



Managing the transition to critical green growth: The ‘Green Growth State’



Diego Vazquez-Brust^{a,*}, Alastair M. Smith^b, Joseph Sarkis^c

^aSchool of Management, Royal Holloway University of London, Egham Hill, Egham, Surrey TW20 0EX, United Kingdom

^bSchool of Planning and Geography, Cardiff University, Glamorgan Building, King Edward VII Avenue, Cardiff, Wales CF10 3WA, United Kingdom

^cSchool of Business, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Worcester, MA, United States¹

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 20 October 2014

Keywords:

Green growth
Discourse
Green Growth State
Industrial policy
Green economy

ABSTRACT

Political will at the national and multilateral scale is coalescing around the emerging discourse of Green Growth. The narratives and practices of Green Growth have already been rejected by many stakeholders as a reformulation of business as usual discourse. However, this article argues that this critique is grounded in a false conflation of distinct interpretations of the concept. In place of homogenising all associated narratives, we argue for an aspirational Critical Green Growth perspective, socially inclusive and conducive to structural transformation, incipiently identified in Asian national policies, particularly Korea. Drawing on this background, and other development insights, we conduct a ‘backcasting’ exercise to identify trajectories leading to this imagined future of Green Growth. We address a key gap in the literature, the lack of dialogue between Green Growth and Developmental State studies. We then argue for the importance of the Green Growth State (GGS) in introducing fundamental change in this critical window of opportunity. Elements of this overarching concept would include broad characteristics of: a flexible and diverse policy mix; value-driven, multi-stakeholder, multi-level governance; public trust and collaboration; and appropriate measurements of progress discouraging commodification of nature.

© 2014 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

1. Introduction

“The science is clear: the sponge that cushions and sustains us, our environment, is already saturated with carbon. If we don’t limit global warming to two degrees or less we are doomed to a period of unprecedented instability, insecurity and loss of species... As responsible citizens of the world... we have a duty to persuade our leaders to lead us in a new direction” (Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town; Tutu, 2014).

At their heart, Green Growth discourses transcend the curbing of economic growth as a means for responding to environmental limits. Green Growth interprets climate change not as a cost, but as an opportunity (Kastrinos, 1995; Mathews, 2012) and advocates investment in the environment as a driver for “recoupling” environmental protection with growth accumulation (Elliott, 2011). For this reason, following its emergence in the West around 2005, Green Growth has

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 01784 276483.

E-mail addresses: D.A.Vazquez@rhul.ac.uk (D. Vazquez-Brust), Smitham3@cardiff.ac.uk (A.M. Smith), jsarkis@clarku.edu (J. Sarkis).

¹ Tel.: +1 508 831 4831.

gained considerable momentum in supranational organisations such as the World Bank and OECD after 2008 (Meadowcroft, 2012; Messner, Schellnhuber, Rahmstorf, & Klingefeld, 2010). By 2012, the World Summit (RIO+20) linked the green economy with sustainable development and poverty reduction as priority themes for action, and the UN articulated strong support for Green Growth at the start of the conference.

Despite this momentum however, the Rio+20 witnessed a considerable derailment of traction for the Green Growth. Civil society groups opposed the agenda, with one headline story in the World Summit newspaper *Terraviva*, boldly pronounced “Green Economy, The New Enemy” (Terraviva Rio+20, 2012). Moreover, the final official conference report, *The Future We Want* (Rio+20, 2013), contained only a cautious account, with Green Growth as one of a set of important tools available for achieving sustainable development.

In response to what we identify as the non-inevitable stumbling of a potentially powerful paradigm of meaningful transition, the current paper undertakes fundamental reappraisal. We argue the reason for this and other detraction from the Green Growth agenda is conflation with other overlapping, yet distinct and discernible, public policy narratives—the Green Economy and also Green New Deal. Moreover, we identify that in the West, Green Growth discourses have become colonised by underlying ideological structures, which utilise selected elements to further more longstanding agendas, such as the continued liberalisation of markets.

As part of this argument we suggest that, while scholars should continue critical treatment of all green Growth discourses and practices, it is essential not to ‘throw the baby out with the bath water’. In order to illustrate this, we proposed that the more fundamental constructions of Green Growth as articulated in East Asian, and particularly South Korean which has made astonishing Green progress (Mathews, 2012, 2013), remain a radical policy alternative for Western transitions. We argue that while a critique of Korea’s application of Green Growth might find them wanting against some benchmarks (Roelfsema et al., 2014), this does not undermine the relevance of original aspirations that contains potential to influence empirical outcomes from discourse formation.

To advance what we term a more *Critical Green Growth* agenda, the paper fundamentally employs the technique of ‘backcasting’: first constructing a desirable, aspirational future and then critically exploring the conditions that might potentially precipitate it (Gouvea, Kassiech, & Montoya, 2013; Partidario & Vergragt, 2002). In this way the approach is specifically developed to better embed normative aspirations in the distillation of transformative policy principles and direction (Vergragt, 2013; Wilson, Tansey, & Leroy, 2006), and therefore escape confining contemporary discursive fields. Following this methodology, first we build a normative, aspirational definition of Green Growth that transcends current Western interpretations, designed to work as a policy vision or end goal to guide efforts of these coalitions for change. Second, we draw on empirical data and theory to outline an integrative critical perspective depicting conditions needed to achieve such vision.

Overall, the *Critical Green Growth* perspective that emerges in the first half of the paper supports calls to move beyond the focus of quantitative growth and instead advocates for qualitative change. We support the reframing of economic progress through movement away from: quantity to quality, the consumption of physical to non-physical outputs, and technological to wider socially embedded innovation (organisational innovation, social networks and R&D intensive specialisation) (Csaba, 2010). Practically we argue for the necessity to promote future economic activity not harmful to, and that can support, natural capital. This therefore incorporates quality-oriented, low-carbon, energy efficient growth, with a strong focus on creating value through new clean technology, as well as natural infrastructure and innovation in markets for environmental goods and services. However, we also advocate that existing environmentally problematic sectors of the economy must be proactively phased out. Here *Critical Green Growth* goes beyond the ‘business as usual’ perspective that economic expansion should be balanced with proactive efforts to maintain and develop environmental systems – and therefore, engages with central criticism of more mainstream interpretations, such as the Green New Deal (Schneider, Kallis, & Martinez-Alier, 2010). As a result, the quality of Green Growth can be identified by the extent to which ‘green’ economic activity contributes to enhance and preserve natural capital.

Grounding our ‘backcasting’ exercise in critical understanding, we build on empirical progress that has been made under the Green Growth agenda in East Asia and specifically South Korea (Mathews, 2012; Vazquez-Brust & Sarkis, 2012a). This work identifies a significantly stronger role for the state than has been currently considered in European or North American Green Economy perspectives; and underlies our support for the view that any significant transitional theory must be a theory of politics and the state (Buttel, 2000). The paper therefore addresses a key gap in the literature, the lack of dialogue between Green Growth and Developmental Capitalism State studies (Death, 2014).

As a result the paper makes unique contribution by proposing the concept of the Green Growth State (GGS) as a value-driven, multi-stakeholder governance framework to facilitate economic expansion from environmentally synergistic sectors; and proactively cure brown operations. Analysing evidence from East Asia, we contend that progress towards a Green Growth future will require the institutionalisation of deliberative democracy processes – and ecological values transcending national interest as overriding policy principle – in Developmental Capitalism models. In this way, we view our proposals as categorically different from a centralised *Green Leviathan* model.² Stemming from this core we proposed further

² The Green Leviathan perspective argues that centralised national-state level environmental policy produces more stringent regulation and delivers more effective environmental protection outcomes than devolution and decentralised policies. Using empirical evidence from US, Canada, Switzerland and EU, Weibust (2013) demonstrates that when formal and informal cooperation between state or provincial government were tried, they proved less effective at environmental protection than national standards. He argues that, in particular, regulatory enforcement provisions must be centralised and not subject to negotiation in order to be effective.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7424432>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7424432>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)