

Artisan of utopias By Victor Arturo Ricárdez García

Words for Martha Ileana Espejel Carbajal

More than a witness, Ileana is a protagonist of the world and its most rapid and hopeful transformations. More than a prolific author, Ileana is a creator of utopias, the most beautiful ones, due to their sense of reality and their ability to inspire others, like me, not to give in to mediocrity; to recognize and rectify when we make mistakes, and to get up if we fall. More than a manager of ecosystems, a specialist in socio-ecological systems, and an expert in coastal dune management, Ileana is a landscape artist. I swear, without exaggeration, that from the footprints she leaves in the sand, I have seen the most beautiful flowers bloom for the most diverse and varied pollinators of the desert, because Ileana does not walk alone, but as part of a team.

After studying biology at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, she pursued her master's studies at the Universidad Veracruzana, where she founded and directed the Ethnobotany Yucatec Program. At El Colegio de México, she specialized in environmental and development studies and earned her Ph.D. in plant ecology at Uppsala University in Sweden. A critic of patriarchal academia and basic science; bold and visionary, she founded and coordinated the Master's in Ecosystem Management of Arid Zones and contributed with other extraordinary individuals in creating the bachelor's in environmental sciences and the Ph.D. in Environment and Development. These are multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary programs at the Autonomous University of Baja California aimed at proposing creative and alternative solutions to complex development problems. In this way, she has taught us that sometimes it is not necessary to conquer spaces but to create them.

Of course, her experience transcends the academic realm. An expert in integrating and coordinating multi and interdisciplinary work teams, she has cultivated her gifts and talents by linking scientific knowledge with traditional knowledge in the execution of a wide variety of projects that promote the conservation of ecosystems and priority species; the integral management of natural and cultural resources in urban and rural contexts, as well as sustainable and inclusive development at local, regional, and national levels. She has been a pioneer in land use planning, community observatories for citizen science, and ecological and territorial zoning programs, eventually establishing herself as an expert in evaluating environmental policies. In this regard, her career honors the words of French sociologist P. Bourdieu regarding social structures and schemas, when he stated that it is possible to change social reality if we can change its representation. However, Ileana, always more direct, has shown us by her example that indeed, if we can change, we can transform the world.



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ESPEJEL

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