

Democracy, a Tale of Sustainability

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Abstract

Global societies are facing a vast amount of environmental and social problems based on resource deprivation and climate change. Many systemic forces, mechanisms and organizations struggle to deal with these problems in very specific ways with the heritage of ideas such as growth, progress and development in a broader discursive context to drive them. The term sustainability has become a key concept of theoretical discussions and practical applications in the modern ideological landscape. The way that sustainability is used it is embedded to a very specific individual and societal imaginary connected to capitalism and the neoliberal paradigm. This research's purpose is to locate and scrutinize the dominant way (hegemonic) that the term sustainability is used theoretically (discourse analysis) and practically by different actors-stakeholders, in the 21st century, in a specific case study in the European context (Greece-Skouries). Moreover, the most important part is the critical analysis of the qualitative data I collected and analyzed as well as the critique on these approaches and data through Castoriadis project of autonomy. My attempt is to open a new dimension in the way sustainability can be perceived and achieved and to point out the essentiality of autonomy (Democracy) in order for this to happen.

Key Words: Sustainability, Democracy, The Project of Autonomy, Hegemonic Discourse, Capitalism, Neoliberal Paradigm, Environment, Society, (Individual-Social) Imaginary, Growth, Progress, Development.

Acknowledgements

"I am indebted to my father for living, but to my teacher for living well" - Alexander the Great. 356-323 B.C. (BBC History 2014).

Diogenes of Sinope was walking around with his lamp trying to find someone to communicate with during the midday. Most of the time in my life I feel as Diogenes felt. Drawing over Cornelius Castoriadis thoughts (2010, 133), I feel alone but not isolated.

However, I have the impression that science has become an elitistic art excluded from the daily struggle of every day people, for a better living. As many scholars argue, science is just another tool for human beings and therefore there is no possibility to be absolute or objective (Feyerabend 1975; Harding 2004). For this, my writings have a clear and steady politico-ideological stand. My effort is dedicated to create an opening of another dimension for a better/sustainable/ decent world for most, if not for all beings.

On the other hand, I have the statement, that professor Higgs made about the academic system, some months ago, in mind. He argued that he could not be productive, if he was about to work, in the way that academia works in our days (Higgs 2013). Drawing on the words of sir Ken Robinson, our education systems such as school mechanisms kill creativity (Robinson 2010; Robinson 2012). It is really a shame, for beings such as humans, who are essentially depended on creating and responding with cultural creations and networks, to eliminate this ability to the minimum and as I argue this is a lethal error for their own survival because of their obsession to the capitalist imaginary of "rationality" and "mastery over nature".

This project is dedicated to all my beloved persons, who supported me through this procedure. But most of all it is dedicated to daily people around us (the world), who struggle for a better future for themselves and for next generations. It is a small contribution to the fights against the violence of hegemonic and hierarchical systems of power who distribute the natural and social resources unequally and who use the fruits of earth and human labor in an inhumane way, while they preach rationalism and domination over natural and social resources. My attempt is to create

awareness of the unlimited power of the political and socio-historical subjects (humans) have by starting questioning the essential social institutions structure and remove their position to an autonomous state where they will know that they are the only masters of their fate, and the only ones responsible to sustain their existence and what sustain them in the first place.

To my parents, teachers and my beloved Amalie.

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1. Introduction

“The ecological movement appeared as one of the movements that struggled for the autonomy of society” (Castoriadis and Cohn-Bendit 1981, 32).

This paper is an effort to point out the vitality of democracy¹ in relation to power², ecology and sustainability. It tries to challenge the longstanding hegemonic environmental discourse³ linked to sustainability through Hajer’s analytical discursive framework (1995), while it attempts to redefine democracy through the project of autonomy (1998; 2010) as it has been presented from philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis. Finally and most importantly, I will try to expose the essentiality of democracy in order to achieve sustainability.

Marteen Hajer’s (born in 1962) work “the politics of environmental discourse” (1995) has been a great influence, because it helped me realize the importance of the substantial discursive analysis that lies underneath any construction of the social imaginary. However, Hajer is not only a professor at the University of Amsterdam but also an active columnist and an active participant in a variety of social fields. Based on his work, his main idea about the sustainability discourse analysis, which is translated, as sustainable development in the global capitalist imaginary, is one of the major tools used to construct my thesis.

On the other hand, Castoriadis (1922-1997) is a key figure that has always fascinated me. As an economist, philosopher, psychoanalyst, a critical theorist and social critic he contributed to philosophy and to science to a great extent in my perspective. He was a pioneer of bringing up a wind of change in the way that many of us think nowadays. He was born in Constantinople/Istanbul and moved to Greece to study. Because of political reasons he had to

¹ The concept of Democracy will be thoroughly explained in my thesis. However characteristics that I will not refer to, but as I in my perspective and my definition of democracy find vital are: a full scale inclusive direct democracy, where all the socio-political and historical subjects, defined as citizens, with absolute right over their individual self-definition of their social identities as perceived fluid and accessible without any restriction of expression with respect to dignity and

² As Foucault argues “power is everywhere” (1991).

³ Speaking about the hegemonic sustainability discourse, does not imply that this is the only existing discourse (Barnes and Hoerber 2013).

leave the country and he immigrated to France. Some of his more influential ideas are: ‘heteronomy and the project of autonomy’ and the ‘social institutions’. These ideas are very influential in both academic and activist circles, where someone can find in his book: “The imaginary institution of society” (1998).

To be able to examine and analyze my thesis it is essential to have the fact that the context of my research is delved in the capitalist imaginary. My ambition is not to suggest or to offer a specific alternative but to point out that human beings are able to reconstruct their societal realities in ways and fashions that are not predetermined, nor limited in hierarchical, technocratic and bureaucratic systems (heteronomous) however in self-reflecting, self-regulating, self-legislating and self-limiting, sustainable societal realities (autonomous).

Nowadays “we know that one must not think “nature” (environment) as a stable and static organic unit in a state of constant harmony, but that nature changes continuously even without human help, not only in geologic but also in historical time” (Radkau 2008, 21) through the study of ecology. Therefore I argue that this makes the struggle for sustainability even greater in the modern formation of capitalist societies were values such as mass production and consumption have been placed in the center of capitalist imaginary.

In the current structure of global societies, consumerism has become a cultural paradigm rather than sustainability. Consumerism can be recognized as being “dominant in many parts of the world across many cultural systems” (Assadourian 2010, 8). The cultural paradigm always derives from the way that imaginary institutions of society were constructed and developed through time and space (Castoriadis 1998). Furthermore, consumerism has affected the imaginary of many wealthy nations and it has become “a way of life and an ideology” (Schor 1998, 217).

Buhr refers to consumerism as meaning both consumption and production, which is highly correlated with the discourse of infinite (and linear) economic growth, which the current capitalist systems are based on (2011, 6). Moreover, Tim Jackson argues during “the last five decades the pursuit of growth has been the single most important policy goal across the world”

(2009, 5). This procedure, as Rogall points out, has led to a dominance of neoliberal⁴ positions in the public sphere (Buhr 2011). Furthermore, the path dependency theory⁵ leads us to Hornborg's argument that there are "extremely powerful interests at stake"- "which have very much to gain [...] from the current organization of global society (2009, 238). In addition, Marcuse argues: "a comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic restriction prevails a token of technical progress in advanced civilizations" (2002, 1).

Inspired by Kuhn's thought on paradigm shifts in science (1962) it seems that societal transformation is very challenging. Moreover, Meadows argues that paradigms can be seen as the second more powerful place to intervene in a system, as well as no paradigm can claim to contain absolute truth (1999, 19)⁶. Thus, Castoriadis' project of autonomy (democracy) is crucially connected to ecology, because it claims no absolute truth and it critically challenges the heteronomous paradigms, as well as it is a base for the awareness⁷ socio-historical subjects can raise in order to create sustainable living environments.

However, as I argue, the socio-historical subjects who institutionalize a paradigm cannot self-reflect and constructs a non-alternative (unquestionable) framework, which can only shift under immense struggle and pain. In the capitalist imaginary and more extensively in the neoliberal paradigm, technology and science enables mass exploitation while "natural ecosystems give societies economic services of tremendous value" (Speth 2008, 53). It is impossible for the ecosystems to restore and reproduce the same materials in a short period of time and in an amount that forthcoming generations will be able to enjoy.

⁴ As Chomsky argues the term neoliberalism is misleading, because the doctrines are neither new, nor liberal (2013). Although, following the argument of Chomsky I disagree dialectically with the term "neoliberal", however I will use it for reasons of simplification.

⁵ Path Dependency according to Investopedia is "an idea that tries to explain the continued use of a product or a practice based on historical preference or use" (2014).

⁶ Meadows refer to her model of "twelve leverage points to intervene" analysis. A model developed in order to analyze system dynamics in connection to environmental limits to economic growth (2014).

⁷ Awareness, as I perceive it and as described in Baumeister and Bushman "Self-Awareness can make people behave better. Being self-aware makes you compare yourself to moral standards or other ideals" (2011).

1.1 Object of Study

My thesis' overall object of study is to explore and point out the hegemonic discourse of sustainability that shape policy making in the European union and the nation state in my case study (Greece), and to finally criticize the structure of modern society and how discourses and policies shape society and vice versa through the 'project of autonomy'. I will try to project the reasons why sustainability cannot be achieved in the specific formation of society and why autonomy (democracy) is essential in order to achieve it.

Europe is a geopolitical space where capitalism⁸ and the neoliberal⁹ paradigm has been developed and implemented in different levels across member states of the union, affecting and interconnecting sociopolitical environments, economies and the environment on the whole. European union consists of different stakeholders, organizations; governmental and NGO's and in a broader dimension it includes civil society¹⁰.

My focus is to locate the ways in which the hegemonic sustainability discourse that lies in the global capitalistic¹¹ imaginary, part of which is the neoliberal paradigm, shapes policy implementations in the "western world", specifically in the context of the European union. More specifically I will select a specific area of a European nation (Greece) as my case study.

⁸ As Weber argued; capitalisms ultimate goal is the eternal and linear purchase of wealth and profit through a continuous logistic procedure (TXVS 2014).

⁹ "Neoliberalism is a political movement beginning in the 1960s that blends traditional liberal concerns for social justice with an emphasis on economic growth" (The FreeDictionary 2009). Moreover, is important to point out that the neoliberal manifest is a "prevailing pattern of market-oriented, market disciplinary regulatory restructuring" (Peck, Theodore and Brenner 2009, 51). Furthermore, the neoliberalization of social, economic and political processes pervades urban development, planning and governance discourses and practices, and pushes them in a market-oriented direction (Taşan-Kok and Baeten 2012, 1).

¹⁰ Civil society also includes social movements and is often described as key actor for enabling societal change (Finlayson 2005, 108; CSCP 2010, 7; Levy and Eagan 2003, 805-806).

¹¹ In my thesis I perceive capitalism as a global phenomenon as well "as an economic and political system in which a country's trade and industry is controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state" (Oxford Dictionaries 2013). However, capitalism is a system that adapts in different societal and cultural contexts all around the world.

In the specific case study that I have chosen, it is repeatedly pointed out that the specific policies that the Greek state and the mining companies are trying to enforce, are embedded in the hegemonic sustainability discourse which always refers to growth, progress and development as means of economic prosperity through private-free enterprise. Specifically, I will examine the perceptions of sustainability in Skouries, Khalkidhiki, Greece and the impacts there are on the environment and society when specific actors and “knowledge producers” imply policies in practice¹²¹³. Finally, I use the project of autonomy to criticize the hegemonic discourse and the implemented policies derives from this in order “to question the essential core of capitalistic imaginary, meaning new values are needed to be introduced into socio-historical life” (Castoriadis 2010, 115). However, the discursive analysis that I use can be located in various different formations around the world, while the project of autonomy can be applied universally.

My approach and method is based on qualitative data, including document analysis of secondary sources and data as well as documentary review and critique. The phenomena studied encompass a frame dating back to the 1990s and continuing till now, within the European context and the Greek context. These categories are and have to become understandable as mutually interactive and inclusive entities.

1.2 Scope and Purpose of the Research and Analysis

"Meadows (1972) has noticed the fact that continued economic growth, which is linked to persistent resource extraction, cannot continue relentlessly due to finite bio-capacity of the planet (see also Global Footprint Network 2010), something that makes change of the status quo inevitable. This perspective is seen as a fact among certain and specific actors of society, but not among others (Buhr 2011, 8). When analyzing these arguments from a discursive perspective, one has to be aware that they are embedded in certain environmental discourses. In my thesis I apply a political ecology approach that emphasizes the existence of both theory and physical

¹² In my research I regard specific actors and “knowledge producers” as any person or people possessing hierarchical position of power to implement agency. Understood as the “socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn 2001, 112). This includes groups of actors such as NGO’s, governments, media, civil society, companies, etc.

¹³ Furthermore, as Hajer sets it, practices are “embedded routines and mutually understood rules and norms”, or: “the sites where language is used” (Hajer 2010, para. 8).

reality in which discourses are embedded. However, a common question lies in each of the discourses, the question of how human ecosystems might look in the future.

My thesis focuses on the ways discourses and their practical outcomes are constructed in the context of European union and more specifically in a national and local level. Furthermore, the thesis is about the way that EU and its member states (Greece in my case) perceive themselves as actors and knowledge producers engaged in reinventing the understanding and practicing sustainability. Escobar points out the complexity between paradigms and the way sustainability can be achieved, when the importance of social movements escape the bureaucratic loop from the bottom (2008). More specifically he says that “sustainability is inextricably entangled in the construction of alternative production paradigms and political orders; they are elements of the same process, this process is in great parts advanced through the cultural politics of social movements and communities in defense of their cultural models of nature” (2008, 103).

My thesis is therefore positioned in the intersection of the construction of the hegemonic environmental discourse, linked to sustainability and the ways in which a European state engage this. Hence it is of particular interest to analyze how policies are connected with specific actors such as the markets, government, academia and businesses. In other words, the solutions or strategies utilized to address perceived problems, “depends first of all on the way in which these problems are framed and defined” (Hajer 1995, 4). Thus an analysis and critique of the understandings of the discourse leads to a better understanding of the fallacies of capitalism.

My research objective result from the above mentioned:

- To examine the hegemonic sustainability (environmental) discourse in which Greece operates and finally to make a critique of the used model through the project of autonomy.

Derived from the above, the problem formulation of my question is as follows:

- What is the hegemonic sustainability discourse in capitalism, and how does it affect the environment and society of Skouries of Khalkidhiki (Greece)?
- Why is the project of autonomy essential in order to achieve sustainability?

This thesis is structured around key contents, which are essential in order to answer the research question. After having introduced the basic guidelines and delineating the thesis purpose, objective and key questions, the second chapter demonstrates the research background. In the third chapter I discuss and analyze the key concepts that are fundamental for the research, I introduce the theoretical context and the analytical model that serve to scrutinize my case study. In chapter four, methodology is outlined. Chapter five focuses on the presentation of the research data, which I analyze and criticize in the next chapter. Finally, key findings are discussed in the conclusive section of chapter seven and reflections on the research follows in the concluding remarks.

2. Research Background: The Imaginary and Sustainability

Several actors have elaborated on different ideas and projections of the future while some of them have created scenarios and discourses. These discourses are essential for Greece, because Greece is a member state of the European union and by being contextualized in the neoliberal capitalistic global paradigm; therefore makes use of them as well. Privatization and Market economy are major tools of the neoliberal paradigm that is fundamentally based on theories by thinkers such as Adam Smith (1776) and Hayek (1996). My research focuses on the hegemonic environmental discourse of sustainability, as well as sociopolitical factors that are essential for understanding the broader environment that at the same time construct contradictive but also corresponding systemic realities. Moreover, I point out the side effects that are produced as a response to historical factors and the ongoing crisis, while their formation often takes a totalitarian appearance.

The historical roots of the European union trace back to the Second World War. West European nations formed the Council of Europe in 1949. On march 25th 1957 “building on the success” of the alliance called European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the European Economic Community (EEC) formed by the Inner Six¹⁴ countries in 1951 and 1958 respectively¹⁵

¹⁴ The Inner Six countries (Germany, France, Italy, Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg) are the countries to which Schuman plan was based upon. This plan was an agreement for these

(European Union 2014). The sign of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 led to the European Monetary Union and introduced elements of a political union. The Treaty of Lisbon in 2007 had a purpose to make the Union “more democratic, more efficient and make it possible to improve addressing global problems, such as climate change, with one voice” (European Union 2012). “European Union’s policies aim to ensure free movement of people, goods, services, and capital, enact legislation in justice and home affairs, and maintain common policies on trade, agriculture, fisheries and regional development” (GASME 2014).

Greece has been a European Union member since 1981. The country has a population of eleven point two million inhabitants. It has been member of Schengen area since 1992 and member of Eurozone since 2001 (European Union 2014). The basic focus area in this study is an area called “Skouries” of Khalkidhiki in the Northern Greece. The study object is a mining field-project that has raised great dispute between Global Investors, the Greek state, markets, the private sector, the workers of the mine and the citizens of the broader area.

In Greece’s case, as I argue, there is a clear political dichotomy that is embedded inside the major political forces, which shape modern Greek politics. On one side the Conservatives-nationalists-liberals are in an alliance with the social democrats and on the other side there is an alliance of the left party. The Left party tries to fulfill the gap that the social democrats created when they abandoned the dream of social democracy that was set in few decades after the Second World War and the Cold War. Furthermore the side effects of the open gap filled by the fascist party. Fascists try to present themselves as a non-systemic, ‘clean-pure’, part of the “patriotic” side of the extreme right wing. They are much like the German Nazi party who created a bloodbath around Europe during the 2nd world war. Apart from that, they hailed and promoted systemic and totalitarian forces, which are still benefited from the structure and the contradictions of modern capitalism and the continuous crisis (war machine economy, the surplus value of the strong capitalists, financial institutions and bank system, etc.). I find it vital to be aware of these imaginaries in order to understand the perceptions of sustainability or

countries in order not to make weapons on their own and not to turn their backs against each other as in the past.

¹⁵ The historical facts are based on the brief history section of the official site of European Union “A Peaceful Beginning-Beginning of Cooperation.”

sustainable development, as it is perceived within the context of the hegemonic discourse of modern capitalism which Greece is part of.

As Buhr argues “it is quite likely that a transformation will happen and is most likely already happening, which is closely interlinked with social and cultural change, as societies and cultures have to adapt to their physical realities” (2011, 12). Accordingly, any transformation would also be a matter of cultural and social adaptation. Whether or not and to what extent humans will be able to actively engage in a process of transitioning the transformation is a question of willingness and imagination (ibid).

On various levels; globally and locally a growing number of organizations, governments and businesses seem to support multiple approaches to aim for different understandings of sustainability, but profound changes, on macro and micro levels, towards the active exploration of alternative models of societies and economies appear to be missing (Buhr 2011, 13). Studies have shown that there is often a discrepancy between existing theoretical knowledge of sustainability, created by different actors of society and their practical implementation (Action Town 2009; Carrington et.al 2010; Harich 2010; Buhr 2011).

3.Theoretical and Analytical Framework of the Research

In this chapter I will contextualize the object of study, followed by defining the core concepts that are essential for the research. The chapter will end in a discussion about the ways in which the utilized political ecology approach is important for understanding and connecting the idea of autonomy and democracy with sustainability.

3.1 Literature Review

This thesis starts with the inquiry of the hegemonic sustainability discourse, which is applied in practice by drawing over the analytical discourse framework of Hajer and concluding with critique through the project of autonomy by Castoriadis, which is essential to sustainability. This chapter displays a brief literature overview relevant to the key concepts as well as to how the question is related to democracy, transitions of the current system and the respective discourses

surrounding sustainability and environmental understanding. However, throughout this thesis relevant literature reviews and critiques are tied in suitable and reasonable ways.

The idea of democracy is ubiquitous and controversial in academic literature as well as in society at large. Especially in the field of social science; various scholars from different disciplines are concerned with this concept. The idea ranges from the disciplines of social science such as sociology and political science to humanities, such as anthropology, history and philosophy. The literature I have chosen varies from older publications to more recent ones; publications connected to democracy-autonomy, sustainability and relevant literature from the field of human ecology and political ecology, as well as publications important for the specific case study I examine. Furthermore, publications important to the broader social science and humanities have been applied.

3.2 Delineation of Key Concepts

The definition of concepts is vital to my research since it is a precondition of what exists between the concepts and the different ways there is made use of them through the hegemonic discourse, in comparison to the use that I choose for my research.

3.2.1 What Is Democracy in Terms of Castoriadis (Trip to Classics)

First of all, the basic socio-historical terms that I will support and connect with the key concepts, that I will analyze afterwards, must be clarified. Castoriadis makes a fair critique when he talks about the definition of the base ground of modern societies, which are defined as “Democracies” or Republics. Castoriadis refers to modern democracies as liberal oligarchies, a term that even the classical libertarian philosophers would have supported (2010, 28, 246). For the philosopher the “original-classic meaning of words is important” (2010, 3).

I have to define thoroughly what Democracy originally was through analysis by scholars and others with focus on the topic. As Birch argues: “The word Democracy comes from the Greek and literally means rule by the people. The assumptions and practices of the Greeks were very different from those of modern democrats (Fotopoulos 1997, 175; Birch 1993, 45). Paul Cartledge argues, democracy literally meant “power-people” (Cartledge 2011) free citizens were “equal before the law” (History 2010). Greece was at the time of Aristotle (fourth century B.C.)

a collection of about 1500 democratic city-states. The most radical, the most stable, the oldest and the longest lasting, of these democratic city-states, was Athens (Cartledge 2011). The Athenian democracy had specific major and secondary institutions with not less important features vitally connected to each other. First of all, there was “Ekklesia” (the assembly of the people, the public sphere) a sovereign governing body that wrote laws and dictated foreign policy. Secondly there was the “Boule”, a council of representatives from the ten Athenian tribes and thirdly there was the "Dikasteria", the popular courts, where citizens argued cases before a group of lottery-selected jurors (History 2010). Moreover, the institutions of “oikos” (the house, the private sphere), the theatre and the “agora” (the “marketplace” and meeting place, the public/private sphere) where major political and social affairs were criticized, which were essential for the Athenian democracy.

The Athenian Democracy has been criticized vastly for being exclusionary, difficult to access and elitist, the institution of slavery and the practice of ostracism (Cartledge 2011; History 2010; Scott 2010). However, I personally believe that critics underestimate the original context of the Athenian Democracy. They derive from very different social paradigms, while their social discourses are entirely different from the ones who support the essential value of direct democracy. For this reason I define these critiques as misleading.

In defense to the Athenian democracy, I will try to argue against the fundamental perceptions of the Athenian democracy that has been developed. First of all, the claim that the Athenian democracy was exclusionary, difficult to access and elitist is because of the definition of free citizens in a specific context in specific time and space. Some centuries ago Rousseau argued: “English men are not free but only the day of voting” (Castoriadis 2010, 225). Moreover, today’s citizens have several tools that they can use to access and connect in an unimaginable scale of time and space¹⁶.

¹⁶ One of the most famous ways is through internet and social media, discussed in Varoufakis (2014). However, as I argue, this way is just one of many ways, that human imagination and creative human capability can produce and institutionalize in order to achieve democracy as in its origins.

Castoriadis defends the first claim by saying that the only real democracy is the direct democracy because it is the only one that rejects and eliminates bureaucracy (2010, 11). Secondly, the institution of slavery was a majority of the known ancient world. Thus, Castoriadis argues that slavery has not been officially abolished in our times, because of the superiority or the nobility of our modern “democracies”, but because of the struggle of the social and civil rights movements against slavery, as well as the recognition of the many groups who struggled for human and civil rights (2010, 31, 77). However, the people who struggled for their demands in the past, through movements, were included in the hegemonic and hierarchical part of the mainstream and became a part of the bureaucratic machine. They lost their radical power to alternate the paradigm that suppressed them in the first place. Furthermore, Marx correctly stated, “the existence of the State is inseparable from the existence of slavery” (Castoriadis 2010, 103). Finally, despite my disagreement with the practice of ostracism, as Cartledge argues, it has “fulfilled its function of aborting serious civil unrest or even civil war” (2011). Consequently, the essential nature of ostracism was to prevent democracy from being destroyed from within, something that in our times can be translated with forms of citizenship elimination, instead of torture, capital punishment and even inhumane imprisonment.

Athenian democracy passed through a crisis, but survived the defeat from Spartans in Cecily during the Peloponnesian war, in 404 BC, only to come to an abrupt end one century later, after the invasion by Macedonians and their general, Alexander the great, in the Athenian city state. Macedonians imposed a heteronomous system of oligarchy with the franchise restricted to the rich (Historyworld 2013). Until modern times Athens has, as part of Greece, been a part of a long tradition of imposed heteronomous systems of governing and hegemony and most recently a part of the representative “liberal oligarchies” (Castoriadis 2010, 4). I argue subsequent to Castoriadis, that the Athenians’ autonomous radical and direct system has never been defeated¹⁷, because the imaginary of socio historical subjects always will be capable of producing and institutionalizing unlimited in-fashion societal realities with the same materials placed in

¹⁷ The term defeat is used because in Greek tradition the process of struggle, the fight was always an ongoing path to change.

different order¹⁸. Furthermore, I argue that heteronomous models are external and repressive impositions against the consensus and against the will of the socio-historical subjects in the first place. Heteronomous models base their establishment, legitimacy and reproduction in a continuous process of creating a status quo, which counts on the general subconscious political passivity of the vigorous autonomous imaginary of the socio historical subjects. The autonomous imaginary can be controlled and repressed through concentration and exposure to a variety of different systemic tools and discourses in heteronomous regimes. As Foucault said it, it is “the deployment of force and the establishment of truth” (1975, 184). Thus, when I refer to democracy I refer to a radical and direct regime based on the principals of the Athenian “Demos” and not on the form of modern “Democracies” or Republics, which Castoriadis define as “liberal oligarchies”.

3.2.2 Why Castoriadis and Why Democracy (The Three Spheres Case)

In order to offer a concrete definition of key concepts in this thesis I bring the justification of democracy forward, as Castoriadis points it out, by making a thorough distinction, definition, and description of the three social spheres that are based on the angle of political and social life (2010, 4). Castoriadis defines the three spheres: the private sphere including people’s strictly personal life; a public sphere, in which the decisions that automatically apply to everyone are publicly sanctioned. Last but not least, a sphere called the public/private sphere, which is open to all but where there is no place for political power, not even if exerted by the collectivity: “it is the sphere where people discuss, publish, go to the theatre and so on” (ibid). As he argues, in present time the private sphere and the public/private are confused, especially under the influence of Arendt after she had formulated her arguments about them (2000). Castoriadis makes a fierce critique of the way the term “civil society” is used by intellectuals and the insufficiency between the opposition of civil society and the state, which for him does not give us the means for conceptualizing a democratic society (2010, 4). Unlike supporters of civil society, Castoriadis believed that a movement within the limits set by the system, could not radically change society. “Only a rapture with the system (both at individual and societal level) can bring about a radical change” (2010; Gezerlis 2001, 473).

¹⁸ Castoriadis argued that history is an area of human creativity that is framed in a specific context but not determined. Furthermore, “every human action creates new possibilities and if it is important it creates even new forms of socio-historical ontologies” (Castoriadis 2010, 291).

Furthermore, as he continues, “under totalitarianism, the three spheres are completely merged.” “In liberal oligarchies (representative democracies) there is a more or less clear domination of the public sphere by one part of the public/private sphere (“Marketplace”, the economy) and at the same time, elimination of the true public character of the public sphere (the private, secretive nature of today’s State)” (Castoriadis 2010, 4). In defense of democracy he extends his argument by saying that “democracy is the correct articulation of those three spheres, with the public sphere becoming public in fact” (ibid). For this to happen it is required from each socio-historical and political subjects “to participate in the management of the community affairs, which in turn requires institutions enabling people to participate and inciting them to do so, something which in turn is impossible without effective political equality” (ibid). In contrast to that, Orwell’s metaphorical argument about the inequality in the “Animal Farm” speaks about the way that “liberal oligarchies” are structured in complete opposition to the fundamental principals of democracy (1996).

As it has been described above, I perceive democracy in its original-classic definition, in the context that Castoriadis uses it, in order to explain and further analyze the terms that he uses to connect sustainability in a radical way to an, as I assume, unfamiliar audience.

3.2.3 Heteronomy and The Project of Autonomy

Castoriadis’ project of autonomy has been criticized by many scholars, as a project of utopia (2010). The philosopher argues against this criticism not only as being non valid but also essentially wrong. By taking the original meaning of the word utopia Castoriadis argues that such term means something that do not exist and cannot exist. However, what he refers to, “the project of autonomy” is the project of individual and collective autonomy, not a utopia, “but a socio historical project susceptible of being achieved, and which has never been shown to be impossible” (2010, 3). Individual autonomy is impossible without social autonomy and vice versa. Both are two interwoven dimensions of autonomy. Furthermore, individual autonomy is only possible when the individuals take a direct part in the formation and the implementation of the social laws, which condition their activity (Fotopoulos 1998, 158). “The autonomy of individuals has the equal participation of all in power as a context, without which there is obviously no freedom, just as there is no equality without freedom” (Castoriadis 1991, 137). Moreover, the uprising of individual consciousness is vital for realization of an autonomous

society (from Greek: auto, by itself and nomos, law). Thus, “it is the project of a society in which all citizens have an equal, effective possibility of participating in legislating, governing and judging, and at last in analysis and in instituting society” (2010, 3).

Castoriadis brings out two great transitional examples to prove that this project happened in the past in the European imaginary space, these two examples refer to Ancient Athens and the Enlightenment period (Curtis 1991, 81-123). However, Castoriadis never argued that autonomy couldn't be traced in societies outside the “West”¹⁹. Moreover, he states, “If society is about to change, a radical change is needed in the interests and the attitudes of human beings. The passionate desire for consumer goods must be replaced by passionate care about community affairs” (2010, 5). As he argues, “all societies are self-creative and yet most utterly incapable of questioning their own established norms” (ibid). In such societies, the de-facto situation immediately coincides without remainders of de-jure validity for them (ibid). “Such a society, which does not or cannot question its own norms or even consider its norms to be given by God, gods, nature, history, ancestors, and so forth, is a heteronomous in opposition to autonomous societies” (Curtis 1997, 406). Thus, heteronomous societies are the ones, where ‘truth’ is what conforms the established modes of representation (Castoriadis 2010, 58).

Furthermore, what distinguish autonomous societies from heteronomous societies is the fact that “Autonomy exists only when we create the institutions which, by being internalized by individuals, must facilitate their accession to their individual autonomy and their effective participation in all forms of explicit power existing in society” (Curtis 1997, 405). A vital element of autonomy is awareness of the socio-historical subjects and their unique ability (their political dimension) to construct the law and its limits equally and only by themselves. Autonomy means not only that tradition can be questioned but also that everything can be posed in question (Gezerlis 2001, 472). Such a process comes in perfect agreement with what Hobsbawm called “the invention of tradition” (1992). Consequently, when Castoriadis speak

¹⁹ When I refer to the “West”, I refer to a specified context, which was developed during the industrial revolution. Such civilizations are the western civilization and the U.S.A. However the term is very ambiguous and as I argue it includes, after the Second World War, civilizations, which have been introduced to the discourses and the practices that this paradigm embeds in the neoliberal economic global paradigm.

about the imaginary institution, he takes the word institution “in the deepest, broadest sense, meaning the entire set of tools, language skills, norms and values” (2010, 46).

In Greek the word polis stands for the city. A city is constituted by ‘polites’ (citizens) who by their political manifestation constitute and construct theoretically and physically the limits of their existential and cosmological reality. Although Aristotle’s thought has been criticized vastly, he was right when he defined human beings as political animals (Stanford 2011). As I argue, human beings are political animals constructed from two characteristics that constitute the essential socio-historical, ecological and political dimension of their existence. They are at the same time part of nature, and unique in the way that their imaginary can produce and institutionalize unlimited in fashion societal realities with the same materials in different order. Beilharz argues, “Even in the most fearful situations we create, we apply anthropological intelligence, we work against the current” (2006, 325). By pointing to this phrase I want to argue that any form of determination is rejected as a fallacy and misinterpretation based on the idea of a utilitarian and fixed “human nature”. Such an idea-part of the capitalist imaginary (Smith 1776; Althousser 1965; Rousseau, 1997; Hobbes 1965) has majorly affected the construction of the neoliberal paradigm that we live in and it exposes an aspect of the irrationality of this paradigm.

As Castoriadis argues, “the creative power of human beings, their power to change what exists, is indeterminable and unforeseeable by nature and by definition” (2010, 205). Furthermore, Kiopkiolis argues, “the embryonic terms of a generic capacity for self-activation can bear fruit if they are planted in rich soil. Contemporary workshops of self-government and creative praxis precisely assume the vital role of a catalyst and hotbed for the constitution of autonomous subjectives” (2012, 231). In extend he brings the example of someone who attempts to learn to swim, as someone who have to step up to his action and no theoretical or psychic preparation will help him to learn, if he do not act (Kioupkiolis 2012, 231; Hegel 1977).

Furthermore, some scholars claim that power and agency is mediated to people in socially and culturally conveyed ways and structures, which in turn are reinforced or altered by agency (Giddens 1979, 49-51; Ahearn 2001, 117). Furthermore, Gezon completes Ahearn, when he says “agency or the ability of an individual to act, emerges within specific contexts and cannot be

considered as ontological prior to action itself” (Gezon 2005, 148). Adding to that, Escobar sees individual agents as the ones that have the ability to create “places as strategic possibilities” through agency (2008, 357). Moreover, political ecology goes beyond theoretical and methodological contexts and enters the area of “recommendations for action” (Paulson, Gezon and Watts, 2005, 30). In connection to Castoriadis, the paragraph tries to make it understandable that there are limits in the ways knowledge is produced and put in practice, but on the other hand there are unlimited ways to use the existing tools, in order to produce new realities in conception and in fashion. Bookchin, one of the prominent thinkers of political ecology, argued that “the means of tearing down the old are available, both as hope and as peril, so too are the means for rebuilding” at a political level (1982, 347). He further characterizes the ruins “as mines for recycling the wastes of an immensely perishable world into the structural materials of one that is free as well as new” (ibid). This can be translated through a Feminist Standpoint Theory as a standpoint which is earned through the experience of collective political struggle, a struggle that requires, as Nancy Hartsock puts it, both science and politics (Harding 2004, 8).

Finally, in order to be more explicit on what the project of autonomy is, I argue that autonomy is a direct democratic procedure where the socio-historical subjects (humans) are aware of their constructive and institutive power of law without any external or above (hierarchical) imposition. The socio-historical (and political) subjects of the autonomous regime have the ability to self-reflect, self-regulate and self-limit, which leads to sustainable existence of both the individuals and the society (the environment included) at large.

3.2.4 Discourse, Storylines, Capitalist imaginary and The Neoliberal paradigm

“Knowledges²⁰ are being constructed and interlinked with various discourses” (Buhr 2011, 20). Dryzek defines discourse as “a shared way of apprehending the world” (2005, 9). Moreover, Hall refers to “a system of representation” (2001, 72). This specific form of statements are claimed to be true and valid in particular moments of history (2001, 74). Dryzek argues that discourses contain assumptions about different understandings of the world, for example how different

²⁰ Although grammatically knowledges is a non-existed phenomenon, it is used to stress out the multiple and diverse behavior and nature of human ecology and political ecology. There is always a plurality of knowledges with the help of which human beings perceive themselves, self-define and reflect, analyze and explain themselves and their multiple layers of their environments.

people “construct meanings and relationships” (1997; 2005, 9). Moreover, discourses are intrinsically linked to power as the “condition the perceptions and values of those subject to them” (Dryzek 2005, 9).

However, discourses are not solely connected to the realm of language, Hajer points to the “institutional dimension of discourse, considering where things are said and how specific ways of seeing can be structured or embedded in society at the same time as they structure society” (1995, 263). Thus, discourses are connected to language as a “form of social action” (Ahearn 2001, 110) through which they are communicated. Furthermore, Hajer uses the concept of storylines that he defines as “narratives on social reality through which elements from many different domains are combined and that provide actors with a set of symbolic references that suggest a common understanding”, for him storylines are “political devices” as well as ‘discursive practice’” (1995, 62-63).

For Castoriadis, “language is both the vehicle and the essential tool for structuring the world. It is both the natural and the social world, the rational lineaments of every reality in general”. He continues: “it is historically instituted and in each instance the language instituted is different [...] what languages have in common is the ability to signify, to becoming a world of significations” (2010, 112). The interconnection of knowledge, power, language and discourses are vital for understanding the way practices and perceptions are formed between the members of society and also how they are correlated with the different scales of their thinking, acting and instituting. Moreover, Hajer argues “language has the capacity to make politics, to create signs and symbols that shift power balances, to render harmless events or, on the contrary, to create political conflict” (2005, 179). Furthermore, Foucault argues in “History of Sexuality” that power relations are inherent in other types of relationships such as economic processes, knowledge relationships, and sexual relations (1978, 94-96). “Power relations are the immediate effect of divisions, inequalities, and disequilibrium that occur in these relationships. Furthermore, he points out that power relations have a direct productive role” (ibid).

Castoriadis describes these dimensions as the neoliberal paradigm; he tries to see the fundamental ingredients of the capitalist imaginary as they have been carried to us through

history as legacy from the 18th but already started with the first reformative movements of the 11th century in Western Europe. He argues that liberal systems do not resort to constraint but to a vague semi-attachment of the population, something that has been adopted from the capitalist imaginary; accordingly the goal of human life is unlimited expansion of production and consumption, “called material well being” (Castoriadis 2010, 4).

Going further than that, Castoriadis adds that, the outcome of this procedure is a totally privatized population; consequently people withdraw themselves from participation in political life (ibid). Moreover, he argues, that all of these characteristics are based on fundamental values and on ‘the soul’ of capitalism, which is an unlimited expansion of “rational” mastery (2010, 62). This replaces the previous fundamental value, which was expressed through the absolute power of god and his representatives on earth. This has remained “inactive” for ten centuries (ibid). The imaginary is reactivated from social movements’ struggle against specific forms of oppression (the struggle of the movements is a struggle of autonomy contesting the heteronomy of the established-imposed hegemonic imaginary of absolute truth²¹ of the previous model). Nowadays, writers such as Smith (2008), Keck and Sikkink (1998), started to focus on social movements, activism, international and ecological networks as a response.

Thus, Castoriadis goes even further explaining aspects of the idea of “rational” mastery, while he criticizes Marx’s idea of historical materialism, which has vastly influenced modern civilization, and he points out “that capitalist technology and the so called rational organization of production, aims at transforming workers into passive objects, into pure executants of tasks circumscribed, controlled and determined from outside by an apparatus for managing production” (2010, 110). Furthermore, Marcuse argues that “when technic becomes the universal form of material production it circumscribes an entire culture; it projects a historical totality; a world” (1964, 154).

3.2.5 Mastery of Nature? A Very Brief Critique of Modernity

Descartes urged, some centuries ago, that human beings should try to be masters of nature (Cress 1998, 61-62). As Castoriadis argues, modern humans have placed their existence in relation to

²¹ My project is influenced also from ideas about the construction of reality that Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow exposed in their book “The Grand Design” (2010).

nature as a relation of power and hegemony over it (2010, 185). It was an effort to set nature as a sum of passive objects, and society as a subject of rational mastery, an idea that Marx also contributed to (Louloudis 1986, 22). Furthermore, Castoriadis continues; “in reality this is an insane statement, however this is the reality of the modern world” (2010, 185). The relation between nature and society is a relation that is constructed and set for every society. However, that does not indicate a deterministic relationship but a continuous interaction between nature and society, where society base its fundamental existence on the base of nature, while “nature” sets, projects and becomes “alive” differently in different societies and periods (Castoriadis 2010, 185).

Fernand Braudel, points out the essential importance of religion in the formulation of civilizations in his book “A history of Civilizations”. He argues: “religion is the strongest feature of civilizations, at the heart of both their present and past” (1995, 22). It is thus essential to point out the importance of religion in the way that societies are formed and the way they project their ‘realities’ internally (the representation that members of societies construct their reality in specific time and space in order to constitute) and externally (the representation and the power interrelations with external subjects and objects outside of a specific reality). In Christianity (and in further extend in all the “great” monotheistic religions) as Weber points out, god created human beings, in contrast to Greek gods who gave birth to a mortal and imperfect humanity as they were, something that leads the Christian God to be a kind father but also a strict and punishing patriarchal king. He is a king who rewards obedience of ‘his ship’ (humans) and strictly punishes disobedience (2005, 216).

As I argue, this “king god” is the one who prevailed the imaginary creation of the modern “democratic” state, even in its capitalistic form by wearing a cloak of rational mastery of nature and used work as a means of reward and salvation against “laziness” (Lafarge 1999) which has to be prosecuted and punished. As Guattari and Negri argue in their polemic, we have to “involve all the projects of awakening and building towards liberation, anything that helps to reclaim mastery over work time, the essential component of life time” (2010, 30). However, to continue my argument, I should mention the translation that perceive work as means of salvation and reward, is mainly, but not only, promoted from Protestantism and it has been expanded in

modernity because of its historical connection to the industrial revolution and the technological advantage that the states, who adopted it, have taken of it. Its expansion took place through the process of colonization in the previous centuries, through world war domination, in our days through education systems, and through the strategy of “exporting democracy” through the dialectics of western ethicism. A great example is the slogan “work make you free” (Vashem 1990, vol 4, 1751) that was placed over the entrances of many Nazi concentration camps during the second ‘World War’. I argue, outlining Weber’s, and Marx thoughts, this phrase embodies the absolute truth of capitalist imaginary in relation to eternal growth and expansion, as well as liberation and the reach of heaven through work in its more radical form. An obsession that also was a central idea of Communist regimes. However, as Fotopoulos argues, democracy is incompatible with the two versions of the growth economy (capitalist and socialist-Marxist). Democracy with its classical-original meaning is a regime of an equal share of power (1997, 171). The idea of Maximization of production and the development of productive forces through the expansion of technology and science is opposite to the term democracy.

Capitalism’s fundamental ideological ingredient is “rationalism: it alleges knowledge, competence, its scientific character, and so on” (2010, 114) Castoriadis argues. He also argues that “pseudo-rationality is the keystone of the imaginary of the society, something that is also true for Marxist ideology, which has become a secular state religion” (ibid). One great example that exposes the irrationality of this system that Marx also believed in, was perceiving technology as means of progress, so human labor would reduce the working hours per day, and workers would focus on other “liberating” activities. Such a prophecy has been completely disproven by the facts of the irrationality of this “rational” system that we live in. In this loop it is thus the hegemony of technology and science as two main domains of the discourse of rationality that construct modernity and capitalist imaginary.

When Castoriadis refers to the capitalist imaginary, he also points out a paradox, the paradox of bureaucracy as an achievement in the west, or as absolute and totalitarian systems in the east, where both regimes are based on the hierarchical structure of managers and workers. Moreover, Castoriadis points out that “the passivity of contemporary people rest on the imaginary signification: techno-science as capable of solving problems in their stead” (2010, 141), as a

response to that he suggests, we have to release ourselves from these contemplate generalizations: “science knows or will know everything, science does not know anything” (2010, 185). Thus, Fayerabend argued that: science is one of the many forms of thought that have been developed by man, and not necessarily the best. It is conspicuous, noisy, and impudent, but it is inherently superior only for those who have already decided in favor of a certain ideology (1975, 295).

3.2.6 Sustainability, Sustainable Development Discourse and The Dominant Storylines

Sustainability in capitalist imaginary can be found in many different forms. From recycling and reusing materials, to new technological innovations, there can be a major field of theoretical and practical systemic and controlled approaches that serves the specific formation of modes of production and consumption. However, in my point of view, sustainability is a political act, a prose of life, where consciously we realize our living stand as part of nature. It is a struggle to preserve our existence in order to survive and extend our life expectancy as a species within natural and socio-historical environments. A key factor of this struggle is the structural approach of our theoretical thinking (ideological landscape) and its practical application. Perceiving our existence mono-dimensionally in a hierarchical and antagonistic environment, between the members of our species as well as externalizing and placing us above the rest of nature, is a struggle for acceleration of pain and destruction of what sustain us in the first place.

A variety of different discourses have been developed through time in order to analyze and achieve ecological sustainability in the context of the modern societies. Different discourses, narratives and storylines of achieving sustainability have been developed among different stakeholders. However, only few of them have become mainstream while competing, contradicting, or collaborating with the hegemonic neoliberal paradigm.

The way I perceive sustainability traces its roots back to the indigenous people of Latin America’s understanding where they refer to “Mother Earth” (Pachamama), as a context which includes human society and nature in the same system. Their perception lies over the perception that we humans have to live in harmony and balance with nature that includes an equal

distribution of natural resources in order to sustain existence. Nature is everything around and inside of us. It is a system of cycles interlinked with each other (Solon 2014)²².

Furthermore, I perceive sustainability as the “integral and multidimensional character of the practices of effective appropriation of ecosystems”, as defined by Escobar and Paulson (2005, 270) while they recognize cultural, economic and ecological dimensions of phenomena. As Ehrenfeld argues, sustainability is “an outcome of the way we chose to live our lives” (2008, 8) an argument proves that alternative paradigms linked with sustainability can occur though the reconstruction of the imaginary institutions of society as Castoriadis sets it (1998). Furthermore, Castoriadis pointed out the great importance of ecology and the urgent call for sustainability, a procedure that contradicts with the “obsession to rationality” from the west, the “mastery over nature”, the idea of the unlimited and linear development of the means of production and the increase of bureaucracy and automatization of techno-science (Castoriadis and Cohn-Bendit 1981, 32; 1993).

Regarding the term *sustainability*, it goes back to 1980’s when it was utilized as part of what Dryzek would call the “sustainable development discourse” (2005, 145). One of the first to define sustainable development was the Brundtland commission (UN 1987)²³. In the 21st century, sustainable development was often criticized for sustaining dominance in the system of economic growth (Daly 2008), which is not sustainable with the Earth’s resources (Global Footprint Network 2010).

In our days, sustainable development is conceptualized as a hegemonic discourse through the work of Maarten Hajer (Bingham 2010, 1). Therefore, the construction of a new, moral and ethical view of nature is required to take the interests and values of all living creatures into account (Pepperman 1996). Regarding global socio-environmental change and sustainability

²² For example, the extreme concentration of CO₂ emissions has direct effects on the cycle of water through the melt of ice, etc.

²³ UN’s definition was significant because it was used for the first time on the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992. Dryzek argued that the UN however was not the first to utilize the term. The concept could also be found in the discussion about Renewable Resource Management as well as when sustainable development was a “radical discourse” for the “Third World” (2005, 145).

several scholars applied world system theories such as in Alf Hornborg and Crumley's anthology (2007). The analysis of flows and networks in relation to the above-mentioned changes began increasingly to constitute awareness of many scientists in the 90's, as Mol²⁴ points out (2010, 71). Escobar (2008) and Sassen (2006) drew assemblages to understand these changes. Furthermore, governments could be seen to strengthen the ties between eco-modernist²⁵ thinking and neoliberal economic discourse (Hajer 2005, 179).

Sustainable development "differs to what human needs count, what is to be sustained, for how long, to whom, and in what terms" (Dryzek 2005, 146). In Dryzek's analysis of the development of environmental discourse he highlighted the hegemonic position in the political discourse of the concept of 'industrialism'. He pointed out the obsession of industrialism that it is "in terms of its overarching commitment to growth in the quantity of goods and services and to the material well-being that growth brings (2005, 13). Furthermore, Buttel, Hawkins and Power argue that the dominating environment discourse in the 1980's had changed from "limits to growth to global change" in the 1990's (1990, 57). However, it has been supplemented with new approaches of how to "tackle" environmental problems at stake. One example is that the thinking and the approach of academia are connected to action research on the level of organizations and movements, in field and tribal studies. Such approaches seem to increasingly emerge as Burns argue (2007). Consequently as I argue, industrialism is a fundamental element of the construction of the capitalist imaginary as well as being embedded in the discourses and the practices deriving from this imaginary.

Sustainable development has two dominant storylines²⁶. The first is the one that forms and shapes sustainable development (SD) ²⁷ perceives growth through vast privatization,

²⁴Mol argues for example that Global Change discourse strengthens through "the old idea of global ecological interconnectedness" (2001).

²⁵ Hajer defines ecological modernization as "the discourse that recognizes the structural character of the environmental problematic but none the less assumes that existing political, economic, and social institutions can internalize the care for the environment (1995, 25).

²⁶ The concept of this storyline has been explained in **3.2.4**. The two dominant storylines as defined above are the Socio-Economic Development one (which is the one that essentially shapes the implementation of policies in practice) and the Socio-Environmental Development

competitiveness, economic growth, job opportunities-flexibility and a set of financial institutions (Bingham 2010, 31). It has a focus on socio-economic development. This could include incremental as well as external systemic change by opening new markets in a national economy. The substantial characteristic of this vision is that the majority of people worldwide, nowadays, perceive it positively in regard to their livelihoods (ibid). The alternative displays the rapid decrease of ability for all people to sustain their livelihoods whether this includes a breakdown or a continuation of current economic and social systems. It focuses on socio-environmental development. The eminent feature of this vision is that the majority of people would describe their situation as negative regarding to their livelihoods (ibid).

Thus, sustainable development discourse (with both dominant storylines) has become the hegemonic sustainability discourse in the European Union, as well as in its nation states. For this reason, the main focus of my research and of the critique will be based on this discourse. Furthermore, I argue that sustainability by being embedded in the capitalist imaginary and the neoliberal paradigm has been transformed to a bureaucratic tool and is perceived in a specific way, which is essentially connected to growth and development through technology and science. Thus, Castoriadis project of autonomy express a radical approach both as a critique to capitalist imaginary and to sustainable development discourse including its storylines.

3.3 Political Ecology Approach

“Ecology is primarily political; it is not scientific. Science, as such, is unable to set its own limits or its ends” (Castoriadis 2010, 197).

Political ecology is one of the most fertile areas in studying and analyzing this thesis’ case study, as it puts emphasis on the multiple layers and perspectives of understanding and exploring phenomena. I argue that change toward alternative paradigms connected to sustainability is essentially connected to power, pointing out Agrawal’s argument that “the environment always

(Which although it is not the mainstream one, in our days has gained much attention and alternates the major paradigm as this has been set from the socio-economic storyline).

²⁷ The most famous definition for SD, which is also internationally adopted, is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED 1987, 43). Further analysis of the term will take place at chapters 3 and 5.

involve power/knowledges and subjectives and are always mediated by institutions” (2005, 203). Social institutions take part in the knowledge/power procedure, which lies in the basis of resource distribution. At this point, my research is on the same line as Martinez Alier’s description of political ecology “as the study of distribution conflicts” (Escobar 2008, 6).

In addition, I perceive political ecology through the lens of Castoriadis, where problems are embedded in a heteronomous closure of the society which embraces hegemonic discourses and make them part of its endogenous discourses. It is a self-trap that societies get caught in and only under unpredictable circumstances this unique endogenous reality will be contested and questioned. In conclusion, I draw my basic thoughts about ecology through Castoriadis’ understanding, where “ecology is subversive, it questions the capitalist imaginary that is prevailed everywhere” (2010, 194).

For Castoriadis ecology is primarily political and not “scientific” (2010, 197). However this brings the question of the political “faces” that ecology can change into and if there are ethical limits to its politico-ideological dimensions. It is historically proven and it is obviously, as I argue, in line with Castoriadis, that neither ethos nor meaning exists prior to the one we give to our lives as individuals and societies at large. Castoriadis and Gooch pointed out historical examples where ecological movements and scholars stood on the side of totalitarianism such as fascism and Nazis, far right parties, “national-socialists” and Communists-Stalinists (2010, 194; Gooch’s presentation 2013). As mentioned before, it is important to focus on the mingling of the three spheres as Castoriadis set them, when we analyze the sociopolitical background.

Another essential and tricky part, as I argue, is the confusion of the public and the private/public sphere, as well as a heteronomous societal hierarchical structure existence (where political parties “represents” people). As long as this distorted political formation will remain, where passive political subjects will delegate their will and power to representatives, this power will be used against people’s interest with the danger of being expressed in the most violent forms; through totalitarian forces.

My argument is going further than the point above. I presume that political ecology is an essential part of human ecology. If one presumes that human ecology is a study of the relationship between human and nature and one sees the mix-collide of the three spheres in the totalitarian regimes with their form of production, one can draw specific results. First of all there are absolute realities that always have the intension to expand in the case of totalitarianism (Arendt 1958). Second of all, their form of production is based on the linear progress of technological development at the highest levels of an ideal capitalism, while creating fully passive, isolated, individual human machines (ibid; Castoriadis 2010, 200). Thirdly, nature is perceived in a way that although it interacts with human beings it is always there to be mastered for the sake of systemic expansion in a deterministic fashion (Heidegger 1996). For me there is no way such a thing can be perceived as a feasible solution of survival and transformation in a sustainable paradigm. For that reason, I argue that democracy, which is based on the project of autonomy, is essential for survival and for an ecological paradigm to occur, because aware socio-historical subjects create their self-limitations on a free will basis in a societal context. Moreover, in an autonomous society, nature is perceived as a part of human society and sustainability derives from a balanced way of living with what Aristotle would have called “phronesis” (cautiousness) (Castoriadis 2010, 195; Eckersley 1992, 173; Hansson 2003).

Political ecology, compared to other approaches or disciplines of scientific inquiry, emphasizes nature on an interdisciplinary scale, to offer space to create a synthesis of knowledge. Thus above all, political ecology is deeply established in the process “of reconstructing the world in an ecological sustainable, social just, and culturally pluralistic manner” (Escobar and Paulson 2005, 274). Additionally, the political ecology framework incorporates with other theoretical stances such as: world system analysis, system theory, etc. The above mentioned approaches are vital for respecting the multi-scale analysis of political ecology since it underlines the importance of research phenomena on the whole as a part of larger integrative wholes (Escobar 2008, 291). System theory is essentially connected to world system analysis (Wallerstein 2004), in which world system is understood as “inter-societal networks where interaction is an important condition of the internal structure of the composite units and generates change in these local structures” (Gassón 2007, 163).

4. Methodology and Methodological Approach

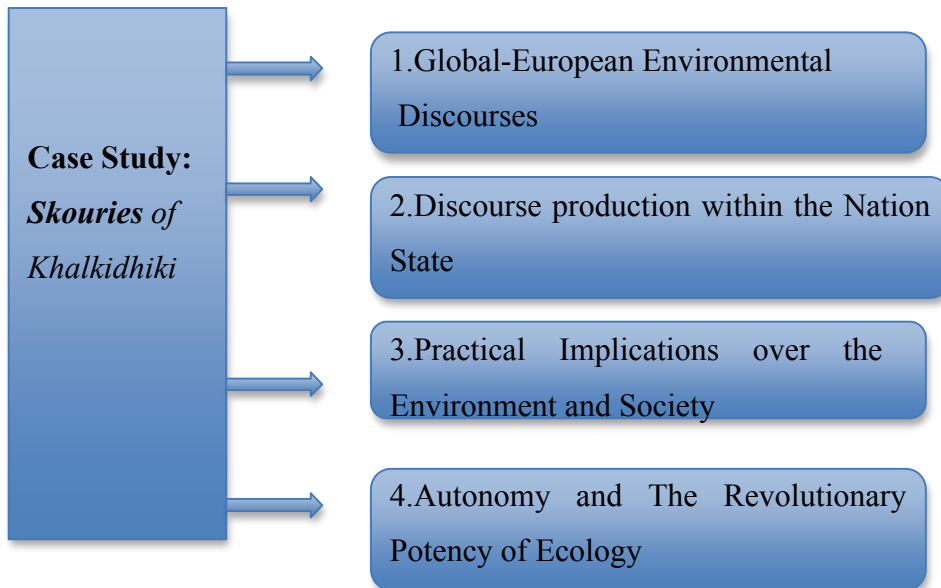
My research's goal is to combine both practical "realistic" stances and theoretical approaches within a political ecology and discursive analysis frame. This includes a methodological approach focusing on a thorough interpretation. The part of methodological and analytical research "is affected by larger economic and political systems as well as discursive and cultural constructions of the environment" (Paulson, Gezon and Watts 2005, 31). Tools such as system theory as well as world system analysis are essential for my thesis and will be embedded and used in order to construct and analyze my data and explicitly point out my results and critique.

My interest about the specific case study in Skouries, started after watching a documentary about the ecological degradation that the mining procedure in the area have caused and the violent respond the government and the private companies, who are involved in this case, have given the citizens. I am fully aware that my role as a researcher examining this case includes a variety of perspectives and discourses and I have to be as critical as I can be. However as Castoriadis argued, ecology is mainly a political tool. The ecological dimension can be polemic and a political stand against a hierarchical and bureaucratic system that functions irrationally and creates "externalities" as part of its illusion of mastery of nature, eternal and linear progress and the tyranny of an absolute knowledge that comes through technology and science.

4.1 Analytical Model

This research is a study of specific discourses, actors, and networks that constitute the hegemonic power relations as well as a radical critique. Svarstad offers a methodological tool of political ecology while arguing that is important to begin with a broader picture and then focus on the meso and micro levels on a deeper level (2005, 239). What is brought out is a combination of Hajer's analytical discourse framework, Svartstad's analytic model and a critique through Castoriadis' project of autonomy and the revolutionary potency of ecology, through a four level analysis from the global to local level; since Skouries is located in a specific area. In addition, Svarstad enables discourse production by locating it in a political ecology approach, which is vital for my research. However, I will adjust her model in my analysis to the specific needs of my case.

Figure 1: Four Level Analysis of Skouries



Source: My own illustration based on Svarstad concept (2005)

The previous sections have delineated the ways in which political ecology is applied in my thesis and how tools such as system theory as well as world system analysis are used. The above are embedded in a discursive approach, as showed in the next section. In my thesis' theories are interacting and are always interconnected.

4.2 Discursive Approach and Critique

The discourse analysis is a central method of my thesis. In order to understand the perceptions that have been developed between the actors in my case it is vital to scrutinize their ideas of reality and the status quo. More specifically, I will examine the key themes and discourses expressed and implemented in the area of Skouries through the findings of document analysis. Although there is a vast amount of environmental studies and literature, I have chosen to focus mainly on Hajer (1995), because his theoretical and analytical framework is well suited for the analysis of sustainability in my case study, for a variety of reasons. He offers a historical contextualization of the discourses in time and space, which is central for political ecology. Through Hajer's approach I will draw my arguments to analyze sustainable discourse in which

he perceives “politics as a struggle for discursive hegemony in which actors try to secure support for their definition of reality” (1995, 59).

In the end, I will scrutinize, criticize and deconstruct the hegemonic and mainstream discourse of sustainability through the project of autonomy and the revolutionary potency of ecology as Castoriadis (2010) defines it and I will try to point out the endless possibilities humans have to reclaim their social and natural environment and escape from heteronomous structural passivity.

4.3 Data Collection Methodology

The methodological selection of data was undertaken based on different criteria. Firstly, the methods had to be suitable for the research, regarding also economy of time and space. Secondly, the methods had to match with the criteria and to be significant with human ecology and political ecology approaches. I choose the qualitative secondary data analysis in my research because it was difficult to have access to administrative or other primary sources in the first place. I selected interviewed²⁸ people who have diverse social and political stances, from the Exandas document directed by Avgeropoulos, articles, and researches previously done, in order to get a better understanding of the ideas formed by individuals and the respective discourses in which they were embedded. Furthermore, the main research method of my study was document analysis. This included the analysis of scientific sources and documents, which enables historical and discursive contextualization of the study phenomena.

4.4 Reflections upon Methodology

In my research I tried to be as critical as possible. I used qualitative data from diverse sources, which added a more concrete, coherent and objective stance. However, methodology as embodies researchers’ opinion, shapes the results and vice versa. On the other hand, there are certain criteria derived from the scientific data, which made my project trustworthy. Furthermore, limitations of data had to be considered in order to save space and time for the specific research.

²⁸ The people selected are interviewed for the Documentary Exandas, directed by Giorgos Avgeropoulos (2012).

5. Background, Key Contents and The Case Study

5.1 Sustainability in The Hegemonic Discourse

In response to increased criticism of ‘development’ activities, a new discourse began to take shape in a global institutional setting of ‘sustainable development’ (SD). Sustainable development can be seen as a discursive shift (Bingham 2010, 9). As the promised universal benefits fail to materialize, the concept of sustainability has been used to modify development in an attempt to resolve the contradictions between rapidly degrading natural environment and sustained economic growth (Rist 2007, 487). Therefore, whether good or bad, SD is no longer a topic of debate. The SD proliferates in various discursive arenas, such as national governments, academia, private sector, NGO’s and civil society. However ambiguous as terminology, “continues to structure the identities of individuals and groups with disparate social and cognitive commitments whilst the rally around its symbolic representation of an ultimately manageable social and environmental reality” (Hajer 1995, 10). Hajer also notes that the SD discourse “has made it possible to create a global discourse-coalition in environmental politics for the first time” (1995, 14), which fulfills the two basic conditions as evidence of a hegemonic discourse: institutionalization and structuralization (1995, 60-61). Moreover, the global SD discourse is sustained by various definitions, assumptions and storylines that position nature, indigenous people and accordingly civil society, which I will not examine further in this thesis.

However, in the context of global summits and agreements, new alternatives can be generated. Haque argues that there is a relative lack of consideration within the SD discourse for many indigenous communities that already live out sustainably, meeting the human needs of their societies while preserving land and nature, and yet associated with backwardness (2000, 14). The argument above confirms that the project of autonomy and the potency of ecology can be found all around the world and not only in the west. This is proved because indigenous people fulfill the fundamental principals of autonomy, and can be recognized through the democratic self-limitations and awareness about natural environment and their connection to it [example of Gujjars tribe] (Castoriadis 2010, 227; Gooch’s presentation 2013; Goleman 2009, 92-93). On the other hand, when we talk about the capitalist global imaginary and its relation with the expansion of urbanism, we have to be clear as Lewis argues: “nature itself conspires against utopian plans

of harmonious living, disproving environmentalists who support the idea of ‘returning back to nature’” (1992, 95). Something that means, as I argue, that a romanticized approach towards nature is misleading. ‘Returning’ to nature, as a process of rejecting the humanitarian and civic achievements of modern civilization, is not feasible and viable.

5.2 Case Study Background

My case study is about Skouries mines of Greece, the largest mines of the Cassandra mines in the northern Khalkidhiki, located in Central Macedonia. It is one of the largest gold deposits in Greece and in the world (Eldoradogold 2013).

An accurate estimation reserves 5.3 million of gold and 246.2 million tons of ore grading 0.49% of copper. In 2003 a major scandal occurred in connection with the mines. The scandal involved the Greek government purchasing the Cassandra mines, for 11 million euros, from TVX Hellas, a bankrupted private company who previously ran the mining pit and was a subsidiary of a Canadian company. The Greek government sold the mines immediately along with the rights and 70 other fixed assets for the same amount to a new private company (‘Hellas Gold’), which was founded a couple of days before the purchase²⁹. This practice however has been deemed in breach from the European commission based on the EU law. Furthermore, the assets have not been valued from an independent actor, but it was promoted directly to Hellas Gold as mentioned above (Curia 2012). Moreover, the value of the assets decreased over the next six months and Hellas Gold benefited in various ways, such as exempt from paying transfer taxes, paid reduced lawyer fees, notaries and any financial obligations concerning environmental damage resulted from previous operation of mines (Panagiotopoulos 2012, 1).

After an investigation in 2009 (RAPID 2008), the European Commission brought the Greek state to the European Court. In 2011 the court decided that the transaction constituted illegal state aid and therefore transformed to a lower price than the real market value. Although the court ruled Hellas Gold to pay a fine to the Greek state (EnetEnglish 2013), both the company and the state appealed against the decision of the court, but it was rejected (Curia 2012). Thus today the case is still pending. In the meanwhile, the Canadian company ‘Eldorado Gold’ initiated a take over

²⁹ The main shareholders of Hellas Gold are European Goldfield (95%) and Greece’s biggest construction and civil engineering company, Ellaktor S.A.

from ‘European Goldfields’ in 2011 and in 2012 Eldorado Gold became the major shareholder of the mines (Eldoradogold 2012). Furthermore, the former Greek Deputy of Economic minister, Christos Pachtas, who was responsible for the transaction from the side of the state, became mayor of the Municipality of Aristotle, the land where philosopher Aristotle was born and where the mines are located.

The highest administrative court of Greece ruled; that because the mine is not part of the European Union Natura 2000 Network, “the project would not cause significant damage to the area” (EKathemerini 2013). However, reports from Amnesty international about possible violations of human rights (Amnesty International 2013) and research about the environmental and social degradation from the scientific community exposed the environmental and social implications. Furthermore, the economic crisis and the drop of the price of gold, made Eldorado gold announce cuts in capital spending for 2013 (Financial Post 2013), however despite the company’s announcements, large scale development work have been reported since then (efsyn 2013). The process is still ongoing (EKathimerini 2013), despite of the opposition of the local population (Mining Watch Canada 2013; The Globe and Mail 2013).

The above-mentioned issue of large-scale mining in Khalkidhiki has “become part and parcel of wider criticisms of the austerity agenda currently being pursued by the Greek government, under strict advice from the troika of lenders – the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank” (Wilton 2013). Furthermore, European Commission and Eurostat essentially points out: “Sustainable socio-economic development is a core element of the European Union's Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS). The strategy sets out the objective of promoting a prosperous, innovative, knowledge-rich, competitive and eco-efficient economy, which provides high living standards and full and high-quality employment throughout the European Union” (European Commission-Eurostat 2013).

In contrast, as Castoriadis argues (before capitalism), “people had a naïve but correct awareness of their vital dependence on the environment, without any scientific knowledge” something that “changed with capitalism and modern techno-science, based on continuous, rapid growth of

production and consumption, catastrophically affecting the ecosphere of the planet, which is already feasible” (2010, 197; Swyngedouw 2010, 215).

Thus, the effort to point out the key points of the hegemonic discourse of sustainability (sustainable development) is an effort that has been made in the past for other cases as well. However, my analysis is unique because of its critique towards the environmental discourses of sustainability, mainly the dominant discourse that lies in the capitalist imaginary, which no analysis has made before.

6. Analysis (Findings and Discussions)

The following analysis is a multi-scale procedure based on the altered model of Svarstad’s four-level-analysis. The first level represents a historical contextualization of environmental discourses on a global level. The second level refers to the discourse in the national and the local context. The third level will contextualize the direct effects in practice, the ones that take place in the broader area of the mines of Skouries. In the last level I will scrutinize and criticize through the project of autonomy, as well as projecting the revolutionary potency of ecology, the hegemonic sustainability discourse. Thus at the end, I will interconnect the different levels by contextualizing my case study when moving from the local to the global perspective.

6.1 Hegemonic Global Environmental Discourse: Sustainable Development

Sustainable development discourse “is an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorizations that has come to dominate environmental politics” (Hajer 1995, 44). However, two distinct storylines of the SD discourse seem to share the overall picture of the hegemonic discourse and compete to define its principles. “The socio-economic storyline claims that economic growth will achieve the social objectives; while the alternative argues that environmental priorities are the key. Thus, the two storylines exist in reflections of the contradictory tenets of the overarching discourse while both prioritize social objectives” (Bingham 2010, 31).

As mentioned above European Union, as well as my case study, develop their discourse around the socio-economic storyline as part of the global (neoliberal/economic) capitalist paradigm,

which continues to dominate on the level of intergovernmental decision making where “discursive closure has led to institutionalization of techno-scientific problem-solving, androcentrism, commoditization, managerialism and centralized governance with weak public participation” (Bingham 2010, 31). On the other hand, alternative discourses are largely coopted or remain marginalized (ibid). However, it is essential to refer to SD on a global and international level in order to gain legitimacy for policy makers and organizations. Even though it is quite deceptive when the term ‘sustainable development’ remains ambiguous can be used to justify various and contradictory problems (ibid).

Romanou argues that there are three major misconceptions about the economic crisis; mainly in the southern part of Europe. Like Castoriadis, she states that “capitalism which relies on continuing growth and competition, profit maximization, power and wealth accumulation by the oligarchy, commodification of public goods and resources, and the voracious exploitation of the environment” (2014) produces and reproduces the crisis which is spread in the banking system’s collapse nowadays.

Another misconception as she argues is the impact of capitalist imaginary and its crisis over societies. She points out that discourse and response, which focus on the economic impact alone (severe wage cuts, unemployment, deteriorating conditions and benefits for the working class) leave aside very important sides. “The societal crisis manifests itself with growing, uncontrolled consumerism, which leads to overconsumption of natural resources, but also to the emergence of hyper-nationalism and eventually racism as competition for resources becomes tighter. The political crisis reflects a democratic deficit, when growing public discontent and resistance cause abuse of authority, police brutality, and state repression” (ibid).

The third misconception that she points out is the ecological contingency, “the frantic race to extract even more natural resources (oil, gas, gold and other precious metals) using increasingly more dangerous methods such as the extraction of oil from tar sands, the search for deep ocean oil and increased gas drilling, and the development of fracking” (ibid). “Massive land grabs and resource privatizations also lead to increasing environmental degradation. Above all, however,

climate change due to greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere appears to be the ultimate triumph of capitalist greed over nature” (ibid).

As an expert in carbon circle and environmental section in NASA, Romanou is fully aware that the impacts of climate change (‘global warming’) are expected to be huge particularly in areas such as southern Europe. “Economies, like Greece’s and other coastal countries in Southern Europe, which rely mainly on tourism and fisheries as well as shipping, will be heavily impacted by the projected sea level rise, the changes in the ocean’s chemical balances (acidification), and droughts leading to soil erosion and forest fires” (ibid).

6.1.1 Discussions

“As global warming mostly impacts the low-latitude (Global South) regions of the world, Greece, located at the tropical-subtropical boundary, is one of the few industrialized countries that has the most to lose from climate change; it also relies heavily on coal for the production of its electricity. So Greece should be at the forefront of climate change mitigation efforts” (Romanou 2014). In essence, Skouries of Khalkidhiki is an area tied to the global capitalist sustainable development discourse³⁰. Moreover, the dominant global SD discourse constructs a particular representation of reality at the expense of other world-views, while the alternative storyline steadily gains influence in the policy implementation procedures. However, “besides the unequal benefits resulting from such large scale developments, the capacity of the natural environment supporting them was limited” (Meadows et al. 1972). In the broader context Razavi argues that: “neoliberal economic agendas are impacting rural livelihoods and people’s attachment to, and functions of, land in rural and non-rural household economies differently in diverse contexts” (2003, 2). Thus, I argue that whether sustainable development within the dominant neoliberal capitalist system, follow the socioeconomic development storyline or the alternative one, modes of action and theory are still based within the very same system.

³⁰ However, “the proposition of a single coherent ‘global discourse’ would be a fallacy” (Bingham 2010, 12).

However, in the next session I will refer to the activation of people not only from the local community in their effort to prevent the ecological and social catastrophe that is about to affect natural and social environment in Northern Greece. Moreover, I and Avgeropoulos, argue that this is a point of awareness, so people may be able to overcome the narrow limits of their materialistic and short term interests when something greater come to affect their livelihoods and that of future generations (Avgeropoulos 2012).

6.2 The Discourses Within Nation State

“We have to decide if we want development or not” -Former Minister of Economics Georgios Papakonstantinou (Avgeropoulos 2012).

This section’s major purpose is the examination of the ways in which environmental problems are defined and framed among the networks of actors within the national context as well the specific case study I examine. Secondly, this will be connected to a brief examination of the ways in which policies are implemented.

Greece is constrained by the SD discourse in two ways. Firstly, the priorities of the hegemonic discourse are often at odds with traditional and local values (Bingham 2010, 31). “For example, in terms of decision making, authority is granted to states in international agreements, protesting against the dispossession of local land and resources, becomes more difficult when they are considered private property” (ibid). Bureaucratic management techniques serve to alienate local communities and can disrupt and dismantle their institutions (ibid). Secondly, local communities are ascribed as holders of traditional knowledge, which has to be abandoned in order for new development to come through forms of techno-science. In this situation traditional knowledge becomes a marginalized externality of capitalism³¹ that (as the major distributor of power) has to be taken out of the picture. On the other hand, the alternative storyline that prioritize socio-environmental sustainability, recognizes that economic development can lead to poverty and environmental degradation, especially for local communities who exhibit self-sustaining cultures outside the heavy industrial mainstream economic norms (Bodley 2008, 141). This alternative

³¹ Capitalism not only externalizes and marginalizes traditional knowledge but also nurtures apocalyptic imaginaries, which is an integral and vital part of the new cultural politics (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007), for which the management of fear is a central leitmotif (Badiou 2007).

struggles to redefine SD discourse and adapt in its own positions. However, although it receives substantial support from scientific institutions, national NGO's, political parties, populist movements and international organizations, it remains marginalized in policy-making arenas (Bingham 2010, 31).

The hegemonic discourse is reproduced in Greece's policy making; it is used to justify 'growth' at any cost and technological interventionism for sustainability. "A corporate and governmental discourse, reinforce one another, constructing a reality in which rapid economic development is crucial for national advancement, and sustaining the dominant discourse from positions of relative power" (Bingham 2010, 32). To understand this better, Avgeropoulos points out statements from stakeholders of the Greek state and the private companies involved in the mining project: "the capital infusion, investments and socio-economic development would appear, in order to alternate the economic crises' outcomes, create wealth and bring growth" (2012).

The Canadian Company Eldorado Gold's plan for the area of Skouries of Khalkidiki is planned to operate in two phases. "The initial phase consists of a small, open pit, with production expected in 2016. In the following phase, production will come from the underground" (Eldoradogold 2013). The data that the company has published in order to prove that development and growth will be brought for the Greek state are based on an economo-centric perspective, which externalizes³² vital societal and environmental factors that cannot serve their static (in time and space) economic models. Scientists from the university of Thessaloniki have warned about the failure of this project, because they had similar experience of similar efforts taken place in the area from companies who owned the mining pit in the past and now are bankrupted (SosHalkidiki 2013).

On the other hand, as I and Avgeropoulos argues, the most important, respectful and courageous act of all is the activation of the local community and the citizens from all over Greece who struggle against the degradation of social and natural environment at any cost (2012). Their

³² An Externality according to Investopedia is "A consequence of an economic activity that is experienced by unrelated third parties. An externality can be either positive or negative" (2014).

struggle is about reclaiming back the public space (Malkoutzis 2013, 60). These citizens created a social movement-network without direct connections to bureaucratic structural organizations (private, public, or NGO's) and marched against the exploitation of the local community's social and natural resources (Avgeropoulos 2012). The effort to obstruct the mining project, which protesters say will be an environmental and societal disaster for the area, has been well organized and many battles in the past have been achieved (Malkoutzis 2013). Moreover, although political parties have supported the protests, the social movement has managed to avoid being associated with specific parties (Malkoutzis 2013, 61; Oikonomides 2013, 56). Moreover Klein argues that Greece is a very climate vulnerable country and as the economic crisis remains people's resistance will extent further (Klein 2013). Furthermore, the citizens have the support of intellectuals such as Noam Chomsky (2013). Talking about movements, David Harvey argues: "neoliberalization has spawned a swath of oppositional movements both within and outside its compass" (2007, 199). Such an observation leads us to understand capitalism as a system that constantly creates forceful contradictions inside its core and periphery while it prosper from the crisis that generates in societal, humanitarian and environmental level.

To enhance the understanding of what the local community has to deal with, I will make a brief overview of the policies (Hellas Gold S.A. 2010) and practices that take place in the broader area of which the mines are located and show the way the hegemonic SD discourse and its dominant storylines influence them. To do that I used data from a scientific research of the University of Thessaloniki (Ellinikos Xrysos-A.E.M.B.X-ENVECO A.E. 2010):

- Deforestation of a forest area greater than 2.5 square kilometers.
- Nine boreholes for drainage around the crater to a depth of 750 meters.
- Open pit mining of 24,000 tons per day, with excavation and blasting.
- Transfer, pre-crushing and deposit of ore in covered storage area with 80,000 tons capacity.
- Trituration – chemical processing of ore.
- Transferring of the final product (only 1.977% of ore), to the metallurgical factory and waste enrichment, constituting 98.03% of the ore to the tailing disposal a storage sites.

Moreover, for many years there were created and reproduced a whole set of propaganda and fear mechanisms in order to promote the ideals of the hegemonic discourse. As Chomsky argues, media's function is to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs and codes of behavior that will integrate them to the institution structures of the larger society (Herman and Chomsky 1988, 1). Even mining-workers fell in the government's and mining company's trap of negative propaganda; "securing their jobs in order to feed their families" and authorities succeeded to turn the mining-workers against their fellow citizens and the struggle of the local community for preserving their natural and social habitat (Avgeropoulos 2012).

Thus, as many independent scientists and organizations pointed out, the company's Environmental Impact Assessment has many problems, as deficiencies in the documentation (T.C. of Greece 2011; Melas 2013; Karamouzis 2011), incomplete problematic methodologies (T.C. of Greece 2011; Melas, 2013; Karamouzis 2011; Varsavekis 2012; Dimitriadis 2011; Triantafyllidis 2012), deviations from the procedures of the European Commission (T.C. of Greece 2011) and misinterpretation of statutory limits of pollutants (Melas 2013) will cause essential problems for social and natural life in the broader area. Something that can lead to habitat destruction, deforestation, desertification, land, water and air pollution in great extend which will affect Northern Greece as a whole (Avgeropoulos 2012).

6.2.1 Discussions

While the Greek state and private companies struggle for bringing "growth" and "development" in the area, citizens struggle for sustainability and preserving their natural and social habitat, which is considered to be one of the most vibrant and diverse in the world. SD has great influence among the actors of society but as I argue, as long as the socioeconomic factors prevail, the anthropological and egalitarian factors of the society will remain marginalized and excluded from the effort of the citizens to construct their own democratic reality. In the mining procedure the distribution of natural resources exploitation connected to the recognition of community's relation to natural resources (and landscape) is at stake, as well as their participation in the decision making process determine the sense of injustice (SosHalkidiki 2013). In political ecology terms, "mobilization can be understood as a response to a series of disruptions in the course of "procedural justice"" (Martinez Alier 2001).

Environmental degradation as well as the reduction of the public sphere because of penetration caused by private companies and the markets in general, dismantles what in the first place was claimed by the imaginary of the nation state. This procedure release contradictory and supplementary forces, as I argue, which construct this imaginary, while global capitalist imaginary and its major proponents, fund and support powers that are willing (for example fascists, nationalists, movements, NGO's, individuals, etc.), as enthusiastic proponents and tools, to provide the justification glue for the systemic forces, in order to be sustained in hegemony and power. Castoriadis argues: “nationalism and chauvinism are forcefully emerging because when everything else is collapsing, they seem to provide the only identification to which people can still cling” (2010, 192). Moreover as Poulantzas points out, the fascistic ideology bases its propaganda over the ideals of a unified class of people and masses, and it “forgets” the class struggle inside the very same society, subconsciously promoting a marginalized and “homogenous” weak willed mass who need a leader to guide them in the land of their utopianism (2008, 260).

Thus, I argue that we live in times where totalitarian right wing forces are waiting to take advantage of the unstable situation, while governments and markets cooperate in order to claim public space for “reversing the economic crisis outcomes”, which they created in the first place. In this procedure, both governments and markets have major interest in using totalitarian forces as radical and forceful tools in order to penetrate existing markets and create new ones (Chatzistefanou 2014). In response to that, democratic left forces have to rise and organize themselves for every possible situation and, as Žižek argues, they have to attack at a specific point (2013) while their major goal is to offer a socialist alternative to capitalism (Lapavitsas 2013). In Lapavitsas words: “Such a program ought to reconsider immigration and its place in contemporary capitalism. It should also avoid treating supranational bodies, such as the EU and the EMU, as inherently progressive, while rethinking the connection between the nation state and democracy” (ibid).

6.3 Practical Implications Over the Environment and Society (Skouries)

“In the land that gave birth to democracy, democracy has been abolished” -Toskas (Wilton 2013).

By relating discourse to practice we have seen that the intention of global SD discourse is heavily influenced, mainly from the socio-economic storyline but also from the major alternative storyline; the socio-environmental. This means that even socially and environmentally destructive sustainable development interventions, such as in Skouries, can source discursive legitimacy from global agreements (BBC 2013).

The distractive procedures have major impacts on both the environmental and the social habitat, the political and economic life, not only in the local area but also in the broader area of Northern Greece. Moreover, by analyzing the data, that I collected from scientific documents, about the implications over the environment and society I try to prove that policy making in the neoliberal paradigm and the concentration of capital to a few “elites” is a destructive irrational procedure which is about to set the whole human civilization at stake, with vast consequences mainly for the industrial “world” (Lovelock³³ 2010; The Guardian 2014).

Environmental impacts of the area: Firstly, water resources: the E.I.A³⁴ does not meet any of the goals from the state law. The company’s³⁵ plan of reintroducing pumped water in the aquifer and repositioning part of the mined material as support in circumstances where drainage has occurred (Triantafylidis 2012; Avgeropoulos 2012) will result in permanent pollution of the groundwater, by infiltration of pollutants once the aquifer has returned to surface level (Faculty of Agriculture 2012; Environmental Council of AUTH 2011; Karamouzis 2011; Triantafyllidis 2012; Zagas 2010; Theodossiou 2012). Secondly, the atmosphere: the air pollution estimates found in E.I.A violate the statutory limits for gaseous and particulate pollutants (Environmental Council of AUTH 2011) while these atmospheric pollutants will be transported over long distances (Melas 2013). Thirdly, the soil is considered a non-renewable natural resource, while the mining activity will cause drying topsoil within kilometers of the open pit (Faculty of Agriculture 2012; Panagiotopoulos 2012) and severe soil erosion in subsequent catastrophic flood events

³³ Lovelock a proponent of nuclear energy, criticizes environmentalism. He states that climate change is a phenomenon, which you will never surely know its outcomes of. However, as he points out civilizations have been vanished because of different natural and social reasons in the past and that does not have to worry us at all (2014).

³⁴ E.I.A: Environmental Impact Assessment.

³⁵ Eldorado Gold that owes the 95% of Hellas Gold S.A and is the main company who has the rights over the mining area and two other strategic locations in the broader area.

(Panagiotopoulos 2012; Theodossiou 2012). Fourthly, in the ecosystems the planned intervention is characterized as violent and will irretrievably change both landscape and the ecosystem functions (Environmental Council of AUTH 2011; Forestry Division of Halkidiki 2011; Triantafyllidis 2012).

Bioaccumulation of heavy metals on various levels of the food chain is extremely dangerous to the functioning of ecosystems and ultimately to human health (Faculty of Agriculture 2012; Environmental Council of AUTH 2011; Zagas 2010; Panagiotopoulos 2012). Moreover, deforestation and forest drainage of the aquifer is a threat to ecosystems within a radius of several kilometers from the site (Dimitriadis 2011). Furthermore, pollution of the marine environment and the construction of large-scale industrial port would damage the quality of sea water both as natural habitat and marine organisms as well as bathing waters (Environmental Council of AUTH 2011). Fifth, the mining waste from the solid extraction exceeds 182 million cubic meters (Hellas Gold S.A. 2010). Thus, more dangerous chemicals will be wasted in the environment with countless destructive consequences for the natural and social habitat. Finally, the human health from the mining activity poses serious risks for workers, residents and visitors to the region. The presence of heavy metals, even in low concentration causes a plethora of serious diseases and low life expectancy (Faculty of Agriculture 2012; Benos 2013).

The impacts do not stop there. Society is essentially affected from the procedures in the mining area, which professor Panagiotopoulos describe as devastating (2012). “Most notable are the disruption of social cohesion, internal migration due to loss or deterioration of economic activities and intense inequality against women who are primarily affected by predominantly male activity” (Zorrilla 2009; Sweeting and Clark 2000).

But problems do not stop there. “Multinational mining companies follow certain tactics aiming at ensuring a social license” (Zorrilla 2009). They are trying to create alliances with authorities and groups that can easily be manipulated (as I mentioned some examples in the previous sessions), they create rapture in the social network while they finance compensatory social projects and purchase strategic land for their favor (Panagiotopoulos 2012). Moreover, aggressive methods against opposing citizens groups such as terrorism, violence, blackmails, lawsuits and

propaganda, are used (Zorilla 2009). Finally companies use private security while they closely cooperate with paramilitaries and police forces (ibid). Many of these tactics have been applied from the Hellas Gold S.A. in Khalkidhiki (Amnesty International 2012).

Supplementary, to the government's statement about tourism as "the only driver of growth" for the Greek economy is the above-mentioned practices which essentially pollute and destroy the natural and social environment on which the majority of people of Khalkidhiki rely to in their livelihood. Important to mention is that Khalkidhiki is the third most common touristic destination in Greece. Furthermore, most of the available jobs in the area are based on agriculture, fishing, beekeeping or responsible forestry (Wilton 2013), this is going to change vastly if the pollution, as predicted, will spread even further in a few years.

6.3.1 Discussions

Scientific valuations based in cost-basis analysis made for the government and the private mining companies monetize social and environmental "externalities" using basic economic theories (Papada 2014). As professor Mylopoulos argues, the environmental, economic and social implications of this mining project are devastating (2014; 2014). Citizens like Mr. Toskas pointed out that democracy is essentially interconnected and related to sustainable living. I argue, drawing on Castoriadis thought, that democracy in all forms, has been based and can be found only where public space and time exists. Furthermore, it is interconnected with the three political spheres that I referred to in the third chapter. In contrast to that, the neoliberal global capitalist paradigm is majorly dependent on the markets, private sector penetration and occupation of public space.

6.4 Autonomy and The Revolutionary Potency of Ecology (The Road to Sustainability)

"Do not plead for freedom, take it with your own hands, alone" (Varnalis 1943).

Regarding the world system perspective, my research is involved in the global system in various ways, and it can be characterized as a western project but not exclusively. Although my study is based in the western context, the project of autonomy is not an exclusive western invention, since movements and indigenous tribes remain outside the hegemonic capitalistic paradigm and SD discourses it can be found all over the world. Thus, it has a worldwide application in a

variety of different scales, in respect to indigenous tribes, groups and movements who contest the global capitalist paradigm and struggle to remain self-reflective, self-limiting and creative in the unique contexts of their own.

One of Castoriadis' vital points about the project of autonomy, are the characteristics that can lead to it. He argues that mortality and its acceptance is vital for human beings in order to create awareness for self-reflection and self-limitation (2010, 213). However expressing his pessimistic tendencies, he argues: "we have neither the courage nor the ability to admit that the meaning of life, for our individual and collective life, can no longer be provided by a religion or an ideology, it can no longer be given to us as a gift, and therefore we must create it ourselves" (ibid). As I argue, this is the awareness of our political dimension of every thought and act that we proceed through our daily protest of existence.

Furthermore, outlining his thoughts, I argue that the socio-historical subjects also activate the means of sustainable living by struggling for autonomy. Sustainability and autonomy are two projects essentially tied together. Furthermore, as Castoriadis argues, rotation and revocability are basic notions and political tools (2010, 202) in the process of achieving autonomy and sustainability.

Nowadays as Castoriadis argues, "we are witnessing the total domination of the capitalist imaginary: the centrality of the economic sphere, the unlimited supposedly rational expansion of production, consumption and more or less planned and manipulated leisure" (2010, 206). Moreover, he continues, "the development of techno-science, and the fact that scientists do not and will never have anything to say about its use, or even the capitalist orientation, has created an environmental problem and made it so serious today" (2010, 198). To deal with this, he argues, "we need phronesis" (cautiousness). The presence of techno-bureaucracy (economic as well as scientific) is organically and structurally incapable for possessing cautiousness, since its very existence and moving force is nothing but the delusion of unlimited expansion. So we need true democracy, establishing the broadest possible procedures for thought and debate, with the participation of the citizenry on the whole (2010, 195).

As Hajer argues, the importance of discourse is great, because “whether or not environmental problems appear as anomalies to the existing institutional arrangements depends, first of all, on the way in which these problems are defined” (1995, 4). Elaborating more on that, someone can realize that the missing link between definition and practice can be seen as being problematic, because of the discursive context that lies upon it. I argue, that the hegemonic SD in the specific global capitalist imaginary will never be able to reflect critically on the way that theory develop and practice is applied in connection to perceiving natural and social habitat as public space, as a sphere for humans to freely exercise their fundamental civil and democratic rights, because there is not such an option in its essential core. Therefore, as Castoriadis argues, “the capitalist imaginary of pseudo-rational, pseudo-mastery, and of unlimited expansion, must be abandoned” (2010, 199).

Castoriadis made a very interesting point when he argued that ecological guidelines could be found in totalitarian regimes and ideologies. However, the essence of sustainability cannot be found in any totalitarian regime or ideology. As I analyzed above, sustainability can only be found in the terms of self-reflective and self-limiting procedures and these characteristics are essential parts of democratic-autonomous regimes. Furthermore, I argue that sustainability as well as autonomy is constructed on aware socio-historical and political animals-subjects. A democratic society is an autonomous society, and an autonomous society is above all a self-limited society (2010, 196). Thus, as Zinn argues, we are in need of an “introduction to a new kind of society, cooperative, peaceful and egalitarian which no law, or president will give to people” (2002, 143).

As I pointed out in the previous three sessions of chapter six, the local is interconnected with the global in multiple and complex ways. From the discursive and theoretical level to a practical level with very direct impacts in social and natural environment and resources. Perceived from a global world system perspective, “from Rio Summit irresponsibility and the alliance between the neoliberals, right wing American Protestants and the Catholic Church and their monstrous conservative decisions” (Castoriadis 2010, 198) to the environmental and social degradation in Skouries, the same capitalist imaginary impacts human and natural environment in disastrous ways for the survival and variation of species, and a sustainable living (Solon 2012).

6.4.1 Discussions

For Castoriadis, democracy and sustainability is a struggle to preserve-sustain human beings within their natural, social and political habitat. Furthermore, it is clear that sustaining humans and their habitat is incompatible of maintaining the existing system. It requires a political reconstruction of society to turn into an effective democracy and not just in words. We have to prove to ourselves that we are capable of doing something useful for next generations, as well as to show our appreciation to what sustains us in the first place. In order for this paradigm shift to happen we need a revolution. Castoriadis argue that revolution is a radical transformation of societal institutions, which “requires profound changes in people’s psycho³⁶-social structure, in their attitude towards life, and in their imaginary to further extent” (2010, 199). As Hajer and Wagenaar note “disparate actors [...] find nascent points of solidarity in the joint realization that they need one another to craft effective political agreements” (2003, 3). Moreover, Bauman argues, that to confront, today, means to reform, compromise, self-identify, and self-determine members of the polis (2000, 178).

Although Castoriadis speaks about a transformation that does not require bloodshed, I argue that violence can be an unavoidable outcome of this procedure (Bakunin, 1990, 28, 49, 212-214, 219; Kropotkin 1995, 209-211; 2002b, 188-191; Listerborn, Molina and Mulinari 2011; Solnit 2014) in order to prevent and stop totalitarian, systemic, hegemonic and bureaucratic forces from continuing this catastrophe towards our species and the whole world; to prevent these forces from forming another obsessive religion, which in its core has the mastery over nature, growth, progress, and development. Solnit points out that scientists direct link-relate climate change with violence (Kirby 2014; Hsiang, Meng and Cane 2011; Solnit 2014). She argues that violence increase when climate change vastly affects the poorer layers-classes of society (Solnit 2014). She actually states that climate change is itself an: “extreme, horrific, long-term, widespread” violence (ibid). She correctly observes that people become violent when prices of first need products such as wheat get to high causing an unbearable human life (ibid).

³⁶ As Baumeister and Bushman argue, psyche is a broader term for the mind, encompassing emotions, desires, perceptions and all other psychological processes. Moreover, “if psyche was designed for something in particular, then nature and culture designed for this way. Furthermore, the research is in favor of the view that nature and culture have shaped each other” (2011).

Furthermore, drawing on Foucault, I argue that violence, as a form of power, is an essential part of existence and life struggle. However, “power is diffused in and embodied in discourse, knowledge and “regimes of truth”” (1991; Rabinow 1991). Moreover, Foucault points that “discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart” (1998, 63, 100-101). Furthermore, Gaventia continues, “Foucault recognize power as not just a negative, coercive or repressive thing that forces us to do things against our wishes, but can also be a necessary, productive and positive force in society” (2003, 2).

Natural disasters as well as the reduction of social welfare, which increase insecurity and unsustainability, intrigues people to violently oppose to authoritarian, hierarchical and oppressive regimes (Solnit 2014). The unequal exchange of resources as well as the unequal distribution of wealth reproduce and drive the suppressed to violently express their demands for a more equal society, a society, which at the very end is needed in order to gain sustainability. Moreover, Solnit also points out the connection of climate change with vast migration which also leads and, which in further extent, will lead to violent conflicts (2014). Finally, as I argued in this paper, this form of questioning the hierarchical regimes in order for people to attain a fair and equal access to information, distribution of wealth and access to resources is essentially linked with the project of autonomy, which is vital in order to achieve sustainability.

To understand the clear and direct connection with my case study, we have to realize that the world is not only economically interconnected through capitalistic values, but it is primary interconnected and inter-affected from the way natural resources are used and the level of their usage. Moreover we have to be aware of the way we perceive and analyze the dimensions of existence and the structures of both society and nature. We have to abolish the perception where economy is at the center of our social interaction as well as the basis of the superstructure (Castoriadis 2010), which influences and constructs the capitalist imaginary. What I argue is that this economic base or centrality does not really exist. Economy is just a factor that the capitalist imaginary formulated. In reality there cannot be a clear distinction between the societal powers and structures while every one of them has its own equal importance in the process of the construction of a social reality. Economy is an essential form of the pseudo-rationality of

capitalism. It creates a great variety of externalities. In this process, economy has to externalize vital factors and powers that cannot be measured because of their non static-alive formation.

The project of autonomy is essentially connected with sustainability as my case study attempted to prove. In Skouries the socio-historical subjects (citizens) contested elements of the core of capitalist imaginary of a specific level. With their effort, as I argue, they are not able to succeed autonomy because they have not reached the level where this can be achieved. The discourse that their struggle has embedded in entails fundamental parts of the capitalist imaginary (development, growth, progress) even if their standpoint can be characterized ideologically as being against the neoliberal's paradigm priorities³⁷. Having forsaken-abolished their political dimension³⁸ the socio-historical subjects are trapped in a bureaucratic and heteronomous loop that draw them to a manichaeistic³⁹ reality. However, with their struggle they will succeed to a very limited point until the capitalist imaginary will recruit its forces.

7. Conclusion (Final Remarks-Thoughts)

Skouries of Khalkidhiki is a remarkable European case study area, where the neoliberal approaches are used as in many cases (mining fields) all around the world, has affected the society and their natural habitat vastly. I was surprised when I came across the mining procedure that takes place in Khalkidhiki, because I recognized so many similarities with mining extraction fields all over the world and the struggle between different actors that claim in symbolic and

³⁷ This standpoint includes ideas and perspectives such as the ones that have been expressed from Marx, Keynes, and other intellectuals.

³⁸ A phrase from Oikonomides approves the discursive background which dialectics and practices are embedded in: "The local residents defined their struggle as social rather than political and set aside their political and ideological differences to pursue the ultimate goal of protecting the social fabric of their region from the consequences of uncontrolled neoliberal industrialization (2013, 56).

³⁹ Manichaeism is "a syncretic, dualistic religious philosophy taught by the Persian prophet Manes, combining elements of Zoroastrian, Christian, and Gnostic thought and opposed by the imperial Roman government, Neo-Platonist philosophers, and orthodox Christians. It is a dualistic philosophy dividing the world between good and evil principles or regarding matter as intrinsically evil and mind as intrinsically good" (The FreeDictionary 2014).

physical terms, the land-territory and resources, which are vital in order to sustain and fulfill the need of existence, survival and continuation-evolution.

The struggle of the society in Skouries, is a struggle of the people not only to be able to use the sources of the land that sustains them physically, but also to reclaim the public space and the rights of self-defining and self-determining the ways this land's resources should be used, not only in economical terms, but also as a matter of democracy and sustainable living.

Outlining the thoughts of Castoriadis, I conclude that the industrial revolution enabled human beings to unleash forces and possibilities for exploiting nature and their fellow human beings in a scale that humanity have never seen before. Capitalism would have been useful if it was to prove its essential invocation to rationality and to use its forces in a way that the whole population would be able to be fed and prosper. Moreover, the specific producing and consuming culture would have been alternated because of the self-limitations that would have been implemented from the socio-historical subjects by themselves and to themselves. However, because such thing is not going to happen on its own, it is vital to understand that human agency can release its own creative forces in order to prevent the vast and irrational continuation of another destructive system. For this reason, the project of autonomy is essential in order to achieve sustainability and prevent human beings from a mass destruction of what sustains them in the first place and what is connected with their very own existence and the extend of it.

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