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Convergences and challenges between ecological economics and ecofeminism: Towards a sustainable and inclusive economic model

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Abstract

This study explores the convergence between ecological economics and ecofeminism, analyzing how their shared principles can contribute to building a sustainable and inclusive economic model. A qualitative approach based on the PRISMA method is employed to conduct a systematic literature review in academic databases such as Scopus and Web of Science. Thematic analysis identifies emerging categories, including shared principles and divergences between both frameworks. Coincidences are found in the critique of unlimited economic growth, the recognition of unpaid labor, and gender equity in natural resource management. However, they diverge in methodology: while ecological economics emphasizes the quantification of environmental impacts, ecofeminism focuses on the deconstruction of patriarchal and extractivist structures. The integration of both perspectives strengthens the development of economic policies that consider environmental sustainability and social justice, promoting post-capitalist and post-extractivist models. The findings can guide public policy strategies that incorporate gender equity and the recognition of care work in economic and environmental planning.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Ecological economics, Environmental justice, Gender equity, Sustainability.

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1. Introduction

In the pursuit of a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to identifying contemporary challenges, the dialogue between Ecological Economics and Ecofeminism has emerged as fertile ground for reflection and action [1-3]. Both frameworks share the fundamental premise of reconsidering the relationships between non-human animals and nature while advocating for a profound transformation in the way economic science is conceived and practiced. Ecological Economics, from its core objectives, proposes a revision of conventional economics by acknowledging the finite limits of the planet and the necessity of integrating ecology into economic decision-making [4, 5]. This approach challenges the traditional notion of unlimited growth and advocates for intergenerational equity and the preservation of ecosystems. In this context, Ecofeminism

provides a unique perspective by highlighting the connections between gender oppression and environmental degradation [6, 7].

The dialogues between Ecological Economics and Ecofeminism deepen when considering how women have been historically marginalized and how this exclusion is intrinsically linked to land exploitation. Ecofeminist voices argue that there are notable parallels between the domination of nature and the subjugation of women, asserting that both phenomena are rooted in patriarchal structures [8, 9]. In many contexts, women have been the primary custodians of natural resources and traditional knowledge related to sustainable environmental management. However, conventional economics has devalued and marginalized these contributions, thereby perpetuating both environmental degradation and gender inequality [10, 11]. Ecological Economics and Ecofeminism converge in recognizing the importance of revaluing and empowering women's roles in the sustainable management of natural resources [12, 13].

Ecological Economics also emphasizes the internalization of environmental costs in economic activities. In this regard, Ecofeminism underscores how women, especially in impoverished communities, are often the most affected by pollution and environmental disasters. Integrating the principles of Ecological Economics and Ecofeminism entails holding accountable those responsible for environmental harm and ensuring that solutions are inclusive and equitable, particularly for women and marginalized communities [14, 15].

Therefore, sustainability, from this integrative perspective, becomes a project that not only identifies environmental challenges but also seeks to transform the unequal power structures that perpetuate the exploitation of both land and women. Ecological Economics and Ecofeminism unite in their call for a transition toward an economic model that values diversity, equity, and the interconnectedness between humans and nature [16-18].

Accordingly, this article analyzes the convergence between Ecological Economics and Ecofeminism to understand how both approaches can contribute to a sustainable and inclusive transformation of the economic model, promoting gender equity and environmental preservation. Similarly, the research question guiding this study is: How can the integration of Ecological Economics and Ecofeminism contribute to constructing an economic model that acknowledges the planet's ecological limits and promotes gender equity in the management of natural resources? To address this question, the article is structured as follows: the present introduction, followed by the methodology, results, discussion, conclusions, and references.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative approach based on the PRISMA method (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) to conduct a systematic literature review. This method facilitates the identification, selection, and synthesis of relevant studies on the synergies between Ecological Economics and Ecofeminism, ensuring rigor, transparency, and reproducibility in the data collection and analysis process [19, 20].

2.2. Search Strategy

The systematic literature search was conducted in high-impact academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, SpringerLink, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar, following PRISMA guidelines [21]. Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1.
Example of Search Equation for the Category ECOFEMINISMO OR ECOFEMINISM.

DATABASE	Search Equations
WoS	Tema: ("ECOFEMINISMO OR ECOFEMINISMO") Índices=SCI-EXPANDED, SSCI, A&HCI, ESCI Período de tiempo=Todos los años
	Tema: ("ECOFEMINISMO OR ECOFEMINISMO") Refinado por: Años de publicación: (2016 OR 2017 OR 2010 OR 2013 OR 2015 OR 2012 OR 2009 OR 2011 OR 2014 OR 2008 OR 2020 OR 2021 02 2022 OR 2019 OR 2018 OR 2006 OR 2005 OR 2004 OR 2003 OR 2002 02 2001 OR 2000) Índices=SCI-EXPANDED, SSCI, A&HCI, ESCI Período de tiempo=Todos los años
	Tema: ("ECOFEMINISMO OR ECOFEMINISMO") Índices=SCI-EXPANDED, ESCI, A&HCI, SSCI Período de tiempo=Todos los años
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("ECOFEMINISMO OR ECOFEMINISMO")
	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("ECOFEMINISMO OR ECOFEMINISMO")
	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("ECOFEMINISMO OR ECOFEMINISMO") AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2018) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2017) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2016) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2015) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2014) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2013) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2012) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2011) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2010) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2009) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2008) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2000) OR LIMIT-

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 2.

Search for the equation for the category Ecological Economy or Ecological Economics.

DATABASE	Search Equations
WoS	Tema: (("ECONOMÍA ECOLÓGICA OR ECOLOGICAL ECONOMY ")) Índices=SCI-EXPANDED, SSCI, A&HCI, ESCI Período de tiempo=Todos los años
	Tema: (("ECONOMÍA ECOLÓGICA OR ECOLOGICAL ECONOMY ")) Refinado por: Años de publicación: (2016 OR 2017 OR 2010 OR 2013 OR 2015 OR 2012 OR 2009 OR 2011 OR 2014 OR 2008 OR 2020 OR 2021 OR 2022 OR 2019 OR 2018 OR 2006 OR 2005 OR 2004 OR 2003 OR 2002 OR 2001 OR 2000) Índices=SCI-EXPANDED, SSCI, A&HCI, ESCI Período de tiempo=Todos los años
	Tema: ("ECONOMÍA ECOLÓGICA OR ECOLOGICAL ECONOMY") Índices=SCI-EXPANDED, ESCI, A&HCI, SSCI Período de tiempo=Todos los años
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("ECONOMÍA ECOLÓGICA OR ECOLOGICAL ECONOMY ")
	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("ECONOMÍA ECOLÓGICA OR ECOLOGICAL ECONOMY ")
	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("ECONOMÍA ECOLÓGICA OR ECOLOGICAL ECONOMY ") AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2018) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2017) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2016) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2015) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2014) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2013) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2012) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2011) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2010) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2009) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2008) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2000) OR LIMIT-

Source: Own elaboration

2.3. Search Equations

Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) were used to combine key terms in the search process. Finally, the article includes synthesized findings, which constitute the foundation of this study and are developed under the emerging categories of "Shared Principles" and "Divergences and Convergences" [3, 19, 22]. Table 3.

Table 3.

Relationship Between Analytical Categories and Emerging Categories.

General Objective	Analytical Categories	Emerging Categories
Analyze the convergence between ecological economics and ecofeminism to understand how both approaches can contribute to a sustainable and inclusive transformation of the economic model, promoting gender equity and environmental preservation.	Ecological Economics. Ecofeminism.	Shared Principles. Divergences and convergences.

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 4.

Following the PRISMA method, the selection process will be carried out in four phases.

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Document Type	Articles in indexed scientific journals, books, and book chapters from academic publishers.	Opinions, unpublished theses, and non-peer-reviewed documents.
Language	English and Spanish	Other languages without available translations.
Publication Period	2000-2024	Publications prior to the year 2000.
Thematic Relevance	Studies addressing the relationship between ecological economics and ecofeminism, sustainability, and gender equity.	Documents that do not centrally address the relationship between the two approaches.

Source: Own elaboration based on Pliscoff-Varas [23].

2.4. Study Selection Process

Following the PRISMA method, the study selection process was carried out in four phases:

Identification: Articles were collected using search equations in academic databases.

Screening: Duplicate studies and those that did not meet the inclusion criteria were removed.

Eligibility: The relevance of the studies was assessed through a review of titles, abstracts, and keywords.

Inclusion: the most relevant studies were selected for qualitative analysis [2].

2.5 Data Analysis

The selected studies were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis, identifying the main lines of discussion within the literature [3].

3. Results

The dialogue between Ecological Economics and Ecofeminism has emerged as an enriching field that confirms the need to critique and reevaluate economic practices in the context of global sustainability. Both approaches share fundamental principles and, at the same time, present divergences that invite deep reflection on how to move towards a more equitable and environmentally respectful future [4, 5].

3.1. Shared Principles

3.1.1. Recognition of Planetary Boundaries

Both Ecological Economics and Ecofeminism share the fundamental premise of recognizing the biophysical limits of the planet and the impossibility of perpetual economic growth within a closed system of finite resources. Ecological Economics, grounded in thermodynamics and bioeconomics, emphasizes the need to internalize ecological constraints in economic decision-making, promoting an economy that respects natural cycles and the carrying capacity of ecosystems [6, 7]. From this perspective, the environmental crisis is the result of an extractivist economic model that ignores entropy and the degradation of natural resources.

Ecofeminism, on the other hand, expands this critique by pointing out that the overexploitation of nature is a manifestation of the same patriarchal logics that have historically legitimized the subordination of women and other marginalized groups. The relationships between ecological crisis and gender inequality are evident in the feminization of poverty and the differential vulnerability to environmental disasters, where women, particularly in rural communities and the Global South, bear the disproportionate impacts of climate change, water scarcity, and pollution [8, 9].

Both approaches agree on the need for a structural transformation of the economic system, advocating for a post-growth and regenerative economy that prioritizes socio-ecological equity and revalues reproductive and care work, traditionally invisibilized in neoclassical economics. In this way, the integration of Ecological Economics and Ecofeminism allows for rethinking production and consumption relationships, as well as questioning the nature-culture dichotomy that has sustained the exploitation of both ecosystems and feminized bodies [10, 11].

3.1.2. Equity and Intersectionality

Both approaches recognize that systemic inequalities operate through power structures that differentially affect various social groups and that these inequalities must be addressed to ensure ecological sustainability and social justice. Ecological Economics incorporates the dimension of intergenerational equity, emphasizing the need to distribute resources and environmental burdens fairly between present and future generations. This approach is based on the theory of natural capital and distributive justice, questioning economic models that allow the hoarding of common goods by economic elites at the expense of collective well-being and ecosystem resilience [12, 13].

On the other hand, Ecofeminism expands the notion of equity by integrating a multidimensional perspective, arguing that environmental exploitation is intrinsically linked to the oppression of gender, class, and ethnicity. In particular, it underscores how women, especially in rural and indigenous communities, bear the disproportionate impacts of ecological degradation due to their role in managing resources such as water, biodiversity, and food security. It also points out that patriarchal structures have invisibilized reproductive and care work, which is essential for the maintenance of life and the sustainability of socio-ecological systems [14, 15].

Both approaches converge in the need for a transition towards economic and political models that ensure the equitable redistribution of access to natural resources and decision-making, integrating principles of ecological, gender, and social justice. Ecological Economics and Ecofeminism not only agree on the urgency of redefining the relationship between the economy and nature but also promote strategies of resistance and community alternatives that prioritize cooperation, reciprocity, and the self-determination of peoples against the effects of an extractivist and capitalist model that perpetuates structural inequalities [16, 17].

3.1.3. Valuation of Unpaid Labor

The valuation of unpaid labor is a central axis in both Ecological Economics and Ecofeminism, as both approaches question traditional economic metrics that invisibilize and devalue the work of social reproduction and ecosystem care. In conventional economics, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) excludes domestic and care work, despite its fundamental role in the reproduction of human capital and the sustenance of communities [18, 19].

From Ecological Economics, it is recognized that human well-being depends not only on market production but also on ecosystem services and reproductive work, both ignored in national accounts. This approach raises the need for new well-being indicators that incorporate ecological sustainability and social equity, challenging the paradigm of economic growth as the sole measure of development [20, 21].

On the other hand, Ecofeminism emphasizes that the sexual division of labor has historically assigned women the responsibility of maintaining life, including tasks such as water management, food, community health, and ecosystem care. This work is not only invisibilized but has also been naturalized, perpetuating unequal power relations that sustain both the capitalist economy and patriarchal structures [19, 22].

The convergence between both approaches highlights the urgency of public policies that recognize and remunerate care work and the sustainable management of common goods, incorporating an ecofeminist approach in development planning. This implies measures such as the implementation of economic compensation systems, the redistribution of the workload between genders, and the inclusion of female perspectives in economic and environmental decision-making [1, 2].

3.2. Divergences and Convergences

3.2.1. Methodological Approach

While both Ecological Economics and Ecofeminism start from a critique of the foundations of conventional economics and its socio-ecological impacts, their methodological approaches present significant differences. Indeed, Ecological Economics is based on an interdisciplinary framework that integrates tools from bioeconomics, thermodynamics, and environmental accounting to assess the sustainability of economic systems. It adopts a quantitative and systemic approach, using methodologies such as material and energy flow analysis, natural capital accounting, and economic valuation of ecosystem services. Its emphasis on strong sustainability implies the need to establish ecological limits to growth and develop policies based on ecosystem resilience, prioritizing intergenerational equity and the fair distribution of natural resources [3, 4].

On the other hand, Ecofeminism adopts a more critical and philosophical approach, focusing on the deconstruction of patriarchal and colonial structures that have historically linked the exploitation of nature with the oppression of women and other marginalized groups. Unlike Ecological Economics, which in some cases still resorts to economic tools for the internalization of environmental costs, Ecofeminism argues that the ecological crisis cannot be resolved solely with technical or economic adjustments but requires a radical transformation of power relations and systems of social production and reproduction [5, 6].

Although there are methodological differences, both approaches agree on the need for a post-capitalist and post-extractivist transition that promotes equity and sustainability. Ecological Economics and Ecofeminism converge in their critique of neoclassical economics and their call for a redefinition of economic value, integrating ecological, social, and gender dimensions into decision-making. Similarly, both emphasize the importance of participatory governance models and the revaluation of traditional and community knowledge for the construction of sustainable alternatives [7, 9].

3.2.2. Focus on Internalization of Environmental Costs

One of the fundamental principles of Ecological Economics is the internalization of environmental costs, that is, the incorporation of negative ecological impacts into economic decisions through mechanisms such as environmental taxes, payment for ecosystem services schemes, and analysis of negative externalities. This approach is based on the idea that markets, by not reflecting real ecological costs, lead to the overexploitation of resources and environmental degradation. Through tools such as environmental accounting and economic valuation of biodiversity, Ecological Economics seeks to generate incentives to reduce the ecological footprint and transition towards strong sustainability [9, 10].

However, there arises a divergence with Ecofeminism, which, while recognizing the urgency of making ecological costs visible in the economy, questions the tendency to translate nature into monetary terms. From an ecofeminist perspective, the logic of valuing nature in economic terms can perpetuate the commodification of ecosystems and the instrumentalization of non-human life, reproducing the objectification that has historically been applied to both nature and feminized bodies. In this sense, Ecofeminism emphasizes an intrinsic valuation of nature, arguing that ecosystems not only have a utilitarian or functional value for humans but should be recognized as entities with the right to exist independently of their economic utility [11, 12].

Despite this conceptual difference, both approaches converge on the need to hold those responsible for environmental harm accountable and to advance towards solutions that not only reduce ecological degradation but are also socially equitable. Ecofeminism expands the discussion on the internalization of environmental costs by including an intersectional approach, highlighting how women and impoverished communities are often the most vulnerable to pollution, climate change, and ecological disasters [13, 14].

3.2.3. Transformation of Economic Policies

The integration of Ecological Economics and Ecofeminism demands a profound transformation in the formulation of economic policies, incorporating both gender perspectives and ecological criteria into decision-making. This change implies the development of policies that not only recognize the biophysical limits of economic growth but also ensure an equitable distribution of resources and environmental burdens, addressing the structural inequalities that affect women and marginalized communities [15, 16].

From Ecological Economics, the transformation of economic policies materializes in the internalization of environmental costs through mechanisms such as ecological taxes, payment for ecosystem services schemes, and green budgets. These strategies seek to ensure that the negative impacts on ecosystems are considered in the cost structure of productive activities, thereby incentivizing sustainable practices [17, 18].

On the other hand, Ecofeminism expands this perspective by emphasizing the need to decommodify nature, questioning the dominant economic logic that reduces ecosystems and life itself to mere inputs of production. Additionally, it highlights how the ecological crisis and the care crisis are intertwined, demanding a revaluation of reproductive and care work, predominantly carried out by women and traditionally invisibilized in conventional economic models [19, 20].

Both currents agree on the need for more inclusive economic and environmental decision-making, ensuring the equitable representation of women and integrating alternative knowledge, especially that coming from indigenous and peasant communities, who have developed sustainable management models of natural resources. Incorporating these voices into the design and implementation of public policies not only broadens the analytical perspective but also strengthens the socio-ecological resilience of communities [21, 22].

4. Discussion

The dialogue between Ecological Economics and Ecofeminism has been the subject of debate and reflection, as both currents seek to identify environmental and gender challenges in an interconnected manner [19]. This debate is essential to understand how these perspectives can converge, diverge, and coexist in the search for solutions for global sustainability. Indeed, Ecological Economics is aligned with a fundamental revision of the economic approach, recognizing planetary limits and the need to internalize environmental costs [1].

From this perspective, the priority is the strong sustainable management of resources to ensure the long-term survival of human societies. Meanwhile, Ecofeminism, on the other hand, highlights the connections between gender oppression and environmental degradation. It calls for a deeper transformation of patriarchal structures that perpetuate both gender inequality and land exploitation. Hence, this article aligns with the postulates of Alier [2], and Alier [3].

To conclude, the results of this article align with the observations of Georgescu-Roegen [4]; Georgescu-Roegen [5]; Mies and Shiva [6]; Shiva [7], and Bidaseca and Vázquez Laba [8] when they indicate that economic and gender policies need to be transformed to understand gender inequalities and environmental limits. The implementation of measures that value unpaid work and internalize environmental costs are fundamental [9].

5. Conclusions

The integration of Ecological Economics and Ecofeminism represents a crucial step towards the construction of a sustainable and equitable future. By recognizing the synergies between environmental degradation and gender oppression, the door is opened to more complex and just solutions. This synthesis of approaches not only transforms the understanding of economics but also invites a fundamental rethinking of the relationships with the planet and among humanity. In this dialogue between Ecological Economics and Ecofeminism, a path towards a more equitable and harmonious world with nature is identified.

The debate between Ecological Economics and Ecofeminism is essential to advance towards a sustainable and equal future. The dialogues of these approaches offer fertile ground for the construction of complex solutions. By integrating principles, recognizing divergences, and seeking convergences, it is possible to work toward an economic science that respects both nature and human diversity. In this continuous dialogue, the key to a significant transformation towards a more equitable and sustainable world is found.

Sustainability acts as the essential meeting point for Ecological Economics and Ecofeminism. Both approaches recognize the urgency of reforming our practices to preserve natural resources and ensure social equity. Sustainability, understood as a balance between economic, social, and environmental aspects, serves as a common framework that can integrate and reconcile these diverse perspectives.

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