

# Choosing between Blue Growth and Degrowth—The need to reclaim the Right to the Sea

Maria Hadjimichael, Postdoctoral researcher, Innovative Fisheries Management, Aalborg University; Email: mmh@ifm.aau.dk

## Introduction

In the current climate of global financial crisis, developed countries are increasingly focusing their efforts on economic growth and development, using the crisis to entrench a neoliberal agenda further deregulating the economy and the privatization of public assets.

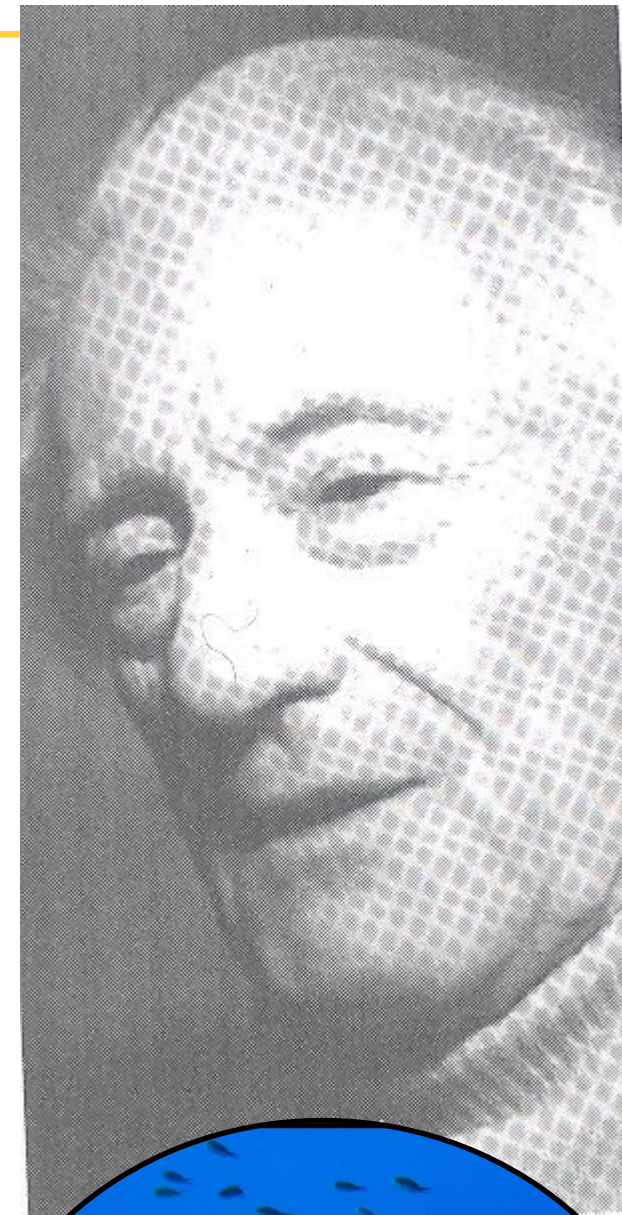
"Neoliberalism has been defined by the battle of private property not only against public property but also, and perhaps more importantly, against the common. [...] Too often it appears as though our only choices are capitalism or socialism, the rule of private property or that of public property, such as that the only cure for the ills of state control is to privatize 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."

Michael Hardt, 2011

## The Sea as Space

"Space is a social morphology: it is to lived experience, what form itself is to the living organism, and just as intimately bound up with function and structure"

Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space



## 'Creating' spaces for new markets

Space is produced and reproduced through human intentions. Currently, the push of the neoliberal dogma for the creation of markets in the sea has unveiled a battle between those who "produced space for domination" (profit accumulation) or the "production of space as an appropriation to serve human need" (human right).



"City" by Celine Meisser

Ways of being and physical landscapes are interlinked, and the space they create is filled with tensions and competing versions of what a space should be. "People fight not only over a piece of turf, but about the sort of reality that it constitutes" (Molotch, 1993).

## Who has the right over the Sea?

The sea and the seashores are one of the clearest manifestations of what is generally considered to constitute "the commons". However, we are recently often reminded that it is not. Rather, it is a space that the government donates to the people by concession, until the opportunity arises to enclose and subsequently monetize and valorize the former common property (Hadjimichael, 2014).

With the expansion of privatization of space for corporate interests moving from primarily in-land and the coastal space to marine space we witness the appropriation of people's rights to commons, i.e.:

- The privatization of marine resources (in the form of catch share which can be exchanged among private companies known as Individual Transferable Quotas);
- The displacement of coastal communities for further development of the coast,
- The dislocation of fishers for developments in the sea (such as aquaculture, offshore oil and gas developments etc).

## United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

Part V of United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) sets the specific legal regime of a country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) where the State has:

"Sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring and exploiting, conserving and managing the natural resources, whether living or non-living, of the waters superjacent to the seabed and of the seabed and its subsoil, and with regard to other activities for the economic exploitation and exploration of the zone, such as the production of energy from the water, currents and winds" (Paragraph 1 of Article 56).

The State manages its EEZ on behalf of its citizens, **but has the State become a usurper of the rights of coastal communities and the users of the sea?**

## Blue Growth and the commodification of the sea

Blue Growth - the long term strategy to support sustainable growth in the marine and maritime sectors. It recognizes seas and oceans as drivers for the European economy with great potential for innovation and growth and supports activities with high potential by removing the administrative barriers that hamper growth, fostering investment in research and innovation and promoting skills through education and training.

\* **Marine aquaculture:** In 2009, it accounted for a third of fish for human consumption, equivalent to 19.3 million tons of fish. In Europe, aquaculture only supplies one quarter of the market and the industry is stagnating because of lack of space, lack of public awareness and cumbersome licensing rules.

\* **Maritime, Coastal and Cruise tourism:** The single largest maritime economic activity providing 1.1% of total EU employment.

\* **Marine biotechnology:** Concerns about growing crops for biofuels on land have led to intensified efforts to manufacture biofuels and other chemicals from algae. Currently a niche sector but has the potential to produce mass-market products in the long run.

\* **Ocean renewable energy:** Offshore wind power generation could meet 4% of electricity by 2020—14% by 2030. Wave and tidal power offer a more regular and predictable source but are not yet commercially competitive.

\* **Sea bed mining:** Underwater technology means that mining companies can exploit the seafloor and contribute towards the growing global demand for non-energy raw materials.

European Commission, 2013

## Why Degrowth?

Blue Growth is yet another attempt of the European Commission to continue the 'grow or die' dogma. The economic crisis and the need for jobs and improvement of European competitiveness, meant that new space markets were required. In the Commission's own words, "with Blue Growth we are unlocking the wealth that exists in the coastal and marine environment". What we are witnessing is an attempt to appropriate one of our last remaining "commons" through different levels of control: the EU, the state, and private capital itself.

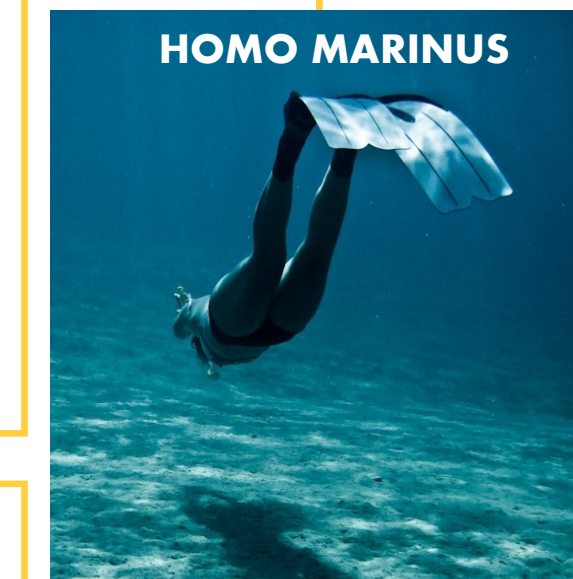
Blue Growth does not take into account the socio-ecological implications of the activities it seeks to promote.

### HOMO ECONOMICUS



"We live in an era when ideals of human rights have moved centre 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." David Harvey, The Right to the City

### Degrowth as the only way



Degrowth—meaning the downscaling of production and consumption—and thus exploitation and impact on the coastal and marine environment is the only way to secure it as a socio-environmental space, as the social morphology that has been described by Lefebvre; as part of our last remaining commons. The only way to protect the sea-space as we have come to know it, is to "re-politicise debates about what are our desired socio-environmental futures" (Demaria et al., 2013).

## Reclaimthesea.org

A website which calls for the start of coalition of grassroots social movements, academics, NGOs, and sea-lovers that want to fight to keep or reclaim their right to the sea.

It includes a 'report a violation' form, for people to share their experiences on the appropriation of their rights to the sea or the coast.

The website also aims to become platform to keep people informed about marine and coastal issues around the globe, particularly ones that have to do with the appropriation of people's right to the sea and the coast.

## References

- Demaria, Federico; Schneider, Francois; Sekulova, Filka; Martinez-Alier, Joan. 2013. What is Degrowth? From an Activist Slogan to a Social Movement. Environmental Values, 22(2).
- European Commission, 2013. [http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/documentation/publications/documents/leaflet-blue-growth-2013\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/documentation/publications/documents/leaflet-blue-growth-2013_en.pdf)
- Hadjimichael, Maria. 2014. In Greece, a battle to reclaim the seashore as commons. Roarmag. Accessed online from: <http://roarmag.org/2014/06/greece-seashore-privatization-bill>
- Hardt, Michael. 2011. Reclaim the common in communism. Accessed online from: <http://www.theguardian.com/comments/free/2011/feb/03/communism-capitalism-socialism-property>
- Lefebvre, Henri. 1974. The Production of Space (English translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith, 1991).
- Molotch, Harvey. The Space of Lefebvre. Theory and Society, 22(6): 887-895.