

Choosing between Blue Growth and Degrowth and the need to reclaim the right to the sea

In the current climate of the global financial crisis, developed countries are increasingly focused on economic growth and development, and the crisis is continuously being used to entrench a neoliberal agenda allowing for further deregulation of the economy and privatization of public assets. Hardt (2011) argues that *“neoliberalism is defined by the battle of private property not only against public property but also, and perhaps more importantly, against the common focusing on two types of the common which have been the object of neoliberal strategies of capital; the common which suggests the earth and all the resources associated with it such as the land, the forests, the water, the air, minerals etc, and the common referring to the results of human labour and creativity, such as ideas, language, affects and so forth”* (Hardt, 2011). The expansion of privatization of space for corporate interests has moved from primarily in-land and the coastal space to marine space with a range of policies and strategies including the privatization of marine resources, the displacement of coastal communities for further development of the coast and the dislocation of fishers for developments in the sea being only but a few broad examples. This presentation will focus on the need to start arguing for a new way of re-organizing across coastal and marine space, and start reclaiming the right to the sea, as resistance to the current wave of privatization, with specific example the EU and its Blue Growth strategy.

Lefebvre in his essay ‘The Production of Space’ (1974), states that space is produced and reproduced through human intentions, even if unanticipated consequences also develop, and even as space constrains and influences those producing it. Space is thus neither merely a medium nor a list of ingredients, but an interlinkage of geographic form, built environment, symbolic meanings, and routines of life. Therefore, an exploration of the expansion of the neoliberal agenda in the sea, unveils the battle between *“those who produce a space for domination against those who produce space as an appropriation to serve human need”* (Lefebvre, 1974). As Marx (1867) argues in the Capital, Volume 1, *“between equal rights force decides”*. However, decision-makers in the current push for economic growth lean towards profit than human need.

The leasing of an area of public domain, which is also a common property, often means the exclusion of others who would normally have access to that area, and this is the case with maritime development. Consequently, decision-making is not ‘just’ a technocratic process but a political one, partly because exclusion from an area that is public domain and rights of access to it, entails different interpretations of ‘what is just’, embedded in different values and understandings of what is at stake. In this momentum for economic growth, non-economic aspects of such activities tend to be ignored and the impacts on coastal communities are unknown or disregarded. Such decisions relate to the neoliberal processes of accumulation by dispossession.

As Harvey pointed out in his essay ‘The right to the city’ (2008): *“We live in an era when ideals of human rights have moved center stage both politically and ethically. A great deal of energy is expended in promoting their significance for the construction of a better world. But for the most part the concepts circulating do not fundamentally challenge hegemonic liberal and neoliberal market logics, or the dominant modes of legality and state action. We live, after all, in a world in which the rights of private property and the profit rate trump all other notions of rights”*. With the

State being in charge for managing a country's territorial waters and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), it has become in many cases a usurper of the rights of coastal communities and the users of the sea.

At both a Global and an EU level, there has been an increase in the attempts of creating profit from sea space with a number of maritime strategies promoting the 'sustainable exploitation of marine resources'. In the EU specifically, this attempt has been named Blue Growth, the long term strategy of the European Commission aiming "*to support sustainable growth in the marine and maritime sectors as a whole. It recognises that seas and oceans are drivers for the European economy with great potential for innovation and growth*". According to the EC, the 'blue' economy represents 5.4 million jobs and a gross added value of just under €500 billion a year and has specifically pointed that further growth is possible in a number of areas which are highlighted within the strategy and specifically the five following activities have been identified and selected for a targeted approach: marine aquaculture, coastal tourism, marine biotechnology, ocean energy and seabed mining. These sectors have been found in many cases to conflict with local community values and interests and have both social and environmental impacts.

In its strategy, the EU states that (at least) these main five sectors will be supported by fostering investment in research and innovation, promoting skills through education and training and most importantly, by **removing the administrative barriers that hamper growth**. Even though removing red tape can be a positive thing, in the cases of such big developments, it is most probable that it will fast forward the developments in the sea and the coastal space, ignoring the social and ecological impacts of our marine commons.

When the State who is meant to be making decisions for the best interest of the society fails to do so, and continues to strive for economic growth working within neoliberal market logics, ignoring the social-ecological impacts of its actions, we need to re-organize ourselves and counter this wave. As Hardt (2011) pointed out: "*We need to look, however, outside this alternative. Too often it appears as though our only choices are capitalism or socialism, the rule of private property or that of public property, such that the only cure for the ills of state control is to privatise and for the ills of capital to publicise, that is, exert state regulation. We need to explore another possibility: neither the private property of capitalism nor the public property of socialism but the common in communism*". It's time we found ways to reclaim our right to the sea. This presentation brings up the need for a new movement to reclaim the sea, and calls for the discussions on this issue to commence.

References

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