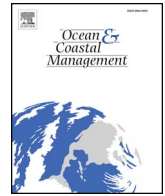




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The stealing of the seashore as a second wave of the enclosure movement: Examples from the Mediterranean

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ABSTRACT

The liminal space between the land and the sea has become a space which facilitates society's understanding regarding the notion of the commons. By commons in this case we refer to the cultural and natural resources which are held or produced in common and are accessible to all members of a society. They have no official legal status particularly in the Western societies as physical space is defined as either public or private property. The commons are enclosed during times of crisis, and transformed into private property. The first wave of enclosures intensified in England around the 17th century and in the rest of Western Europe around the 19th century – a process which social historians and commons theorists attribute to the changes in the relations between society, land and property. In this paper the proposition that the seashore is analogous to the common lands of the past is put forward, and current attempts for privatization and commercial exploitation of the seashore can be understood as a modern wave of enclosure. By referring to theories and existing literature linked with the commons, enclosures and Lefebvre's understanding of space, this paper explores the links and the analogies between the first wave of enclosures (common lands) and the more recent second wave focusing on the seashore in three Mediterranean countries, namely Lebanon, Greece and the Republic of Cyprus. With regards to the second enclosure in particular, attention is given to the policy tools which are being put forward so that the seashore's enhanced economic potential can be fully exploited. The first enclosures in the studied countries created a large pool of small land-owners and thus a specific conception of land and private property as an important feature of land. Nevertheless, there is still societal opposition to the enclosure of the seashore, something which can be linked to society's experiences and the conception of the seashore as a commons.

1. Introduction

Seashores are one of the clearest manifestations of what is generally considered to constitute 'the commons'. With the concept of 'commons' I refer to the cultural and natural resources which are held and/or produced in common and thus are not merely goods but a social practice that generates, uses and preserves common resources and products - it is about the practice of commons, or otherwise commoning (Meretz, 2012). Seashores at the same time, tend to be a component of a State's public domain, and are thus also public spaces. Such spaces are primarily created by a specific authority (local, regional or state), which controls them and establishes the rules under which people may use them (Stavrides, 2015). Their liminal nature (defined in the Oxford Dictionary as that which is transitional or at a threshold), besides being used to explain their changing natural dynamics and boundaries (McCay, 2008), it can also be used to describe how seashores are understood in terms of their ownership status. The seashore on one hand is an area of public domain, though at the same time, its users may often

experience it as a common space (as define by Meretz above).

Understanding the seashores as a space in 'common' links the notion of the commons with Lefebvre's idea on 'the production of space' (1991) according to which ways of being and physical landscapes are inter-linked; creating a version of a space is a very important aspect of a person's lived experience within that space. Imagine that seashores – our experiences there, in combination with the natural environment and the non-human beings that share that space is what makes us interconnected. This is partly what Henri Lefebvre meant in his definition of space as "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" (p.94).

In her 1937 commentary in 'the Atlantic Monthly' titled 'Undersea', Rachel Carson stated that "between the low water and the flotsam and jetsam of the high-tide mark, land and sea wage a never-ending conflict for possession". Almost a century later, conflicts for possessions continue, and though the conflict between the land and the sea has intensified primarily because of increasing erosion and sea-level rise, disputes

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around ownership become increasingly prominent. Wolff (2015) calls this a paradigm shift in ocean (and coastal) management with a trend of what he calls as ‘sea sparing’, meaning the ‘grabbing’ of marine and coastal space from the local users either for conservation purposes or for their use by bigger (multi)national companies. Existing regulatory systems and tools which have been put in place to control and manage the increasing demand for the coastal zone from different sectors such as the tool known as ‘integrated coastal zone management’, do not imply ecological nor social protection (Jablonski and Filet, 2008).

The changes, and specifically the privatization of the coastline and the struggles around this has become a recent (though not an expansive) focus of study, signifying the changing importance of a once economically under-valued space, and the conflicts this has created amongst different societal and interest groups. Hakai Magazine, in a special issue titled ‘The Battle for the Coastline’ uses examples from South Africa, Japan, Israel, Canada, Myanmar, India, Scotland, Cuba, Australia, and even Ancient Rome to show how coastal communities around the world “struggle to retain balance over their border world”, and “battle the forces that would construct fences and parcel out the continents’ edges to the highest bidder: for a fabulous view, for profit, for security” (Isabella, 2016). There has already been some academic work on the issue as well. Rybom (2010) for example describes the dramatic changes over the southeastern part of the Norwegian coastline over the past 40 years with regards to biological diversity, public access and esthetic appearance, suggesting that many of these changes reflect a changing society, which now focus on development and privatization. Another example from Croatia, describes how the privatization of the country’s assets such as the waterfront post-2000 and the transition of the country to a democratic, capitalist society seem to have reproduced a system of political and economic inequity (Ballinger, 2003). Selwyn and Boissevain (2004) in their edited book ‘Contesting the Foreshore’ discuss, using a number of case studies, the evolution of coastal settlements and how this evolution “is routinely underpinned by conflict between different interest groups contesting the ownership and control of the foreshore and its resources” (p. 11).

What this paper puts forward, is the proposition that the seashore is analogous to the common lands of the past, and that its current attempts for privatization and commercial exploitation of the seashore can be understood as a modern wave of enclosure. Though for the purposes of this paper, the concept of the second enclosure is used, it is important to note that it has already been used by Boyle (2003) for the example of intellectual property. The logic of enclosure, he suggests, has dominated and now the logic that rules is “that a commons is by definition tragic, and that the logic of enclosure is as true today as it was in the fifteenth century”. Using Lefebvre’s understanding of ‘space’, this paper aims to put forward this analogy with examples from the eastern Mediterranean and specifically from the Republic of Cyprus, Greece and Lebanon (mainly Beirut), through a survey of the functions and meanings of the commons in the past and present.

The eastern Mediterranean offers an interesting case study for furthering our understanding of how coastal space can also be produced and reproduced through human intentions (Lefebvre, 1991); how can space be given a new function, by whom and for what reasons. The rise of the tourism industry in many Mediterranean coastal areas has led to the increase in the economic value of coastal land. Coastal land, once had little economic value due to having little or no agricultural use value, but with the rise of coastal tourism, it rapidly acquired development value (Selwyn, 2004). Thus, the new economic functions of the seashore have led to new understandings around the space’s potential, as well as conflicts between the space’s new and old meanings and between old users and (potentially) new owners.

The interweaving concepts of the seascape, the commons and space as a social morphology as well as the struggles around the meaning given to the seascape form important theoretical foundations for this article. Thus, Section 1.1 will discuss Lefebvre’s ‘Production of Space’ linking it with the seashore and Section 1.2 will discuss the enclosure of

the commons and the subsequent loss of community using different theories and examples. Section 2 describes the first wave of enclosures which primarily targeted the common lands, and Section 3 is an empirical description of what I call the second wave of enclosures focusing on the seashore in Lebanon, Greece and Cyprus whilst Section 4 is the conclusion.

1.1. The (changing) social morphology of the seascape

Cheong (2008) conceptualized the coast as a complex commons based on Elinor Ostrom’s framework of the commons (meaning the commonly-held resources shared by a group of users with enforced rules and norms and who also have the right or ability to exploit the resource). This was discussed in the framework of enclosure by private interests (due to the rising economic importance of the coast), and the state (for conservation and to ensure public access¹). In this article, conceptualises the seashore as a common space produced through social practice, and explores its changing function, again a result of its rising economic importance and its enclosure (through state mechanisms) for private interests. Linked with the historical understanding of the commons, both examples are associated with spaces which have been fundamentally transformed, particularly since the transition to capitalism and to a market-based economy (Meretz, 2012).

Different analyses of enclosure mechanisms can help link the historical with the more contemporary processes. According to Marx (1967), land dispossession materialized through the enclosure of the commons by landowners during the 18th century through what he described as primitive accumulation. This was depicted as the process by which precapitalist modes of production, such as feudalism and chattel slavery, were transformed into the capitalist mode of production. The concept of primitive accumulation was linked by geographer David Harvey, with the concept of accumulation by dispossession by using real world examples to define the neoliberal policies in many western nations, from the 1970s and to the present day, and the resulting centralization of wealth and power in the hands of a few by dispossessing the public of their wealth or land (Harvey, 2004). Such cases have also been analysed with examples from the coastal and marine realm (Benjaminsen and Bryceson, 2012; TNI, 2014). According to Kropotkin, capitalism was born from state intervention, whilst the State and capitalism developed side by side, mutually supporting and re-enforcing each other. For the issue of enclosures, he specifically noted that “[i]nstances of commoners themselves dividing their lands were rare, everywhere the State coerced them to enforce the division, or simply favoured the private appropriation of their lands” by the nobles and wealthy (1972; p. 188). Furthermore, Thomas More (1992 [1947]) argued that enclosure was not merely unjust in itself, but a cause of economic inequality, crime, and social dislocation.

The study of the enclosure movement offers ironies about the two-edged sword of ‘respect for property’, and lessons about the way in which the state defines and enforces property rights to more controversial social goals (Boyle, 2003). Thus, though one must not create an exaggerated image of the ecological stability of common lands, it is argued that prior to enclosures in the late eighteenth century, common pastures and forests constituted an ecological reserve that made the peasant economy more resistant to the crisis (Radkau, 2008, p.74). On discussions about privatization therefore, it is important to think beyond the issue of efficiency and take into consideration the social implications which accompany it such as issues of fairness, equity and democracy.

Enclosures are linked with a certain rationality through which space is mobilized in the process of dispossession (Sevilla-Buitrago, 2015).

¹ Though one could argue that attempts to ensure public access to a common cannot be defined as enclosure this is a different discussion and to make such an analysis is not the purpose of this article.

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