

# Neoliberal Environmentalism

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In the public discourse it is generally viewed that environmentalism acts as a counterforce to neoliberalism, or as a limiting force to capitalism. Adopting the global environmental discourse is often seen as opposing the injustices created by the current capitalist system and the only alternative to accepting the logic of current neoliberal system. The global environmental cause, and primarily the climate change, is to be understood as a weapon to use in an ideological struggle. Naomi Klein's book *'This Changes Everything: Climate versus Capitalism'* (Klein 2014) is a good illustration of this position. Klein makes explicit this instrumental role that climate change plays for her: "I realized the science of global warming ... could be a catalyst for forms of social and economic justice in which I already believed" [p.59]. In this manner, as Hulme (2015) has noted, climate change thus becomes a synecdoche for the evils of global capitalism.

This paper examines this relation of environmentalism to neoliberalism. But, on the contrary, the aim of this paper is to offer a rebuttal, contrary arguments to the above-mentioned understanding. The paper presents a perspective that sees the concern for global environmental degradation as a source on which new neoliberal governance structures have been created and which strengthens the underpinnings of the current neoliberal frameworks of power.

Since the birth of modern environmental discourse some scholars have pointed out the implicit consequences of global environmental concerns that are complicit with and supportive of the growth neoliberal systems of governance (Golub and Townsend 1977). Today, there is an established academic discussion on neoliberal environment. It is discussed from different perspectives and in different contexts by, for example, Heynen et al. (2007), McCarthy & Prudham (2004), Robertson (2004), Mueller and Passadakis (2009; 2010), Hajer (1995), Crawford (2009), Swyngedouw (2010), Escobar (1996), Luke (1997), Shantz (2003), and Bachram (2004), Spehr 1999, and Reid (2012a). This literature considers the ways in which environmental governance, and environmentalism as a set of political movements, coincide, articulate, and even constitute the emergence of global neoliberal frameworks.

A central theme in the literature is that the primary response of the global environmental regime to the environmental crisis during the last few decades has been marked by a massive expansion

in 'environmental finance'. From 'carbon markets' to 'pollution permits', 'climate derivatives' and 'catastrophe bonds', we are seeing a proliferation of nature-related financial products. The past few decades have witnessed a rapid increase in the involvement of private corporations in resource ownership, and the provision of 'ecosystem services'. Simultaneously, markets and market proxies have been deployed as mechanisms of environmental governance at multiple scales. The concept of nature as capital has gained visibility in policies and practices in both the public and private sectors. The environmentalism this regime is pushing forward is certainly *not limiting* neoliberalism. Here the conception of 'global environment' and its crisis, has by itself been the argument why all aspects of nature need to be marketized. Today, the real or presumed environmental crisis can be seen as an engine of neoliberalization of our world. Invoking environmental crisis has strategically functioned in the global expansion of neoliberalism by naturalising its frameworks of governance. In this sense, the arguments presented in this paper are putting the ecological crisis upside-down: environmentalism that appears a threat to the system now becomes a vehicle for its very innovation.

## Defining neoliberalism

Despite the familiarity of the term, defining neoliberalism is no straightforward task, in part because the term neoliberalism stands for a complex assemblage of ideological commitments, discursive representations, and institutional practices, all propagated by highly specific class alliances and organized at multiple geographical scales (McCarthy & Prudham 2004, 276). In fact, the notion of a consistent set of defining material practices and outcomes that comprise neoliberalism is problematic. The complexity, variety, and mutability of neoliberalism have made it a difficult phenomenon to study. This is not to say, however, that neoliberalism lacks identifiable dimensions. Though definitions of neoliberalism across literatures are various, they still tend to share the following issues.

Often neoliberalism is understood to be "a theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximisation of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterised by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade" (Harvey 2007a, 22). But many perceive neoliberalism as a wider rationality. Davies (2014, 310) calls neoliberalism an inventive, constructivist, modernizing force, which aims to produce a new political and social model. This view comes closer to the understanding of neoliberalism that the earliest theoretician of neoliberalism Michel Foucault called a neoliberal 'governing rationality' (Foucault 2008).

Whether we understand neoliberalism as a set of economic policies or a larger force reaching for a wider social change, the root principle of neoliberalism is, nonetheless, affirming the 'self-regulating market,' a market increasingly wide in its geographic scope, comprehensive as the governing mechanism for allocating all goods and services, and central as a metaphor for organizing and evaluating institutional performance (McCarthy & Prudham 2004, 276). In the

neoliberal promotion of market-based entrepreneurialism, if markets do not exist, in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, environmental pollution, or previously uncommodified 'natural benefits', then they must be created (Harvey 2007b, 2). This requires the deeply problematic commodification of everything. Thus, neoliberal policy targets institutions and activities which lie, or used to lie, outside of the market, such as universities, households, public administrations, trade unions, and non-human natural world as this paper aims to show. These targets have been, with varying degrees, brought inside the market, through acts of privatization; or reinvented in a 'market-like' way; or they have simply been neutralized or disbanded (Davies 2014, 310).

The implementation of neoliberalization processes is accompanied by an intensification of facilitative government activity. Here, it is good to note the difference between neoliberalism and laissez faire liberalism. In neoliberalism, market is no longer seen as a self-perpetuating machine, but instead, a state is a necessity that is needed to enable and defend the markets, and endorse excludable, private property rights and commodification (see for example Foucault 2008; Peck, 2001; Jessop, 2002). To create markets, the state must be an active force, and cannot simply rely on 'market forces'. Markets depends upon conditions being constructed for it by the state that will make the market thrive. So, neoliberal states are required to produce and reproduce the rules of institutions and individual conduct, in ways that accord with neoliberal ethical and political vision (Davies 2014, 310). Outside this market-enabling role of the state, there is a general political and ideological antagonistic arrangement toward state "interference" (i.e. regulation). This withdrawal or reconfiguring of the state and its functions is often carried out via discourses of national, regional, and urban economic competitiveness that typically include privatization, fiscal and administrative cuts, and re-scaling of governance (Rutherford 2007, 295; McCarthy & Prudham 2004, 276). This kind of "hollowing out" of the state also includes devolution of regulatory responsibilities to local levels of government without proportional transfers of power or capacity, while also scaling regulatory capacities "upwards" to increasingly international institutions with little to no transparency or accountability (McCarthy & Prudham 2004, 276; Lemke 2002, 60). This neoliberal reconfiguring, furthermore, includes shifts from binding to increasingly voluntarist, neo-corporatist regulatory frameworks involving non-binding standards and rules, public-private co-operation, self-regulation, and greater participation from citizen coalitions, all with varying degrees of capacity and accountability (McCarthy & Prudham 2004, 276).

Besides understanding neoliberalism through these state policies, it is important to see that it is also a more fundamental and more extensive force, or as Brown (2015) described it, governing rationality that disseminates market values to every sphere of life. Here, the key feature in neoliberalism is that it works by colonizing the field of value – reducing all social values to one market value. We see the model of the market in all domains and activities, even when there is no money involved. Neoliberalism is a whole theory of society. Its ethical and political vision of society says competition is good, markets are good, because they both produce freedom, but they also produce spontaneous order (Brown 2015). They produce order without having to have democratic majorities determine what is good. The more you can produce market-like behaviour in every corner of society the better.

At the most general level, neoliberalism has been examined by David Harvey (2007a) as a global project to restore and expand the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore power to economic elites. Harvey argues that neoliberalism is not only an abstract set of ideas about how to best to organize society, but rather that neoliberalism is an intensely political project, one in which economic elites more or less intentionally seek to increase their wealth and income, but also their political and economic freedom and flexibility.

## Green neoliberalism

Environmentalism is fluently compatible with neoliberal ideas, whether we understand neoliberalism as state economic policy or as a more fundamental and more extensive governing rationality that “disseminates market values to every sphere of life” (Brown 2015, 176, Foucault 2008), especially concerning the need to restructure the industrial core of the economy of Western countries (Hajer 1995, 33). The environmental prescriptions flowing from the global environmental institutions follow closely the neoliberal prescriptions for social and economic reform. They use the language of business and conceptualizes environmental pollution as a matter of inefficiency, while operating within the boundaries of cost-effectiveness and administrative efficiency (ibid, 31). The prevailing conception of the assured environmental crisis constitutes a challenge for business. The crisis and the policy prescriptions to solve it not only create new commodities, markets and new demands, they also stimulate innovation in methods of production and transport, industrial organization, consumer goods, in short, all these elements that Joseph Schumpeter once identified as the forces that produce the “fundamental impulse that sets and keeps the capitalistic engine in motion” (Schumpeter 1961, 83, quoted in Hajer 1995, 32).

Especially the criticized concept of sustainability has been a problematic extension of neoliberalism and in the center of a strategy for “trimming down” or “cleansing” industrial capitalism while “making it more effective without touching the [...] core of its program” (Spehr 1999). Since the report of the UN-appointed World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) that (re)introduced the sustainable development in 1987, the environmental case has been presented in such a way that it could bring round big institutions like the World Bank and the IMF which, in the 1970s, were still considered to oppose and downplay the environmental issue<sup>1</sup>. Critics of the report claim that the whole idea of sustainable

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<sup>1</sup> Here it is place to note that the modern managerial discourse now dominating the global environmental institutions can be argued to have been formed in 1972 from the thoughts and assumptions of *Limits to Growth* that the Club of Rome, the group of leading Western industrialists, had set forth and sponsored. *Limits to Growth* presented a grim neo-Malthusian vision that was the result of an attempt to model nothing less than the world on a computer in a “detached, rational and scientific” fashion (Pepper 1986, 23). This cybernetic model made the effort of maintaining the ecological and the social order a matter of the increased application of techniques of scientific management. Despite the serious academic critique that immediately followed its publication, *Limits to Growth* was remarkably successful in this respect (for the overview of the criticism, see Hajer 1995, and Pepper 1986).

development is a rhetorical ploy which conceals a strategy for sustaining economy rather than addressing the causes of the environmental crisis. After the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, had made the World Bank one of the central agencies monitoring the greening of policies all over the world, critics argued that this did not prove the success of the environmentalists, but their total collapse. (Hajer 1995, 12.)

Moreover, the conceptual rigour of sustainable development has been widely criticized as ill-defined. But precisely this lack of clarity seems to be the reason for its success. Sustainable development “is less an analytical concept than a signifier of shared political and moral values” (Duffield 2010, 67). It is a mobilizing concept of governance that “encouraged different and largely unconnected actors to interact and forge new, overlapping and hybridized assemblages of knowledge and power” (ibid, 68). In a similar vein, Dryzek (2005, 145) presents sustainable development only as a discourse. Crawford (2009, 31-32) as well as Parr (2009) argue that sustainability has become a code for maintaining the status quo of the neoliberal power structures and social relations. This paper goes further, partly following Duffield (2010) and Reid (2012b), by arguing that sustainability will *increase* the penetration of neoliberal ideas of organizing the social and enables the push of neoliberal markets into different spheres of life and non-life.

Mueller and Passadakis (2009; 2010) have argued that the ecological crisis has been placed at the heart of the growth strategy of the present neoliberal regime. They point that *green capitalism* is now the main driver of a new round of capitalist accumulation. This is seen, for example, in initiatives like The Green New Deal (GND) that was announced by the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) in 2008. It is a proposed set of policy proposals that aim to address global warming and financial crisis. They include schemes for reducing incentives to invest in ‘dirty’ over ‘clean’ industries, creating systematic measurements for ecosystem valuations, like consistent global carbon, emissions and water charges (UNEP 2011, 9, 14, 29). These proposals also strive for trade liberalization, safeguarding market access of individuals, credit availability and microcredit programmes (ibid., 9-10, 31, 34). Green parties that are pushing the GND policies are hailed as a “market-friendly engine of innovation” and the GND is described as a “stimulus package for the ecological technologies of the future” (Mueller and Passadakis 2009, 55). The director of UNEP summed it up when announcing UNEP’s two-year GND project in 2008: “The new, green economy would provide a new engine of growth, putting the world on the road to prosperity again” (quoted in Mueller and Passadakis 2010, 560). Indeed, UNEP (2011, 38) further defines that the so-called “trade-off” between economic progress and environmental sustainability is a myth. GND proposals have been criticized, especially in the developing countries, in that they undermine national sovereignty, set a green “normative straightjacket” for developing countries, and that they signal a “privatization and commodification of nature” (Vedeld 2011, 28). Critics also refer that these global prescriptions consider too little the local consequences of such solutions, saying that local solutions might have much more potential in terms of their sustainability (ibid., 16).

Mueller and Passadakis (2010, 555) suggest that the ecological threat has given global institutions like World Bank, IMF, WTO and G8 a way to overcome the legitimation problem they have been

having. If there ever was a real antagonism between environmental reason and neoliberal capitalism, it has now been internalized by both.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the policies of global institutions, this has also happened in our everyday lives, inasmuch as “sustainability [has become] a political attitude of the multitude” (Parr 2009, 4). Slavoj Žižek (2009) notes that consuming has now become ecologically ethical. Consuming has become an act for the environment as ‘green’ and ‘socially responsible’ companies claim to sell an ethical framework as well as a product, thus freeing buyers from the distasteful role of being merely consumers. In products labeled e.g. “environmentally friendly” one doesn’t buy just a product, one buys, in the very consumerist act, a “redemption from being only a consumerist.” One act of egotist consumerism, but within it one pairs for being redeemed for it as the “act of egotist consumption already includes the price for its ethical opposite.” Save the planet by shopping.

## Commodifying carbon

A central tenet in the neoliberal character of environmentalism is the subsuming of nature into the markets by signing economic value to it. Carbon dioxide was the first aspect of nature to which commodification was enforced by global institutions that were brought about to solve the environmental crisis, in this case primarily via the Kyoto Protocol and various offsetting schemes (Swyngedouw 2010, 220). In 1997 as a part of the international climate negotiations of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) the Kyoto Protocol was to bind 38 industrialized nations and the EU to reducing their emissions of six different gasses by an average of five per cent by 2008-2012. Emissions from international aviation and shipping were not included. Countries unable to achieve their targets were allowed to “compensate” through the so called flexible mechanisms of which there were three: 1) Emissions Trading: buying credits from countries that have exceeded their targets, 2) Clean Development Mechanism: by assisting others in achieving sustainable development, like putting money into forestry or soil conservation, or 3) Joint Implementation: by investing in “cleaner” energy technology abroad.

The market solution to climate mitigation was proposed by powerful states who used both discursive and political economic power to modify Kyoto to serve their interests and in doing so set the stage for very modest carbon reductions that did little to reduce the risks of climate change. The market narrative was used to establish a new commodity in carbon reductions that has rapidly become a new form of development investment that some critics see as of questionable value to the poor in the developing world while it has become a new arena for capital investment and speculation (Liverman 2009, 295).

A key point in criticism of carbon trading concerns the way in which it has reduced the material effectiveness of the Kyoto protocol by allowing for excess emission reductions to be traded rather

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<sup>2</sup> Žižek (2009) points that the transformation of capitalism towards caring for ecology started already in the late 1960’s. This was also the time when economic liberalism renewed itself as neoliberalism.

than benefitting the climate. Through carbon trading and Clean Development Mechanism those who are able to meet their quotas could then sell the excess pollution credits to those who were *unable* or *unwilling* to meet the targets domestically. And with the Clean Development Mechanism, industrial countries could fund emission reduction projects in the developing countries and from them gain credits to be used to meet commitments instead of making cuts domestically. So, with enough money, one can buy a permission to pollute. These market mechanisms set the stage for very modest carbon reductions. They are not benefitting to climate. If the goal was to decrease carbon dioxide emissions, The Kyoto Protocol has been a failed agreement (Rosen 2015). For a review of the critiques, see Lohmann (2006) and Gilbertson and Reyes (2009). Even the World Bank, advocate of carbon trading, shows a rather critical view on the CDM and focuses on its various shortcomings (World Bank, 2010).

Because of the Emissions Trading scheme, which created carbon dioxide equivalents (CO<sub>2</sub>e) for which all the gasses were translated and which were to be sold and bought, the Kyoto Protocol has been called as the “largest invention of monetary assets by voluntary international treaty in history” (Victor 2001). This fictional and interchangeable single ton of gasses, the ‘tCO<sub>2</sub>e’, is a basic unit of account, often understood to be a commodity, but increasingly also conceptualized as a currency. As do Mueller and Passadakis, also Liverman (2009, 293-294) argue that this commodification of carbon emission reductions has immense negative implications. It has created a new but highly slippery commodity in the form of ‘carbon credits’. She argues that this carbon trading is a new form of colonialism whereby the North is able to maintain its consumption by paying (ibid., 294) the South. These market mechanisms, Liverman (ibid., 295) says, are not going to benefit the environment. But despite of their relative lack of ecological utility, the system is so attractive to so many players because they offer a brilliant – if partial – short and medium term fix for the problem of over-accumulated financial capital, as the key companies are making millions out of them, while the expenses fall on tax-payers (Bachram 2004; Mueller and Passadakis 2009, 59).

## Ecosystem services

As it is now across a wide range of countries and institutions there is now widespread acceptance that the way to protect the environment is to price nature’s services, assign property rights, and trade these services within a global market. The concept of ecosystem services has taken the environmental science and policy literature by storm, and has become almost *the* approach to thinking about and assessing the nature-society relationship. The idea that human society benefits from the environment or nature in various ways, both directly and indirectly, is certainly not a new one, and can be traced back several millennia. But the modern-day concept emerged in the 1970s as ‘environmental services’ (Wilson and Matthews 1970), was re-named ‘ecosystem services’ in the mid-1980s (Ehrlich and Mooney 1983), and gained momentum from 1997 onwards (Lele et al 2013) as the two publications *Nature’s Services* (Daily 1997) and *The Value of the World’s Ecosystem Services and Natural Capital* (Costanza et al. 1997) brought significant attention and research focus to assessing the value of ecosystem services. Interest has grown

steadily since then, and ecosystem services are now a central feature of discussions about conservation and sustainability. Indeed, ecosystem services were the central organizing theme of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005), and there are ongoing research programs on ecosystem services by the World Bank, the US Environmental Protection Agency, and the Natural Capital Project (a partnership among the Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund, and universities of Stanford and Minnesota)<sup>3</sup>.

This concept has been promoted mainly by the UN organizations and supporting economists and researchers as a framework for managing environmental systems and for achieving the goals of sustainable development. Ecosystem services are defined as the benefits people obtain from ecosystems. These ecosystem services are grouped into three categories: provisioning, such as the production of food and water; regulating, such as pollination of crop and decomposition of waste; and cultural, such as spiritual and recreational benefits that lie in a forest or a scenery (UNEP 2004, 13-14).

The essence of the concept is that the contribution of biotic nature to human well-being is unrecognized and undervalued, which results in destruction of ecosystems. Humankind benefits from a multitude of resources and processes that are supplied by natural ecosystems. Through environmental discourses these resources are defined finite and “continually degrading by anthropogenic activities” (Haines-Young and Potschin 2007, 2). To better consider the health and role of the ecosystem, these services are being assigned economic values. By assigning economic value to biosphere it will not anymore be outside of the economic domain, and thus, after creating markets with clear price signals, changes in the condition of the biosphere will not go unnoticed anymore, as UNEP (2004, 13; 2011, 32) argues is the case today. Nature will be made “economically visible” by considering it as an economy of services that humanity uses. Nature is turned into commodities.

World Bank, together with UNEP, has announced in October 2009 a global project on “Ecosystem Valuation and Wealth Accounting” which will enable nations to test and evolve this framework in order for them to be “better able to reflect and measure sustainability concerns” (UNEP 2011, 5). The UNEP report explains that “Ideally, changes in stocks of natural capital would be evaluated in monetary terms and incorporated into the national accounts [...] Green Accounting or Inclusive Wealth Accounting are available frameworks which we expect will be adopted by a few nations initially and pave the way for measuring a green economy transition at the macroeconomic plane.” (UNEP 2011, 5.)

Imposing market relations on uncaptured environmental phenomena requires techniques by which a dollar value can be placed on “environmental services”, and such techniques have proliferated over the past decade on the strength of the imagined consensus on the need to price nature. “Although ecosystem valuation is certainly difficult and fraught with uncertainties, one choice we do not have is whether or not to do it,” says one prominent economist, who describes the Earth as “a very efficient, least-cost provider of human life-support services”, the entire value of which is between 16 and 54 trillion dollars (Costanza et al., 1997, p. 255). Since he admits that

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.worldwildlife.org/projects/the-natural-capital-project>

this is more than the then-current global GNP, the real utility of studies like the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment is to present ecosystem services as amenable to being treated as commodities. If environmental goods can be alienated and owned, the economists tell us, then they will behave as commodities behave: those environmental services that are in demand (clean air and water) will increase in supply. Similarly, once environmental harms have been valued and defined as property, payment of the social costs of these harms can be determined by bargaining between the parties involved. In this way, the lowest-cost solution is adopted, which by definition would create the highest welfare. (Robertson 2004, 265)

Consequently, the field of neoliberal economy is widened as previously uncapitalized aspects of nature and society become internal to capital. This turning nature into marketized products, “privatization of the climate” (Swyngedouw 2010, 220), and the development of ecosystem services, together with widening the field of private property rights<sup>4</sup>, understood by Escobar (1996, 326), is a sign that capital is undergoing a significant change in form, and is entering an “ecological phase.” Luke (1997, 44) describes the same transformation and states that this kind of market environmentalism is now the highest stage of capitalism. Escobar (1996, 328) further explains that the reconciliation of economic growth and the preservation of the environment through ‘sustainability’ is the result of complex discursive operations involving capital, representations of nature, management and science. In the sustainable development discourse ‘nature’ is reinvented as ‘environment’ so that capital, not nature or culture, may be sustained (ibid.). The need for this kind of reconciliation and management came from the claims about the threatening ecological crisis and is linked to the representation of the earth as a “fragile ball” that ‘we’ are responsible for managing and moving towards sustainability that is defined to us by global institutions.

Like it was with the carbon commodification also the ecosystem services concept has its shortcomings. Duraiappah (2011) asks, why is human well-being increasing when ecosystem services are declining? Is there a fundamental flaw in the conceptual framework of ecosystem services? The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA; 2005) defined ecosystem services as the benefits ecosystems provide that contribute to human well-being. The indicators presently used to measure and track well-being are primarily direct measures of current material wealth, including the gross national product (GNP) per capita and, to a large extent, the Human Development Index (HDI). It was therefore no surprise that the MA reported that two-thirds of assessed ecosystem services were declining while global well-being had increased over the last fifty years—although one might expect that decreases in ecosystem services should also decrease human well-being. They are unable to give any conclusive explanation of why human well-being is increasing while ecosystem services are declining.

Through the ecosystem services concept nature and ecosystems are understood to provide benefits for humans. But we need also to look at the other side of the coin: they also hinder human well-being. The relationship between nature and society is not all positive, ofcourse.

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<sup>4</sup> To include nature into the sphere of economic processes, besides economic value, it also needs to be assigned an owner to function properly (UNEP 2004, 15). Widening the field of property rights includes also expanding intellectual property rights, patenting and the licensing of genetic material such as seed plasma.

Nature imposes several kinds of hardships on human beings. This is something that is not accounted for in any of the economic valuation efforts. However, it should be. If we count all the positive services nature provides us with, we should be realistic and honest enough to count the numerous disservices against them. Some ecologists have begun to question this omission and are now pointing to 'ecosystem dis-services'.

In addition to dis-services, there are trade-offs between the services themselves. A rainforest for example can provide timber as well as regulatory services of carbon sequestration. But increasing carbon sequestration may result in lower biodiversity as well as reduced harvest of timber, and maximising timber production will reduce the available fodder, firewood, and biodiversity. Again, these trade-offs are well known. But the ecosystem services literature has only emphasised 'win-win' situations. In addition, there is an overall limitation to the way the environmental problem has been framed by the proponents of ecosystem services. For a review of the critiques, see Lele et al 2013.

Karl Polanyi argued that land, synonymous with nature, is not created as something to be sold (Polanyi 1944). It is not produced by man. Also economics handbooks state that a good is an asset produced for being sold, something that does not happen with natural resources; therefore, nature is not a good. When we sell the right to harm the natural environment, we are effectively selling something that is not ours. Furthermore, each authentic good is an individualised unit, perfectly separate from the others, meaning that the destruction of one does not affect the rest; for example, the destruction of one car does not affect the rest of the cars in circulation. This does not fit well into the understanding of nature as one interconnected ecosystem (which by itself, is a prerequisite for understanding the ecological crisis as global). The commodification of nature means an assertion of human control over it and the de facto negation of the systemic character of nature. It ceases to be considered an ecosystemic entity and becomes a succession of privatised plots of land, which opens the path to its destruction, because the land becomes a private means of production and therefore, subject to the profit maximisation.

When we characterize nature as capital, there won't be an outside-of-capital left anymore, which could be a point of reflection. Without this kind of outside into which one can escape and hide, a perspective disappears from one's worldview, and along with it a capability to imagine alternatives. At that point we can say the capital has devoured the world.

## Depoliticizing tendencies of environmentalism (under development)

There are other major neoliberalizing issues with the ecological crisis that support the argument presented in this papers.

Depolitization is a feature of neoliberalism, as markets void of values replace political spaces, and the role of the state, which has been the main arena for political struggle in which different social

interests have struggled for support, is being reduced. Also here, environmentalism support this trend.

The language of environmentalism is full of talk of 'necessities' and 'imperatives', and often rests on the idea of impending catastrophe. Ferry (1993, 140) argues that fear is a fundamental political ambition and the foundation pillar of the political programme of environmentalism. Instead of argument, the sheer force of necessity and urgency seems to be the grounds for actualizing the environmental prescriptions without consideration of wider social scenarios.. Thus, while politics is the art of contingent, it cannot operate in a field of necessity. Furthermore, speeded by this urgency and the global nature of the issue, ecological crisis reduces the sphere of democratic political deliberation and debate as issues are centralized under technocratic management and consensual policy-making of global institutions, like Kyoto protocol. In this process fundamental ideological disputes and disagreements are denied, as the current presentation of the ecological crisis as a "*supra-national and non-class-specific global crisis*" transcends all social differences. Swyngedouw (2010, 219) furthermore argues that sustaining and nurturing catastrophic imaginaries is an integral and vital part of the new cultural politics of capitalism for which the management of fear is a central leitmotif. At the symbolic level, catastrophic imaginaries are extraordinarily powerful in disavowing or displacing social conflict and antagonisms. As such, catastrophic imaginations are decidedly populist and foreclose a proper political framing (ibid.).

It is argued that the environmental problematique is moving us towards a post-political, or post-democratic state. The writers such as Chantal Mouffe, Slavoj Žižek, and Jacques Rancière have written about this post-political world. Post-politics emphasizes the need to leave old ideological visions behind, we are persuaded to confront new issues, armed, not with democratic decision making processes, but with the necessary expert knowledge of enlightened cosmopolitan technocrats. Post-politics is marked by the predominance of a managerial logic in all aspects of life. The political is reduced to administration where decision-making is increasingly considered to be a question of expert knowledge and not of political position. The political as the space of litigation in which the excluded can protest the injustice done to them is, thus, foreclosed. Proper political choice between competing visions of a different social order is slowly reduced by totalizing threats that permit only one direction. (Swyngedouw 2010.) This post-political world eludes choice and freedom, other than those tolerated by the consensus.

## Discussion

Connections between neoliberalism, environmental change, and environmental politics are all deeply if not inextricably interwoven. Neoliberalism and modern environmentalism have together emerged as the most serious political and ideological foundations of the last five decades of social regulation.

The applying of the perception of environment-in-crisis in different contexts was shown to have a strong tendency of increasing neoliberal forms of governing. The invocation of ecological crisis, limits, finiteness, labeling carbon dioxide as a harmful pollutant has led, through such concepts as sustainability and green economy, to a wholesale commodification of life ready to be regulated and controlled within the neoliberal system. The real or presumed ecological crisis drives a new round of capitalist accumulation and structures of neoliberal governance. Particularly important here is the conception of finiteness of the world, which allows neoliberalism to reach its economic rationalities into whole new spheres.

Markets and ecosystem services are the dominant approach to managing and protecting the environment. This move to commodify nature and market its 'services' is a massive transformation of the human–environment relationship. Arguably, neoliberal environmental strategies have been quite successful. The hegemony of neoliberalism is made most evident by the ways in which profoundly political and ideological projects have successfully masqueraded as a set of objective, natural, and technocratic truisms (McCarthy & Prudham 2004, 276). Capital appears to have successfully established a dominant articulation with other logics, incorporating the naturalized authority of scientific data into its own arguments, and lobbying for laws which stabilize its new markets. Jessop (2008) stresses that considerable work has been put into the process of articulation: that is, making information from one logical realm legible to, and effective in, others. Thus, when ecological phenomena factor into the stabilization or destabilization of capital relations, they never do so as ecological phenomena per se. They do so only after going through a process of coding by which they are made legible to the logic of capital. (Robertson 2004, 366, 371.)

The way environmental institutions have paved the way for certain “solutions” and chosen to blunt the potentials for alternative developments. As an example, Mueller and Passadakis (2009, 58-59) provide the international climate negotiations of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and carbon trading. They criticize the UNFCCC, firstly, of insulating the free-trade policies of the WTO from scrutiny; secondly, of legitimating the economic and regulatory system by channeling the attention of potentially critical environmental groups into “meaningless negotiations”; thirdly, of blunting the potential for more widespread mass movements for climate justice to emerge; and fourthly and most importantly, of its promotion of carbon trading schemes. Without the UNFCCC, the idea of emissions trading would almost certainly not have become global ‘best practice’ in official climate politics as quickly or as universally as it now has (ibid., 59). As one World Bank executive stated, “[i]n a world where you have scarcity, you have to have a price on things” (Simon 2012).

Ecocentrically aligned writers like Mueller and Passadakis (2009; 2010), Parr (2009), Crawford (2009), and Bachram (2004) point that the top-down managerialist solutions provided by the global institutions are – from the ecocentric perspective – “false solutions,” as they provide a political shield for the continued production of greenhouse gases “with impunity” (Mueller and Passadakis 2010, 563), but do not address the real problem: the underlying structures of production. Their environmental value seems very limited. Not benefiting the environmental or

climate as they supposedly should. Instead, they seem more to be about securing and expanding the neoliberal economic structures of governing.

The institutions and practices that neoliberalism demands are driven under the guise of saving the 'environment.' Reid (2012a, 70) observes that invoking ecological crisis has "strategically [...] functioned in the global expansion of neoliberalism by naturalising its frameworks of governance." The idea of environmental crisis enables profound neoliberalizing trends that would otherwise be hard to implement and justify. Instead, they are now seen to have a world-saving function. As Parr (2015, 72) phrased it: "All roads currently lead us through the gates of capitalist heaven.

How we have come to this? Several researchers wonder the fast pace of the emergence of these neoliberal governance frameworks (Lövbrand & Stripple 2011, 197). Few ideas on how to understand this neoliberal environmentalism have been presented. According to one perspective, neoliberal thinking has hijacked environmental politics (Parr 2009, Mirowski 2013?). This idea necessitates that in some point in history they were on opposition to each other. Instead, a historical examination of these both sets of ideas might reveal a more interesting relation. Both, modern environmentalism and neoliberalism, began to emerge in the late 1960's. Many link the actual institutionalization of neoliberalism to the period since the early 1970s. It is primarily during this period that neoliberal practices were introduced as macro and micro-level reforms (Heynen et al. 2007, 6). Žižek (2009) points that the transformation of capitalism towards caring for ecology started in the late 1960's. The emergence of neoliberalism was allied by the rise of the political influence of environmentalism. The basis for all these neoliberal 'financial innovations' has been in the idea of the 'global environment' that the UN gave birth to around the 1972 UN Environment Conference in Stockholm. Hironaka (2015) explains this in length. The Stockholm era represents an episode of social construction that fundamentally changed the way that modern environmental problems were understood. It gave us the concept of 'global environment' where the nature around us is understood as one interconnected wholeness, scarce, and in a crisis. This new conception of the environment linked a formerly diverse set of issues under a common umbrella and reframed them as global concerns. After the conference 'the environment' became a common factor to describe problems of different relations between man and nature. (Hironaka 2015.) The point that Hironaka makes is that the creation and growth of the global environmental regime has been neither inevitable, or natural, but has been shaped by politics in international institutions, mainly by the UN (Hironaka 2015).

Here, it is important to note that the basis for the neoliberalizing opportunities of the ecological crisis were already created with the cognitive construction of global 'environment' and its central features: understanding of natural resources as static, the idea of limits, and the urgent crisis. The representation of and acting upon a phenomenon constitutes two sides of the same coin. Objects can only be governed when they are represented and conceptualised in a way that can enter the sphere of conscious political calculation (Lövbrand 2009, 11). Is environmentalism a perfect side-kick or partner-in-crime for neoliberalism's project, a cognitive instrument for neoliberalism. While environmentalism uses ecological reasons to argue for the need to protect

and manage the life of the global environment, neoliberalism prescribes economy as the very means of that protection and management.

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