

## **For a green criminology ‘with’ images: visually exploring the social perception of environmental harm**

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Among the events that ‘knock on the door’ of contemporary criminology, environmental risks and harms, together with the dimensions of injustice and responsibility that are tied to them, are some of the most significant of our time. To invite these events to enter the criminological building necessarily implies a rethinking of the architectural lines and of the innumerable ‘rooms’ that, within our field, accommodate various disciplines and different kinds of knowledge. In this sense, the study of ‘green crime’ requires new modes of observation of the world and new methods capable of synchronizing with the spatial and the temporal dimensions of the ongoing changes.

On this theoretical basis, I will attempt to open the way for new visual explorations of environmental harms and crimes, suggesting some methodological perspectives that can be stimulated by the use of the photographic image. To demonstrate the power, potential and possibilities of a “visual green criminology” approach, I draw on an ethnographic study carried out in Huelva (Spain), which specifically used “photo-elicitation interviews” to explore the narratives of social actors most directly affected by environmental harm. The proposed observational method has the advantage of bringing together the multiple and complex nature of the experiences of those who live in polluted areas, describing in detail and from their point of view what they know, think and feel about the reality in which they find themselves living. In particular, I will show the value of visual methods generally, and photo-elicitation specifically, as a new source for generating qualitative data in the green criminology field.

Describing how often environmental victims do not agree on the definition and interpretation of that reality and how their experiences of environmental suffering are full of doubts and disagreements, this exploratory research shows the reflexive and active role of social actors in the symbolical and social construction of their environmental experiences and helps to question simplistic notions of how the victims relate to the ‘inconvenient truth’ of pollution.

Finally, I conclude with a call to use qualitative visual approaches for carrying out research in green criminology designed to develop a complex understanding of the multiple forms of environmental victimization and to promote new explorations of environmental harms and crimes.

Keywords: green criminology, environmental victims, visual green criminology, photo-elicitation interview, qualitative methods



Image 1. A first visual exploration (Huelva, Spain) © Lorenzo Natali



Como hemos venido a la capital, he querido que Platero vea El Vergel... Llegamos despacito, verja abajo, en la grata sombra de las acacias y de los plátanos, que están cargados todavía. El paso de Platero resuena en las grandes losas que abrillanta el riego...

*Image 2.* The photographic collage used in the interviews (Huelva, Spain). © Lorenzo Natali



*Figure 3.* The big grey elephant in the backyard of Huelva (Huelva, Spain). Photographic collage © Lorenzo Natali and Alessandra Zanoni

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