

SUSTAINABILITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

THE POWER OF DIALOGUE



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COORDINATION

Lia Vasconcelos

AUTHORS

Antonio García Allut, António Guterres, Catarina Grilo, Cristina Pita, Eliane Noya, Fernando Dias, Graça Gonçalves, Flávia Silva, Flávio Fernández, Iva Pires, João Ferrão, João Nildo de Souza Vianna, José Carlos Ferreira, Karl Bruckmeier, Laura Maria Goulart Duarte, Lia Vasconcelos, Marco Painho, Maria João Ramos Pereira, Mária Coelho, Miguel Carneiro, Miguel Neves Santos, Oscar Vidal Calbet, Rita Sá, Rogélia Martins, Sérgio Oliveira, Stella Maris Vallejo, Stephen B. Olsen, Tiago Humberto Oliveira, Úrsula Caser, Viriato Soromenho-Marques e Yorgos Stratoudakis

EDITORS

Lia Vasconcelos, Flávia Silva

REVISION

Flávia Silva, Filipa Ferro

TRANSLATION

Nuno Castanheira

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THE SEA: HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL VALUES RELATED TO THE SEA

Iva Pires

School of Human and Social Sciences, New University of Lisbon, Portugal – im.pires@fcsh.unl.pt

*We sweat and cry salt water, so we know
that the ocean is really in our blood*
Teresia Teaiwa

When I accepted the challenge to dwell on the historical and cultural values related to the sea I wasn't immediately aware of the immensity of the subject that I had been proposed to address. In addition, it had to be presented in a fashion that was creative and somewhat different from the more classical presentation models. In spite of this, early in my research I found this extraordinary sentence: «We sweat and cry salt water» (Teaiwa cited in [1]), thus also founding our first tie to the sea. After all, the ocean not only surrounds us, but a smaller ocean also “runs” inside us, overflowing when we laugh or when we cry.

And how much of the ocean surrounding us are not tears of Portuguese mothers who lost their children, namely during the Discoveries.

*Salt-laden sea, how much of all your salt
Is tears of Portugal!
For us to cross you, how many sons have kept
Vigil in vain, and mothers wept!
Lived as old maids how many brides-to-be
Till death, that you might be ours, sea!
Was it worth? It is worthwhile, all,
If the soul is not small.
Whoever means to sail beyond the Cape
Must double sorrow – no escape.
Peril and abyss has God to the sea given
And yet made it the mirror of heaven.*

Message by Fernando Pessoa



Figure 1. Portuguese discoveries, voyages and explorations: dates and first locations of arrival between 1425 and 1543, main Indian Ocean routes (blue), Portuguese territories in D. João III realm (green). Source: http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Descobrimentos_portugueses

The oceans are part and parcel of Portuguese History at least since the Discoveries in the XVth century and this long interaction with the sea has contributed to the construction of our identity, bestowing us with an uniqueness as a people (“Half my soul is made of sea air” in [2]) which allows us to distinguish ourselves from everyone else. It has inspired writers, poets and other artists and through it we expressed our interaction with the sea. Camões, Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen, Vitorino Nemésio, Rui Belo, and Eugénio de Andrade are just a few of a larger set of poets talking about the sea in their poems. The indomitable sea of Cape Bojador, in *The Lusíads*, or the punishing sea, the life taker, as in the *Message*, or even the calm and beloved sea of Sophia. We have also to recollect the role played by Portuguese navigators during the Discoveries [3] who started, in a down-to-earth fashion, to draft a global interdependence network (Figure 1) that has not stopped to widen ever since, materializing in the “network society” [4] in which we live nowadays. In the context of the Network Society, the oceans are essential as a support for commodity or people transportation networks, for energy transportation, and for information transportation (Figure 2).

In spite of their immensity, the oceans, being “liquid roads”, bind together societies and cultures. The Portuguese and the Spanish had an important

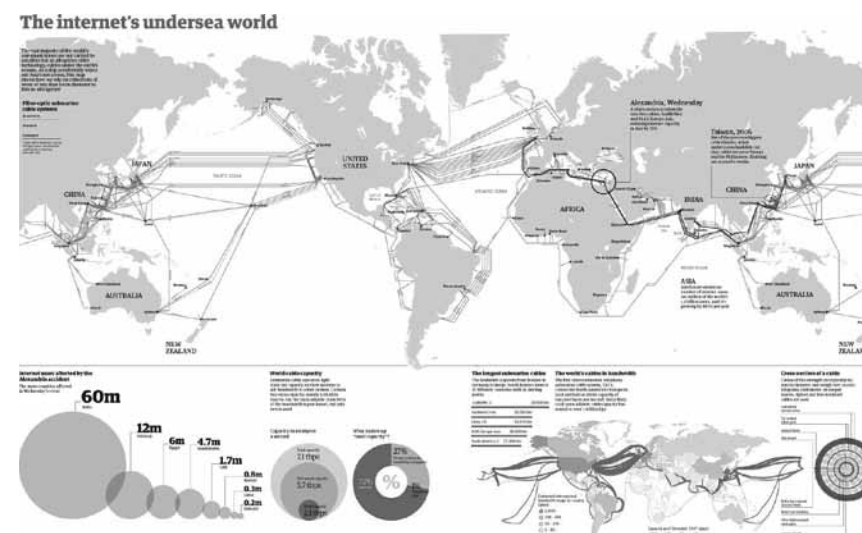


Figure 2. The Internet's Undersea World. Source: <http://visual.ly/internets-undersea-world>.

role in connecting Europe to other continents through the oceans, allowing the arrival to Europe of people, food, crops, traditions, languages and religions hitherto unknown.

But they also left a rich architectural, urban and cultural heritage spread all over the world.

These epic events did not happen by chance. As a matter of fact, they were meticulously studied and prepared, in a process of learning by doing [5]. Each voyage was based on the previous since the first of the coast recognition expeditions, information was collected and then processed into knowledge in what might well have been our first I&D centre, in Sagres, where the best researchers of the time were gathered [5]. And it was this knowledge which enabled us to depart into the discovery of the oceans, making us accomplished sailors and excellent shipbuilders.

From the fear of the unknown – “what is it that lies beyond the horizon?” – to its conquest, with a Portuguese contribution thoroughly described in *The Lusíads*, by Luís de Camões; to the scientific discovery of the oceans, in

which Jacques Cousteau and Rachel Carson, among other, played such an important role in the way through which they talked about science; to the adventures of Hugo Pratt's famous sailor, Corto Maltese, our imagination and knowledge of the sea were cultivated and nurtured.

While in school manuals or in our own discourse we are inclined to emphasize to our children the role the oceans play as providers of resources and services, assuming an anthropocentric stance, Rachel Carson and Jacques Cousteau show us the beauty and diversity of life in the oceans. I would say that we need to read and watch again these classics of the environment [6] in order to let ourselves be once again surprised by the sea surrounding us. The book *The Sea around Us*, by Rachel Carson, published in 1951, won the National Book Award for non-fictional works and, in 1953, the documentary bearing the same title won the Oscar for Best Documentary (in Portuguese, *O Mar Que Nos Cerca*, 1955).

But these stages inevitably led to another stage, the stage of exploitation. In fact, the oceans play nowadays a very important role as provider of resources to support the hyper-consumption society, as Lipovetsky calls it [7].

In a global perspective, the oceans are a decisive element to life on Earth. The major cities of the world (13 of 20 megacities) are situated in coastal areas threatened by processes of erosion triggered by the irresponsible way in which we occupied them, and more than 40% of the world's population (over 2.8 billion people) lives within 100 kilometres of the coast [8]. The oceans are rich in biodiversity, they provide food, transportation and recreation, and have a high economic and social importance to human beings, not only due to the value of their resources, but also due to the services they provide, mainly in climate regulation. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment concluded that 2/3 of the world's ecosystems, from wetlands to coastal regions, forests and soils are either degraded or have been managed in an unsustainable fashion [9], and that 60% of the main marine ecosystems are degraded or have been used in a non-sustainable way [10].

The consequences of this society of hyper-consumption are dual. On the one hand, they are contributing to the over-exploitation of resources; on the other hand, the pollution, sewage and industrial residues dumped into the oceans are contributing to ecosystem deregulations. As Carson states: "It is a curious

situation that the sea from which life first arose should now be threatened by the activities of one form of that life. But the sea, though changed in a sinister way, will continue to exist; the threat is rather to life itself" [11].

The accumulation of plastic in the oceans is an example of that situation. In our day, plastics are the dominant form of anthropogenic pollution on marine environments. Barnes *et al.* (2009) considers that the accumulation and fragmentation of plastics are one of the more everlasting and ubiquitous of the recent changes in the planet [12]. Ever since their mass production started in the 40's, plastic production has been increasing because their characteristics allow countless applications [13]. They arrive to the oceans via rivers, beaches, sea activities and illegal dumping, they are dragged by sea currents forming "plastic continents", they are degraded by UV rays into small particles that fish and birds mistake for food and through them the toxins reach the human food chain [14].

In Portugal, after decades of estrangement, we can witness a new interest for the sea which is now discussed as a strategic vector for development in a national scale [15-18], but also local, as is the case with the use of the "wave" surfed by Garrett McNamara in the Northern Beach, Nazaré.

The "economy of the sea" represented, in 2010, 2.5% of the Portuguese economy's GVA, 2.3% of national employment, and 2.4% of national production, considering just the direct activities (tourism and leisure, sea transportation, ports and logistics, fisheries, aquaculture and fisheries industry, naval building and repairing, coastal defence construction, and sea salt extraction) [18]. But all reports indicate a potential of growth which is not yet being explored: "However, the Portuguese nowadays neither recognize nor view the ocean as a natural resource, thus not taking full advantage of it" and are wasting opportunities "due to lack of an insight regarding the sea which enables us once again to understand its exact value, to rediscover it as a natural resource and to explore it in a sustainable fashion" [15]. The purpose of the National Strategy for the Sea is precisely to create the necessary conditions for the growth of an economy of the sea.

At the same time, the project for the extension of the continental platform beyond the 200 nautical miles (MN) is ongoing, according to what is

stipulated in the Article 76 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLS). Should it be accepted (the Portuguese application was submitted in 2009 and awaits decision), Portugal will have 350 nautical miles under its influence, the equivalent to an exclusive economic zone of 2.15 million square kilometres, granting a sovereignty area of 4 million square kilometres (43 times the size of the land territory of the country), besides allowing Portugal “to position itself more and more as an important European maritime nation, at the same time constituting a legacy for future generations which will thus come to enjoy and explore this vast marine area [19].

The next decade will be definitely devoted to the sea. However, while presenting itself under the guise of a “blue and green economy” COTEC (2012), the process of ocean exploitation continues. From the exploitation of fisheries resources to conflicts arising from the necessity of intervention in coastal areas subject to erosion processes [20], from strange ways of enjoyment of these spaces, producing large resorts, with equally large pools and proportional maintenance costs, even though the inviting sea is straight ahead and supplies the very same service for free; to the exploration of the sea’s subsoil for oil, often with severe environmental impacts, as exemplified by the drama currently taking place at the Niger delta.

Nonetheless, this utilitarian stance which views the oceans as a stock of resources at our disposal to feed a society avid of resources and high standards of life has to be overcome by a holistic stance which considers the sea in all its aspects – economic, environmental, social, and cultural – and can be managed in a more sustainable way.

But how is a common good, as is the case of the oceanic system, managed? “When one is faced with global common goods, the rights of property are inadequately defined. The existence of many agents using the resource, in these conditions, leads to the “market failure”, to an inefficient level of resource use and to a special proclivity to the excessive use” [21]. It is therefore necessary to find innovative forms of management which consider the systemic dimension, since it is the functioning of global natural systems, as the climatic system or the oceanic system, which provides welfare and will allow the future generations to enjoy the same benefits.

As its author states, the concept of a Common Concern of Mankind is simultaneously an identification of a problem and an call for its resolution, but is still not a suitable instrument to implement solutions. Hence the proposal for the classification of the oceanic system as intangible natural heritage to which all countries contribute, but also consume, making it necessary to also create a related metrics able to translate the positive and inputs to the common good, thus allowing a calculus of the eco-balance and assuring equity and justice in the use of these common goods [21].

Going back to the cultural perspective, the notion of the sea is linked to ports, to the bustle of ship loading and unloading, to bars and prostitution, to the joy of arriving and the sadness of leaving. Seaports, interfaces between land and sea, were also gateways to products, cultures, music, amalgamating in them before being spread to the rest of the territory. Landscapes have changed with the arrival of exotic species (palm trees, for instance), but cultural, musical and gastronomic landscapes have also changed. In fact, nothing stayed the same. “Docks” are nowadays places of enjoyment and leisure very different from those of the past, characterized by the hard life of stevedores.

But the sea can also be found in Fado, which I could not leave without mention because it is also part and parcel of our identity. It is, so to speak, the soul of the Portuguese people. Listening to the words of each fado, “one can feel the presence of the sea, the life of seamen and fishermen, the back streets and alleys of Lisbon, the farewells, the misfortune, and saudade. Together, fado and Portuguese guitar contain the essence of the history related to the sea” (www.attambur.com/Recolhas/fado1.htm).

Therefore, and to conclude, I invite you to listen to the fado “A Canção do Mar”, interpreted by Dulce Pontes (in this version with the Aveiro Dance Company www.youtube.com/watch?v=j51oyMWOWEM).

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