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Education on climate risks and their implications for health

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Abstract

The paper presents a descriptive study that analyzes the relationship between science and common culture in the social representations of problems arising from climate change, stressing the importance of promoting adequate communication and education on climate risks and their implications for health. The global climate change on Earth due to natural and anthropogenic causes that occurs at different time scales is a matter of controversy among scientists, policy makers and especially among ordinary citizens who are informed, generally, for the most common means of communication, creating a common culture in relation to this aspect that reveals very interesting facts about what is meant and is known for Climate Change and the consequences that such knowledge can lead to mitigate or otherwise increase. The construction of the common culture on climate change and the problems that entails is comprised of different construction way scientific element; so that knowledge of the common culture on Climate Change can improve education and communication about the threat of it to health.

The study was conducted from the selection of a significant sample of 512 university students taking as independent variables the branch of knowledge and the course. Has been used as a tool for data collection a questionnaire with 45 questions of closed type, of which the first 32 questions are made with the intention of assessing students' knowledge regarding Climate Change and the remaining 13 questions are related personal and subjective aspects.

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1. Theoretical background

Social Representations are cognitive systems that have a logic and own language, are not just "opinions about", "images of" or "attitudes to" if not theories sui generis intended to discover reality and their management (Moscovici, 1969). Social Representations include value systems, ideas and behaviors with the dual function of: 1) to establish guidelines that allow individuals the opportunity to orient themselves in their social environment and material, 2) to secure group communication, providing code to interpret, naming and classifying, univocally, different aspect of the world. Obviously, all this is conditioned by cultural and personal aspects of each group and individual (García, 1990). In the case of Social Representations on Climate Change (SRCC) interest focuses on analyzing how scientific representation of a phenomenon, Climate Change, originally built in a field of external interpretation to the world of everyday life, be objective, be accommodates and is anchored in the system of representations of common culture (Meira & Arto, 2014). The SRCC are built with concepts, theories and other elements that come from the scientific culture; and by transposition and anchoring processes are combined with other elements of the common culture as beliefs or experiences to objectify and legitimize. The interest of these representations not is whether the knowledge of people in relation to a scientific object is correct or not, but seeks to understand the lines open for the common know about that object (in this case Climate Change), how it evolves and what can be their valuation and pragmatic implications (Smith & Joffe, 2012).

Studies on social representations in relation to environmental issues are abundant, highlight the Ecobarómetros that the Junta de Andalucía has been doing for years now, studies of the CIS or the Ministry of Environment as is the case study " Actitudes y percepción del medio ambiente en la Juventud española "(Oliver, Castells, Casero, & Morey, 2005) or research reports from non-governmental or private entities such as the Report " Conciencia y Conducta medioambiental en España "of the BBVA Foundation in 2006, but nevertheless, the climate change is a hot topic analyzed and studied in relation to its causes, impacts, etc., example of which are the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) among others, but little analyzed in the public opinion research, as is the case of said. Still, research based on social representations referring to climate change begin gradually to become hollow in the areas of environmental analysis, and specifically, the most relevant studies of the Spanish geography are framed in the research project RESCLIMA.

It is from this research project where different demoscopic waves trying to publicize the social representation as analytical and explanatory reference with the intention of linking human thought and understanding with the individual and social development so arise that interactions of the day to day based on common knowledge without need of the scientific knowledge. The most relevant studies in this respect have been research within the framework of environmental education with the Spanish population as an object of study and analysis, example is the title " Comunicar el Cambio Climático. Escenario social y líneas de actuación "(Meira, 2009)," Medios de comunicación y Cambio Climático "(Fernandez & Mancinas, 2013)," La sociedad ante el Cambio Climático. Conocimientos, valoraciones y comportamientos en la población española "(Meira, Arto, Heras, & Montero, 2011). Other background of this study is " Representaciones del cambio climático en estudiantes universitarios en España: aportes para la educación y la comunicación " of (Meira & Arto, 2014) framed in the project RESCLIMA too. Thanks to these publications are generating a series of reports that reveal and explore what it tastes, thinks and does the Spanish population with regard to climate change, in both the personal and collective sphere. On the other hand, this publications exploring what is expected and demanded of the government and question what aspects there is willingness to change lifestyles with the intention of once recognized and accepted personal and collective responsibility for the problem, progress in the search for global solutions.

2. Problem, objectives and hypotheses

The construction of the common culture about climate change is understood differently as a scientific element, so that knowledge of the common culture about Climate Change can improve education and communication on the threat thereof for the health. That's why the importance of analyzing the perception of the university students to know what is the future trend to change attitudes and / or values as the risks that climate change may pose for the health and deficiencies or potential that the Environmental education and communication have for this field.

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