industrial forest monoculture, environmental degradation, and population ageing. Using a qualitative methodology that combines a literature review and field observations, the study details the historical, organisational, and productive characteristics of these communities, with a focus on their transition toward more sustainable production models. The work is structured into three main parts: first, it describes the historical and organisational context of Common Forest Lands; second, it examines the negative impacts of industrial forest monoculture in these territories such as biodiversity loss

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and increased wildfires; and third, it discusses the intergenerational factors influencing the adoption of sustainable practices, highlighting the importance of child and youth participation. The conclusions underscore the need for inclusive public policies that address structural barriers, promote economic diversification, and encourage intergenerational participation in resource management. This study contributes to the debate on sustainability and community governance, providing a theoretical and practical framework for future research on collective management models in rural contexts.

Keywords: sustainability, participatory governance, forest monoculture, intergenerational challenges

Introduction

The current global environmental crisis has critically challenged the dominant model of industrialised agriculture, which has historically prioritised short-term economic returns through large-scale monoculture systems. This approach, promoting intensive productivity, has been associated with phenomena such as massive deforestation, soil and water pollution, and accelerated biodiversity loss (Altieri, 1999; Mikkelsen, 2008; FAO, 2021). Moreover, the links between environmental degradation and the emergence of health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, underline the urgent need to adopt sustainable production systems (Lajmanovich, 2020; Li et al., 2023). This global context involves more than reducing ecological impact; it requires a profound transformation across socio-economic and cultural dimensions. From an ecological perspective, it requires preserving biodiversity, restoring degraded ecosystems, and enhancing resilience to health and climate crises through diversified and locally adapted land use strategies (European Commission, 2020; Schneider et al., 2025). In socioeconomic terms, sustainable models promote territorial re-embedding of production, reducing dependency on extractive global chains by encouraging local economies, food sovereignty, and circular practices (UNEP, 2021). Finally, from a political and cultural standpoint, sustainability implies expanding democratic participation, valuing traditional knowledge, and addressing environmental injustices that disproportionately affect marginalised rural communities (Escobar, 2020). These perspectives converge in the idea that sustainability is not merely a technical objective but a collective process shaped by power relations, cultural values, and intergenerational responsibilities (Martín et al., 2024).

In Southern Europe, initiatives such as ecovillages, forest schools, and community agroecological projects stand out as examples of the ongoing search for environmentally respectful ways of coexistence, based on social economy and cooperativism (Pinto & Vilaça, 2023; Trillo Santamaría et al., 2024). In this context, agroecology emerges as a transformative alternative that seeks to integrate ecological management with social justice and economic viability (Gliessman, 2007). This approach highlights the importance of production systems adapted to local contexts and self-managed under policies that prioritise citizen participation, thereby ensuring greater long-term sustainability (Vega et al., 2023; Terán-Samaniego et al., 2025).

In models based on agroecology and sustainable land governance, the importance of autonomous self-management forms stands out. In this context, the Common Forest Lands of Galicia represent a paradigmatic case. This model of collective ownership, covering approximately 20% of the forested area of the region, combines community management with participatory governance, offering a favourable context for the promotion of more sustainable production methods (Marey-Pérez et al., 2006; Balboa et al., 2006; Zugazagoitia et al., 2024). However, these common territories face multiple challenges, particularly regarding the expansion of industrial forest monocultures within these community spaces, including large-scale plantations of species like eucalyptus, which threaten both biodiversity and the resilience of their ecosystems (Copena Rodríguez, 2018).

This case suggests that the transition to agroecological models, while maintaining a communal administration shared by the residents, is not devoid of barriers. This process, understood as a dynamic and gradual system, is conditioned by social, economic, technological, and political factors, in the relationships between the people who work and live in these community spaces, the state, businesses, and society (Van der Ploeg, 2010). In particular, the expansion of industrial forest monoculture poses numerous problems for Galicia with the intensification of forest fires and biodiversity loss (Díaz-Fierros Viqueira, 2019).

In this sense, the object of this research is to analyse the transition processes currently unfolding in these communal forests, with particular emphasis on the socio-environmental tensions they face and the role of community participation – especially among younger generations – in shaping sustainable futures. By exploring these dynamics, the study aims to understand how local collective governance interacts with ecological constraints, demographic shifts, and intergenerational knowledge systems. In line with this objective, the research is guided by the following questions: (1) What historical, social and organisational dynamics have shaped the communal governance of forestlands in Galicia? (2) How does the expansion of industrial forest monoculture affect the potential for transitioning towards more sustainable production models in these communal territories? (3) In what ways can the participation of children and young people contribute to building sustainable proposals within these communities? Following these questions, the central hypothesis underpinning this study is that transition cannot be achieved through legal reforms or ecological interventions alone. Rather, it requires the active engagement of younger generations in the governance of communal lands, fostering participatory approaches that integrate sustainability, social equity, and a strong sense of territorial belonging. Moreover, this research challenges prevailing approaches to territory, governance, and participation by emphasising that collective land ownership and use cannot be understood as a conclusive solution to power-related issues. The existence of collective tenure does not necessarily imply a constructive orientation toward more sustainable production systems (Wittman & James, 2022; Delgado, 2023). In this sense, the article contributes to current debates on sustainability and community-based governance by advancing an integrated perspective that links environmental challenges with intergenerational dynamics.

Following this argument, the article presents the Common Forest Lands in Galicia, examining their historical, organisational and productive dimensions, as well as the

challenges and opportunities they face in the transition towards more sustainable production models. Particular attention is given to the role of intergenerational relationships and the participation of children and young people as key elements in the construction of environmentally responsible and socially just alternatives. The following section presents the methodology proposed for this study.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach combining extended case method analysis with critical document review to examine the socio-ecological transitions of Galicia's communal forests. Building on longitudinal engagement through ethnographic immersion in these territories, the research focuses on Gulpilleira (42°10'N, 8°41'W), a peri-urban community forest of 59.3 ha in the Municipality of Porriño (Pontevedra), strategically located 12 km from Vigo's metropolitan core and 25 km from the Portuguese border.

Ethnographic fieldwork (December 2021–January 2022) prioritised this case due to its hybrid positionality: adjacency to an industrial park hosting transnational corporations (automotive/logistics) and artisanal meat processing facilities, coupled with proximity to Santiago pilgrimage routes driving ecotourism development. This configuration facilitates analysing historical path dependencies in communal land management alongside relational socio-economic processes in Galicia's communal forests governance. Unlike the demographic collapse characterising Lugo/Ourense highlands (–14.2% population 2000–2020), Porriño exhibits counter-trend stability (+1.2% growth 2016–2022) (Instituto Geográfico Nacional de España, 2024), making it an extended case to examine how globalised production chains and rural gentrification reconfigure peri-urban social spaces (Sheppard & Pemberton, 2023).

While Gulpilleira Forest Land serves as the primary case for in-depth observation, the study does not focus exclusively on this community. Instead, it uses Gulpilleira as an entry point to examine broader patterns and tensions within Galicia's Common Forest Lands. This approach aligns with the extended case method, which seeks not to generalise from isolated observations but to theorise from within local processes by situating them in their wider historical and structural contexts (Burawoy, 1998).

In addition to fieldwork, the study incorporates a structured review of secondary data sources, including academic literature, legal frameworks, policy documents, and statistical reports related to Common Forest Lands and rural sustainability in Galicia. The review, focused on materials published between 2005 and 2025, priories peer-reviewed articles indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, Scielo, and Erih Plus. Relevant keywords were selected through a preliminary mapping of core concepts, including: "environmental management and development", "sustainable management, Galicia", "community forest, Galicia", "forestry monoculture", "paradigm modernity, environment", and "forest fire, Spain". These terms were used to identify and classify materials into three thematic clusters: (1) legal-institutional structures, (2) socio-ecological impacts of forest monoculture, and (3) community-based sustainability initiatives.

The documents were collected and organised using Mendeley, with an approximate total of n=60 sources analysed. Additionally, the review incorporates sociological literature by classical authors within the structural-constructivist tradition of Bourdieu, focusing on social inequalities and configurations, particularly in terms of class struggle and household strategies. This secondary data analysis complemented the ethnographic insights and contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the structural dynamics shaping the Common Forest Lands governance in Galicia.

The following section examines the main structural, political, and organisational features of Common Forest Lands in Galicia, with a focus on their historical development and current configuration.

Organisational and productive characteristics of Galicia's common forest lands

The Autonomous Community of Galicia, located in the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula, spans a total area of 29,575 km^2 and has an approximate population of 2.7 million inhabitants (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2021). As a predominantly rural region, Galicia's primary economic activities include forestry, viticulture, livestock farming, and fishing (Meixide Vecino et al., 2021). These industries have shaped the socio-economic structure of the area, creating a context for the development of communal land management.

According to Traviesas (2017), forests in Galicia have historically played a crucial role in society, ecology, and production of the region. They were fundamental to the agrarian system, providing essential materials such as wood for tools, firewood for heating, stones for construction, and staple foods like chestnuts. Additionally, they enabled the expansion of cereal cultivation through the traditional land clearing practices, and supplied key resources for the production of organic fertilisers, thereby helping to maintain soil fertility (Sobrado Correa, 2023). The traditional agrarian system revolved around the communal forest, whose primary purpose was to provide grazing land for livestock and preserve local flora and fauna. This was reinforced by the trinomial relationship between forest, cultivated land, and meadows (Life in Common Land, 2022).

Currently, Galicia accounts for a significant proportion of Spain's deforestation. The northern region of the Autonomous Community is responsible for 25% of Spain's total timber harvests, primarily comprising eucalyptus, pine, and conifer species (La Voz de Galicia, 2019). It is worth noting, however, that not all forests used for extractive activities are private property. Communal forms of forest administration, such as Common Forest Lands, are managed by neighbours[2].

The Common Forest in Galicia represent a unique approach to land use that attempts to address ecological needs alongside socio-economic goals, acknowledging the challenges of balancing these priorities within a context of significant monoculture

[2] Local residents who habitually live and work on these lands. The name in Spanish is "comuneros".

practices. Emerging from pre-industrial times, these communal lands were established to provide critical resources for grazing, timber, and subsistence agriculture (Balboa et al., 2006). Unlike other European communal systems, these common lands-maintained autonomy from municipal ownership, fostering collective responsibility in resource use. This model has evolved over centuries, adapting to modern challenges while retaining its foundational principles of shared governance and mutual support among members. This structure was unique in southern Europe, where communal governance allowed communities to collectively manage and sustain vital resources while fostering resilience against external pressures. This historical context shaped the social structure of these communities, embedding a habitus of shared responsibility and mutual support among residents.

During the 20th century, the Common Forest Lands experienced profound disruptions driven by socio-political changes. These situations did not occur in isolation but were part of broader shifts in land management policies across Spain, which emphasised industrialisation and economic growth at the expense of traditional communal systems. According to Del Arco Blanco and Anderson (2017), during the Franco regime, rural areas were subject to systematic state intervention, including land confiscations, which undermined traditional communal structures and replaced them with centralised, hierarchical forms of control aligned with authoritarian political aims. Communal lands were increasingly repurposed for monoculture plantations of fast-growing species such as eucalyptus and pine, driven by external economic pressures. These changes had far-reaching implications for both the ecological balance and the governance structures of the communities, as rural depopulation intensified with younger generations migrating to urban centres. Due to this historical context, an ageing population remained as the primary custodians of these lands, weakening the intergenerational transmission of traditional practices (Suárez García & Soto Fernández, 2017).

Following this period, Spain underwent a complex and gradual transition to democracy, initiated by the death of Franco in 1975 and consolidated with the approval of the Spanish Constitution in 1978. This historical framework not only restored democratic institutions but also recognised the territorial reorganisation of the state, laying the groundwork for the creation of Autonomous Communities (Candela Sevila, 2018). Within this process, Galicia was granted autonomy in 1981, enabling the region to develop its own legislation on land use. In this period, the institutional recognition of Common Forest Lands under Galician law in 1989 marked a turning point. This legislation formalised their collective ownership as inalienable, indivisible, and imprescriptible, creating a legal framework that reinforced their governance structures (Xunta de Galicia, 1989).

It is worth noting that Spain's accession to the European Economic Community in 1986 initiated an ongoing process of legal and policy development at the regional level. This integration gradually required the adaptation of national and subnational frameworks to align with European standards, particularly in areas such as environmental protection, rural development, and land governance. The Forestry Law of Galicia (DOG 7/2012, June 8) established guidelines for the sustainable management of all forested areas in Galicia, with specific provisions aimed at Common Forest Lands. It emphasised fire prevention, reforestation efforts, and the economic utilisation of communal lands,

aligning with regional and European sustainability goals. Similarly, the Forestry Plan of Galicia (Xunta de Galicia, 2021) provided strategic objectives for the long-term development, encouraging active participation of Common Lands planning processes.

The current organisational and intergenerational structure of Common Forest Lands reflects these historical legacies and contemporary innovations. As Copena Rodríguez (2025) describes, the evolution of these communal territories throughout the 20th century was deeply marked by socioeconomic transformations, institutional pressures, and community-based forms of resistance. Collective memory and local agency have shaped land use practices, challenging top-down forestry models and reaffirming the cultural and social significance of communal governance.

In terms of their present-day organisation, decisions about land use and resource management are made in participatory assemblies where the members exercise voting rights. However, significant differences exist across the provinces of Galicia. For example, Lugo and Ourense, characterised by more rural and interior landscapes, often focus on traditional uses such as grazing and small-scale forestry. In contrast, Pontevedra and A Coruña, with their proximity to urban centres and economic hubs, tend to explore more diversified activities such as agroforestry, renewable energy projects, and even ecotourism. These regional variations highlight how geographic and socio-economic contexts influence the practices and priorities of Common Forest Lands. This is particularly evident when examining the historical evolution of these communities and their adaptations to modern challenges.

In 2019, the Xunta de Galicia recorded a total of 3,326 Common Forest Lands, distributed across the four provinces of Galicia, covering approximately 23% of the territory. Some of these communities are located in rural areas, while others lie in peri-urban zones within towns or parishes. The majority of these Common Forest Lands are situated in the province of Ourense, which accounts for 38.17% (1,142 communities), and Lugo, with 30.61% (916 communities). These are considered the interior communities. The remaining communities, known as those of the Atlantic axis, are located in the provinces of Pontevedra, with 21.89%, and A Coruña, with 9.32% (Xunta de Galicia, 2025). This information reflects the diverse geographical and administrative realities of Galicia, shaping the management strategies and resource use patterns of Common Forest Lands in each province.

In summary, the contemporary configuration of Common Forest Lands embodies a complex interplay between historical legacies, socio-economic pressures, and environmental challenges. Beginning with the geographic and economic context of Galicia, these communities have historically adapted to changing socio-political landscapes. Following this, we will address the main issues associated with the expansion of industrial forestry monocultures in these communal territories.

Challenges associated with the industrial forest monoculture in these territories

Field observations in Pontevedra forest land revealed a complex interplay of socio-ecological challenges shaping the daily reality of these communities. One of the most

evident features observed during fieldwork was the presence of multiple abandoned dwellings, reflecting the demographic decline affecting the area. Signs of abandonment, such as overgrown vegetation, deteriorating façades, and uninhabited houses, were recurrent throughout the area and noticed during field work.

The demographic shift was particularly evident in the interactions within the community, where the majority of residents were elderly, often engaging in small-scale subsistence activities. Alongside this demographic situation, the ecological dimension of the land was equally revealing. The landscape was overwhelmingly dominated by extensive monoculture plantations of pines and eucalyptus, species introduced and favoured for their commercial value in the timber and paper industries. In fact, Eucalyptus globulus accounted for more than 45% of the total wooded surface in seven forest districts of Galicia, illustrating the extent to which this species dominates the regional forest landscape (Barrio-Anta et al., 2021).

However, it is important to note that the forest landscape of Galicia has not always been affected by such dominance. The introduction of eucalyptus to the region dates back to the mid-19th century, when it was first planted for ornamental and botanical purposes by elites on coastal estates (Ramil-Rego, 2019). Its significant expansion occurred progressively throughout the 20th century, especially as forestry policies and industrial demand began to promote fast-growing species. As Paül and Cidrás (2025) note, eucalyptus plantations multiplied under state-led reforestation programmes and changing rural dynamics, ultimately transforming the structure and ecological composition of Galician woodlands.

These industrial forestry practices have reshaped the natural environment, displaced native vegetation and altered local ecosystems. While these plantations provide economic benefits to some, they also contribute to biodiversity loss, increased fire risk, and soil degradation – issues frequently mentioned by long-time residents who have witnessed the transformation of the land over the years. These observations underscore the dual pressures of social and environmental change that affect the Common Forest Lands, highlighting the need for a more sustainable and community-centred approach to land use (De Diego Abad et al., 2020).

In this sense, the influence of public policies has also played a crucial role in shaping the development trajectories of these communities. While subsidies and grants have supported sustainable practices in some territories, in others they have favoured the expansion of fast-growing monocultures, driven by market incentives and forestry subsidies. This duality underscores the importance of designing policies that balance economic viability with ecological sustainability, ensuring that collective management remains resilient in the face of market and environmental pressures. According to Cidrás (2020), the political debate around eucalyptus expansion in Galicia reflects broader ideological divisions, with economic and social arguments often taking precedence over ecological concerns, leading to a lack of consensus in municipal decisions.

According to Burritt, Schaltegger, and Christ (2023), sustainable development involves meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy theirs, while sustainable environmental management underscores the importance of conserving natural ecosystems through careful resource stewardship. In

this sense, the expansion of industrial forest monocultures has generated numerous challenges related to sustainable development and environmental management. One of the most significant problems associated with forest monocultures is the loss of biodiversity. García Rivas and Aguilera Fernández (2023) highlight that replacing diverse native ecosystems with single-species plantations disrupts ecological balance and eliminates essential habitats for numerous species. This impact, as Suazo and Torres (2023) suggest, weakens ecosystem resilience, making them more vulnerable to pests and diseases. Biodiversity is not only crucial for maintaining natural balance but also supports fundamental ecosystem services, such as pollination and climate regulation, which benefit both natural systems and human quality of life.

Additionally, water scarcity and soil degradation are direct consequences of forest monocultures. Eucalyptus and pine plantations, commonly used in these practices, consume large quantities of water, depleting local aquifers and reducing water availability for other uses. According to López Iglesias (2021), these plantations contribute to the drying of wetlands and the depletion of soil nutrients, thereby diminishing long-term agricultural potential. This adversely affects local communities that rely on diversified agriculture and water resources for their livelihoods, exacerbating social and economic inequalities in certain regions.

A particularly alarming issue is the increased risk of forest fires associated with industrial forest monocultures. Eucalyptus, due to its high oil content, is highly flammable, intensifying the spread of fires. Additionally, the accumulation of forestry debris, such as branches and leaves, serves as fuel, aggravating the intensity of fires. In regions like Galicia, recurring fires have highlighted the inherent dangers of this practice (De Diego Abad et al., 2020; Madrigal Olmo, 2020). These fires not only devastate natural landscapes but also affect air quality and generate greenhouse gas emissions, related to climate change.

Monocultures also produce significant amounts of waste, complicating environmental management efforts. Unused biomass, such as fallen branches and decomposing foliage, often accumulates, exacerbating pest infestations and contributing to carbon emissions if burned as waste. According to Alonso (2020), these inefficiencies contradict the principles of sustainable management, which advocate for waste minimisation and the circular use of resources.

The environmental and social impact of pulp mills, the primary industries associated with forest monocultures, is another critical issue deserving attention. These industries are often located near plantations, increasing pressure on water resources and exacerbating air and water pollution due to the chemical waste generated during paper production. According to Suazo and Torres (2023), pulp mills significantly contribute to environmental degradation by releasing large amounts of carbon dioxide and toxic substances during bleaching processes. Furthermore, these industries often create tensions with local communities due to their intensive use of natural resources and their adverse impacts on public health and livelihoods. This can be seen in the recurring tensions generated in society by the paper mill located in Pontevedra. Similar conflicts have arisen around the possibility of establishing another one in the province of Lugo, accompanied by rejection claims from environmental organisations such as Greenpeace.

Ultimately, the long-term viability of industrial monocultures faces numerous challenges, such as rising maintenance costs and declining productivity. Overexploited soils and degraded ecosystems require increasing financial investments to maintain yields, reducing long-term economic efficiency. According to Callaghan and Mitchell (2023), these trends highlight the incompatibility of monocultures with the principles of sustainable development and long-term environmental management. Furthermore, García Rivas and Aguilera Fernández (2023) propose that public policies must prioritise approaches integrating ecological, social, and economic criteria, encouraging diversification and sustainable forest management. Moreover, the socio-economic implications of forest monocultures must not be overlooked. The export-oriented economic model frequently marginalises local communities, disrupting traditional livelihoods and exacerbating inequalities. Fuenzalida Díaz and Arce (2019) emphasise that rural communities often face conflicts arising from the expansion of these practices, underscoring the need for more inclusive and protected policies.

In summary, while industrial forest monocultures may offer short-term economic benefits, their profound ecological and socio-economic costs, exacerbated by the impact of pulp mills, undermine their sustainability. Biodiversity loss, resource depletion, increased fire risk, and socio-economic dislocations call into question the viability of this model. In the future, it is imperative to adopt forestry practices aligned with the principles of sustainable development, integrating community participation and responsible resource management into policies and practices. Nature-based solutions, such as reforestation with native species and collaborative forest management, can provide more sustainable and equitable pathways for rural development. In this sense, in 2017, the Teis Common Land exemplified a collective decision-making process among commoners aimed at ecological restoration and sustainable land management (Campo Galego, 2017). Faced with a pine forest overtaken by invasive acacias, the community opted to replace it with a more ecologically diverse plantation of oaks, chestnuts, and other deciduous broadleaf species. Thus, we can consider that small changes through collective actions can improve the viability and ecosystems of community-managed forests, restoring their richness and diversity. These actions must also include the active participation of children and young people to ensure their continuity

Next, we will address intergenerational issues, particularly the participation of youth and childhood in environmental care within the context of communal forest communities.

Intergenerational factors in the transition to sustainable production models

The transition to more sustainable production models is a global challenge that goes beyond technological innovations and regulatory frameworks. This shift requires a cultural transformation involving multiple generations, ensuring that the practices and values associated with sustainability are effectively transmitted and adapted to current contexts.

While large-scale reforms demand significant investment in infrastructure and governance, small-scale local initiatives also play a crucial role. As Vidal (2025) argues, these grassroots actions, despite their limited scope, can drive systemic transformation when integrated into broader networks of collaboration. Decentralised strategies foster socio-ecological resilience and serve as experimental spaces for alternative models, demonstrating that collective action is essential for an effective and equitable transition to sustainability. From a Bourdieusian perspective, these dynamics can be understood as the result of complex multidimensional and structural processes within the social space (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986; Wacquant, 2008; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Gómez et al., 2025).

In Galicia, the rural context provides a significant example of how intergenerational transmissions occur. In these areas, children actively participate in activities such as animal care, subsistence farming, and selling goods at local markets. These practices enable them to acquire practical skills, reproducing daily life patterns and labour activities within their spaces of participation (Miño & Gómez, 2022). However, these dynamics are not free from structural limitations, as not all practices include sustainable environmental management, especially related to models of production (Miño et al., 2022). In this sense, cultural traditional practices, deeply rooted in local cultural identity, generate tensions between the preservation of traditions and contemporary demands for the environmental conservation (Cruz & Martínez, 2021).

In Galicia's peri-urban environments, the transmission of sustainable values faces different challenges. According to Wacquant (2023), social space is exposed to dynamics which limits the participation of disadvantaged sectors. In Galicia, programmes such as eco-schools aim to mitigate these inequalities, offering opportunities for children to engage in activities that promote environmental education and the conservation of natural resources (Souza, 2022). In this sense, educational programmes for children integrate practices such as managing gardens, recycling, and biodiversity conservation, fostering ecosystem preservation through the active participation of local communities. While valuable, these initiatives are not without challenges. Families with greater resources can integrate these activities into their daily routines, benefiting from more leisure time for family engagement, while those with fewer resources face barriers such as lack of time or transportation to the areas where these activities occur (Harvey et al., 2020). These limitations reflect how structural inequalities condition the adoption of sustainable practices and perpetuate disparities in the transmission of environmental values.

Moreover, the organisational movement of municipalities significantly influences the implementation of these programmes. In general, municipalities opt for recreational activities, organising events tied to cultural traditions, such as local festivals, which, although important for community identity, do not always integrate sustainability practices (Skar et al., 2016). For example, exposing local wildlife to fireworks and light pollution, particularly during Christmas and New Year celebrations. Although this may not appear to have an immediate impact, such factors also influence children's behaviour and their relationship with the environment. When activities are designed primarily for human enjoyment, without considering their impact on local wildlife, the implicit message can be that their immediate surroundings are not particularly important.

This implies that sustainable practices are not merely individual decisions but are conditioned by structural inequalities that influence which activities are deemed valuable and considered necessary for social life (Bourdieu, 1998). This theoretical framework highlights the importance of designing inclusive public policies that address these inequalities and promote equitable participation in sustainable activities. In this sense, Wacquant (1993) emphasises that struggles within the social space involve the constant negotiation of meanings and values. This is particularly evident in the transmission of environmental values across generations, where conflicts may arise over which practices to adopt in response to sustainability demands. These tensions underscore the need for intergenerational dialogue to reconcile cultural traditions with current sustainability requirements, ensuring that future generations are better prepared to face environmental challenges.

At the same time, recent studies have highlighted a growing interest among younger generations in environmental protection and sustainability-oriented initiatives, often expressed through grassroots movements, youth-led campaigns, and school-based projects (Kolenatý et al., 2022). This emerging engagement suggests that, despite structural constraints, young people are actively reimagining their relationship with nature and playing a key role in shaping more resilient and inclusive environmental futures. In addition, the Council of Europe's Recommendation CM/Rec (2024) underscores the importance of safeguarding the environmental rights of young people and ensuring their meaningful involvement in climate governance. It explicitly calls on member states to facilitate youth participation through diverse mechanisms, including public deliberation platforms, community-led environmental projects, and access to environmental litigation channels. By recognising young people not merely as beneficiaries but as active agents of change, this policy framework affirms the value of inclusive structures that enable intergenerational collaboration in addressing environmental challenges (Council of Europe, 2024).

On the other hand, Daly et al. (2024) suggest that public policy should shift toward a *post-paternalist perspective* – moving away from adult-centred models and instead empowering young people to take the lead in shaping environmental responses. In the context of Galicia's Common Forest Lands, this perspective invites a reflection on how youth involvement can contribute to reshaping intergenerational relations around environmental care. Rather than seeing such participation as isolated initiative, it is essential to understand it as part of broader social, cultural, and economic dynamics. Early engagement in communal activities, family support, and the availability of inclusive rural development policies all influence the extent to which young people can sustain meaningful environmental commitments over time.

In conclusion, the transition to more sustainable production models is deeply influenced by intergenerational factors that shape environmental practices and values. These dynamics should be understood as processes structured by social and cultural inequalities, which affect both opportunities and community trajectories. Through inclusive policies, educational programmes, and ongoing dialogue between generations, it is possible to promote a more equitable and accessible form of sustainability that integrates the lessons of the past with the needs of the present.

Final discussion

The analysis of the Common Forest Lands in Galicia reveals both the strengths and limitations of this model in addressing contemporary sustainability challenges. This study highlights how these communities, based on collective ownership and participatory management, face significant pressures stemming from industrial forest monoculture, demographic ageing, and tensions between environmental conservation and local economic needs. From a Bourdieusian perspective, the dynamics of power and capital within these communities reflects broader structural challenges that limit their ability to implement long-term sustainable models. These difficulties are exacerbated by demographic ageing, where the loss of young human capital threatens the continuity and innovation of community management. This dynamics highlights the importance of integrating younger generations into decision-making processes and the transmission of sustainability-related values.

In this context, from an intergenerational perspective, the active participation of children and young people in community activities emerges as a crucial factor for ensuring the long-term sustainability of Common Forest Lands. Initiatives such as environmental education projects have proven effective tools for fostering ecological awareness and connection with the natural environment. However, these initiatives must be expanded and adapted to address inequalities in access and participation, ensuring that the most vulnerable communities also benefit from these opportunities. Additionally, inclusive public policies must be promoted, combining environmental conservation with social justice, enabling these communities to remain a viable and equitable model of resource management. Beyond actions focused on strengthening formal environmental education or encouraging outdoor play, it is equally important to consider how global cultural norms – often shaped by consumerism and oriented towards enjoyment – structure children's experiences and expectations about nature. These norms tend to prioritise entertainment over environmental awareness, reinforcing a relationship with the natural world that overlooks the wellbeing of ecosystems.

In conclusion, the analysis of Common Forest Lands underscores the importance of addressing tensions between cultural traditions and contemporary sustainability demands. These tensions emphasise the need for constant dialogue between generations and local stakeholders to reconcile these conflicting values. In this sense, public policies play a central role in the ability of Common Forest Lands to adapt to current challenges. While European and regional initiatives promoting sustainable forest resource management exist, further efforts are needed to ensure these policies are implemented effectively and equitably. This includes designing financial and technical support mechanisms that enable communities to overcome the economic and social barriers they face in transitioning to more sustainable models. Additionally, fostering collaboration between Common Forest Lands governance and other stakeholders – including researchers, ONG, and local businesses – is crucial for developing innovative strategies tailored to the specific needs of each community.

Finally, this study highlights the importance of integrating a sociological perspective into the analysis of Common Forest Lands, to understand the internal and external

dynamics shaping their functioning. This approach not only identifies the limitations of the current model but also proposes pathways for action that recognise and leverage the inherent strengths of these communities. The transition to sustainable production models requires an integrated approach that combines participatory management, economic diversification, and environmental education with inclusive policies and ongoing institutional support. Only through these joint efforts will it be possible to ensure the resilience of these communities, while simultaneously promoting environmental justice for the younger generations of Galicia's rural contexts.

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