

# Libros en Acción





Constellation  
of the Commons

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### **Who are you and what is your relationship with this association?**

My name is Valentín, I've been working with Ecologistas for over ten years and my task really is managing self financing for the training courses and the publishing house. There are some other things, but fundamentally that's it.

### **When and how was Ecologistas en Acción (Ecologists in Action) born in the Spanish State?**

Ecologistas was created in 1998. After the experiences of some other associations that came from afar, the idea arose to unite many small organizations that already existed in order to found what I believe was the first state environmental organization. Greenpeace, Adena and even Amigos de la Tierra are like branch offices from other countries, so the first organization to be created at the state level was Ecologistas en Acción in 1998. So, next year in 2018 we will turn 20 years old.

### **What type of association is it and how does it work internally?**

It was created, fundamentally, as an association. Let's say that it's a confederation of federations and delegations throughout the Spanish state: Andalusia, the Canary Islands, Catalonia, Euskal Herria (the Basque Country). In Euskal Herria, for example, it's called "Ecologistas marchan" (Environmentalists March). All the federations have an important independence and each federation has groups; there are more than 300 groups altogether. It's a confederation, a confederate association where there's a council that meets every three months, an assembly that meets once a year; it's usually in December because the association was born in December of 1998 and every December, in a different part of the state, there's an assembly where all the partners and members of the federations and groups get together. Then, every three months, there's a confederal council where the representatives of each federation come together, they meet here in Madrid and they comment on how things are. Ecologistas en Acción, in addition to being a confederation and having federations throughout the State, is also divided by areas and commissions. There are areas of urbanism, ecofeminism, energy, anti-globalization, and education. So all these areas, both within each group and at the confederal level, are the ones that do the job of being at the forefront of the problems we're facing.

### **What is the mission of this association?**

The mission is wide ranging. The protection of nature and the environment, the denunciation of everything that has to do with the

continuous impacts suffered by nature and the environment and, above all, we're based on the core thinking of social environmentalism, which is, I believe, what really differentiates us from other organizations. Social environmentalism covers many things, from the conservation of biodiversity to who has the means of production, pollution; a whole series of things that have a lot to do with capitalism and the system we're suffering under. It's political environmentalism that differentiates us from other associations such as Adena or Amigos de la Tierra in Spain.

### **Could you tell us about the publishing house and the editorial board of *Ecologistas en Acción*?**

The publishing house, "Libros en Acción", was founded in 2009 but it didn't start to function as such even precariously until 2010 because, in the end, it was still a publisher that belonged to an environmental association, so it was not a publishing house per se. Little by little it has been becoming more independent and autonomous, within the policy guidelines that the association works under, of course. It was founded in 2009 and we started publishing and distributing in commercial bookstores in 2010. The publishing house started with a small editorial board of three or four people that, due to the workload, gradually left the committee. Now it has been working for a few years with a new editorial board. There are six of us and there are people who write--such as Belén Gopegui or Miguel Brieva--who also publish. There's also Yayo Herrero; Pedro Ramiro, who is also working at Omal; and Çois, who is a very active member of the agroecology commission and who has also written a book; and myself, as well. The projects or works reach the editorial board, and that's where it's all decided. The board makes economic decisions about investment in books, as well as decisions related to content. Above everything is the secretary's office, which is how the Confederation and the association in general work, but really, the editorial board already has a significant amount of autonomy and we're publishing around five or six books a year. The entire editorial board is made of volunteers except in my case, since I'm within the working group of the confederation of environmentalists.

### **How is the publishing house financed?**

Through self-management. The publishing house sustains itself. It's another part of the financing that the organization has, just like the magazine, the training programs, the subsidies to the projects. The publishing house specializes in essays, mainly, and then we have also published some fiction, but more based on drawings, not much text. These are the two main formats. There are also some collections. The most active collection is "Cartografías de vivir," (Cartographies of life) which is where we have published some of the books that have had the most impact. To select what we publish, we value the contents and profitability. We make this clear, we're transparent. We believe that the books are for reading and we try to make them accessible to the reader.

### **At its inception, what were the goals of "Libros en Acción"?**

One of the aims of the publishing house when it was founded, aside from putting on paper the political thinking of social environmentalism which is fundamental to us, was also to become profitable in some way.

### **What is the publication criteria?**



Well, the criteria we use are evidently within our way of thinking and acting-- that is, our day-to-day activism, what we think, what we want to tell, what we want to express and what we want to tell people, not only to those who are close to us but also to people from outside. I think it's one of the most interesting aspects, that we want to reach not only people who are close to us but also a reader who is aware of environmentalism, who is interested, who is curious but who isn't an activist; that is, to reach a reader that isn't working on this on a daily basis. I do believe, after seven years, that our books have a certain credibility or guarantee that they are well written and that the contents are interesting. Therefore, one of the criteria of a publication is that it has to reflect what we are. I say from here that we're open to project suggestions that are logically related to what we are in *Ecologistas en Acción* and with the criteria already mentioned before. From here, I put out a call for people who are writing about these topics to send them to us, both in Spanish and in other languages, and, of course, in any language of the Spanish state.

### **What are the channels of distribution for your materials?**

The material of the publishing house is distributed through various different channels. A typical publisher usually has a distributor. We, apart from having six or seven commercial distributors, let's say, which reach libraries throughout the State, we also have a very interesting alternative channel. We've made a network with 5 or 6 distributors that are very much in accordance with our way of seeing the world and that are also very active and have been for many years: *Traficantes de Sueños*, *Virus in Catalonia*, *Cambalache in Asturias*, *Zambra in Málaga*. We've made an interesting network there that we complement with commercial distributors, but we also sell on our online store and to groups for their own members or for their markets; we also sell in our establishment. This overall means that we reach both very different people and people who are within the network that we work with. The idea right now is to renew the website for *Ecologistas* and, within that website, there will be a blog more focused on the publishing house. That will be where we really plan the publishing extras. In addition to the books, there will be interviews with authors who have written and with people who interest us, there will be images, suggestions, forums and a feedback that we don't have right now. I believe then it will be time to create a space for *Libros en Acción* as a publishing house within the organization but with a certain autonomy. And there we will be able to work very directly, uploading news--not only our own, but also of those who are close to us--and also with our readers, and we will be able to receive suggestions and many other things.

### **Do you think these materials reach university classrooms?**

Yes, but we would like them to do so even more. It's true that these materials reach students through the authors, because some are professors at universities, but I do think that a challenge for us is trying to reach even more. We organize events in universities and for some presentations we invite professors and teachers and I believe that in the university context we are known as *Ecologistas en Acción*, especially in the sphere of environmentalism. It's true that we still have to reach out more, although a year ago we started an experience with *ALCES* that is very interesting and I think it can bear fruit in expanding and multiplying the work we do in the Spanish state with some universities. But yes, it's a challenge that we will be able to address with *ALCESXXI*.

**Thinking about other publishing houses with a political orientation, what is distinctive about your publishing house?**

Well, I think it's social environmentalism. Social environmentalism is very broad and there are publishers that touch upon it occasionally. We address it from the beginning to the end-- that is, we reach down to the bone. There are also publishers who also do interesting work with political essays, in fact, three or four years ago we were founders of the association Contrabandos (Contraband) an association made up of publishers of various sizes, some with a long history but also some smaller ones, such as ourselves. That association of Contrabandos was, fundamentally, for publishers dedicated to the political essay, because there were some connections. Icaria, for example, publishes things that have a lot to do with what we work on, but we direct everything we publish toward social environmentalism. In addition, what we do is based on formats and authors that are highly committed, authors with backgrounds in activism. Not only are they writers who write, analyze, and investigate, but they are also activists. I think that is a difference that other publishers don't have.

**What differentiates writing based in theory from writing based in activism?**

I think an activist knows the context better, that is, an activist will be out on the street more often. For example, not too long ago we published a book about fracking, about the experiences of collectives around the world that told their struggle against fracking in the first person (in the United States, in Australia, in Germany, etc.). We were able to do that because we have an important international network of activists with whom we're connected. I think that activists live on the street, they live this day by day and I think that their way of writing and their way of transmitting is distinctive because they are not analyzing and prioritizing and proposing from above. In all books, aside from having exposition about the topic and analyzing it, we try to offer alternatives. We don't want to be catastrophists, we always want to provide alternatives and those alternatives are contributed, I believe, from daily activism, because it's the only way you are seeing reality and you can look for alternatives. It's not only a matter of telling the story and talking about the negatives, about where we're getting involved or where we're currently stuck; there are also alternatives that come from the street that are valid and coherent.

**What impact do you think 15M has had on the perception of social environmentalism?**

I believe that 15M has had an impact on many things, and yes, I suppose in this area, as well, in how it's perceived. 15M was the beginning of many things; groups were created around topics like this one and also many groups have been strengthened, many small groups. A very important network has been woven together and it has also had an influence within environmentalism, of course. 15M's nature isn't only political, it's also closely related to interests such as environmentalism, antimilitarism and feminism.

**What fuels hope and activism in the field of publishing in a moment of political discontent?**

I believe that the impetus comes primarily from the passion that some of us have to edit and publish books, which are such beautiful objects. Before this publishing house, the people of the editorial committee had already worked on other things. For example, Belén Gopegui and Miguel Brieva are dedicated to writing beautiful texts and making

beautiful drawings. That is to say, there's a prior passion and that's the beauty of making a book, of taking care of it, of getting it out, even if it's only partly yours—after all, the book is always really the author's and, in the end, the reader's. We're also driven to continue tackling the conflicts that exist between society, human beings and nature. I think there are many conflicts and many issues that aren't adequately processed even in the media, because of that urgency that never grants one the time to talk deeply about these issues. Nor are they dealt with sufficiently in the publishing world, because there are not that many books on these topics. I think there's a drive to continue creating thought, to continue transmitting ideas that seem wonderful to us. We have published books like *Rebeldías en común* (Rebellions in common) about the common sphere, or *La gran encrucijada* (The big crossroads) about the collapse. In the books there are notes that motivate us to continue creating alternatives and ideas so that people can reflect and debate. I think that paper is simply one more way to do this, and we think it's beautiful to continue to create, especially as you said, in moments of inactivity after the 15M, in these much less intense moments. Well, I think that books are another way of thinking and reflecting; besides, these are rather unusual books and there are wonderful findings inside them.

### **How do you picture the growth of the publishing house in the future?**

To be honest, it would be very similar to what we have now; it's not really a matter of money because then we would become like Random House and it would be horrific. I think we're fine as we are. We would like to have better communication because within the publishing house we lack communication. What you said before is true; there are readers out there who are interested but have not yet heard of the publishing house. It's true that we have the challenge of making our books more and better known. Is that accomplished with money? Well maybe it would be good; perhaps it would be nice to be able to translate some of those wonderful books that are being published in other countries. Perhaps it would be good to have greater dedication, both from the board and from myself, that is to say, to have more time to dedicate ourselves to this publishing house... If that means money, then it would be good, but it would be for these things.

### **Why do you think that social ecology is still an unresolved issue at a time like this of environmental and social crisis?**

Well, as far as the ecology, I don't know why it seems like environmentalists aren't viewed very positively in society. Everyone says that they are necessary given climate change, pollution, etc., but then environmentalists aren't really viewed favorably either by those in power, obviously, or by normal people. I understand that being an environmentalist entails the stereotype of being old, outdated, but I don't know... maybe people believe that there are other priorities when really what we're defending and what we're fighting for is the fundamental priority, that is, the survival of human beings despite the continued attack of capitalism, of consumer society, which is devastating everything, including the environment we live in. But people see other priorities. For example, if someone is unemployed, the first thing they want is to have a job and it doesn't matter whether or not that job leads to contamination or exploitation, they don't look any further. Once a person has money, they can address other things, they say, for example. So it's a subject that isn't a priority for those in power, obviously, nor for ordinary people, because it has not been well explained. Climate change is very much a recurring topic, but 15 or 20 years ago climate change was a fantasy. Now we have indicators that are telling us that there's a very serious problem and 20 years ago it was not. These are little steps that are taken and at some point it will sink in, I'm convinced, for sure.