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Struggles on the Port of Granadilla: defending the right to nature

Alejandro Armas-Díaz ^a and Fernando Sabaté-Bel^b

ABSTRACT

The paper examines the destruction and commodification of nature during the development of the megaport of Granadilla on the island of Tenerife (Canary Islands, Spain), and the social movements that arose in response to these actions. It draws on participant observations within protest movements, participation in collective action and meetings in the 2000s, relevant documents, and seven interviews with former presidents of the port authority, the ex-mayor of Santa Cruz de Tenerife, and environmental activists. By focusing on the interplay of the crisis, urbanization, nature, conservation and the uprisings, the study expands the literature on the neoliberalization of nature. It is found that the neoliberalization of nature began to intensify after the financial crash in 2008, the completion of the port played a significant role, and biodiversity offsetting emerged against this background. Further, rollbacks in conservation regulations fostered urbanization in the future. The study also focuses on social contestation by highlighting its political emancipatory potential. The emergence of a political red–green alliance that combined the vindication of social rights with the defence of nature and the demand for a different social and territorial island model highlights the ‘right to nature’ as a central element in the fight for the ‘right to the island’.

KEYWORDS

nature; neoliberalization; mega-infrastructure; right to the island; right to nature; social movement; Canary Islands


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INTRODUCTION

The era of austerity began after the financial crisis in 2008 when the policies of many governments shifted toward reducing public budgets (Peck, 2014). These policies aimed to control liberalization and the budget through a combination of measures that included the deregulation and privatization of public goods and services (Harvey, 2011). The response of capital to the global crisis has been both neoliberal (Aalbers, 2013) and based on austerity, thus diminishing the qualities of the commons (Harvey, 2012, pp. 85–86). These measures also affected nature and nature conservation. Regardless of whether by appropriation or degradation, and if protected or unprotected, nature lies at the heart of the capitalist enterprise as it strives to make nature compatible with the circulation of capital and disregards the socio-ecological consequences (Cortes-Vazquez

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& Apostolopoulou, 2019). The neoliberalization of nature has intensified through the adoption of different means that include 'green' and 'un-green grabbing' (Apostolopoulou & Adams, 2015).

However, changes in nature conservation policies need to be understood in the context of the intense processes of urbanization and mega-infrastructure development that led up to the crisis. Although less prominent in the literature, transport infrastructure has played a central role in sustaining the real estate cycle (Coq-Huelva, 2013). We approach these processes with a focus on Spain, in general, and the Canary Islands, in particular, a global node of the second accumulation cycle before 2008 that was strongly hit by austerity measures during the crisis. It is in this context of massive urban expansion, mega-infrastructure development, the commodification of nature and austerity regimes that collective urban action expanded to several major cities and other territories (Harvey, 2012) as a reaction to the wave of the dispossession of concrete rights (water, housing and nature amenities; Apostolopoulou & Cortes-Vazquez, 2018).

By drawing attention to different forms of exploitation of non-human nature in the Canary Islands, we aim to enhance the understanding of the dialectics of the exploitation of nature and its outcomes. We seek to fill the gap in the literature by enhancing the understanding of the central role of social movements against both the destruction of nature and the development of mega-projects that had emerged before the financial crash in 2008. Environmental protests increased, especially in the 1990s and 2000s (Jiménez, 2005, p. 96), and became fertile ground for the essential opening up of the political imagination, as evidenced by the rise in the number of municipal parties in recent decades. Although the period of mobilization against austerity, cuts and high unemployment rates after the 2008 crisis in Spain has been analysed intensely, the period immediately before has not (Calle Collado, 2016). We suggest that struggles against the exploitation of nature may reflect the emergence of a new form of emancipatory politics that encompasses a singular 'right to nature' (Apostolopoulou & Adams, 2019; Apostolopoulou & Cortes-Vazquez, 2018) and within it, a 'right to the island' (Clark, 2013). It is distinctive that environmental protests in the Canary Islands have facilitated more significant mobilization than other forms of traditional claims, such as those against social cuts and labour conditions (Sánchez, 2015).

The 'right to the city' has been revived as a leitmotif for social movements in defining their concept of struggle (Harvey, 2008). Drawing on the legacy of the 'right to the city', Apostolopoulou and Adams (2019) defined the 'right to nature' as a right to influence and rule the processes by which nature–society relationships are (re)shaped by urbanization and capitalism (see also Apostolopoulou, 2019; Apostolopoulou & Cortes-Vazquez, 2018). The Port of Granadilla is an example of a general trend toward the construction of major infrastructure, changes in environmental policy, the claim to a 'right to nature' as an element of struggle over the 'right to the island', and political imagination in the growth cycle before 2008 and the decade after.

We drew on participant observations within protest movements, participation in collective action and meetings in the 2000s, relevant documents, and seven interviews with former presidents of the port authority, the ex-mayor of Santa Cruz de Tenerife and environmental activists. We reviewed planning and scientific documents, official reports, requests and answers provided by the European Parliament (EP) to questions from environmental activists (EP, 2010, 2015).

The paper is structured as follows. The next section presents the connection among neoliberalism, the commodification of nature and protest. The third section addresses the growing cycle in Spanish real estate, degradation of nature and social contestation before and after the 2008 crisis in Spain. The fourth section focuses on: (1) the description of the project and the neoliberal context of the Port of Granadilla by exploring it as a multi-scalar and multi-sited process; (2) treating nature as an interchangeable good and relating the protest to the increasing neoliberalization of nature; (3) analysing social movements that led to the contestation of the project; and (4) discussing the development of these groups in brief. The paper ends with a few concluding remarks.

NEOLIBERALISM, CONSERVATION OF NATURE AND UPRISINGS

Neoliberalism continues long after the 2008 crisis, and several new neoliberal ideas have emerged (Aalbers, 2013). The crisis took place within spaces of intensified competition among global powers that sought to capture resources and gain geopolitical influence over different regions of the world (Smith & Cowen, 2009). Although cities became strategic fields for the advancement of neoliberal restructuring projects, neoliberalism continues to act simultaneously at different scales and places (Peck et al., 2013). At the local level, commodification and privatization characterize neoliberal interventions in urban environments. In practice, neoliberal governments strive to create an atmosphere suitable for investments and favour financial system interests over the well-being of people (Harvey, 2005, pp. 70–71). Neoliberalism is not just an ideology or a regulatory framework and should be interpreted instead as an ‘internally contradictory process of market-driven socio-spatial transformation’ (Brenner & Theodore, 2002, p. 353). It is a process of ‘creative destruction’ with the primary purpose of restoring and strengthening capitalist class power using widening commercialization and increasing capital accumulation (Peck et al., 2009). Neoliberal urban governments and entrepreneurial policies foster real estate investments. These investments are not disconnected but are articulate and enable each other. An example of this is waterfront renewal processes that involve the dismantling of old urban commercial ports, the disappearance of which requires the parallel construction of new port infrastructure in remote locations that are adapted to suit the intensified global traffic of goods. Considering a generalized or extended urbanization process beyond traditional city limits, that is, rural sites, helps understand the implications of urbanization on affected socio-natures (Apostolopoulou & Adams, 2019).

At the global level, geoeconomic aspirations prevail over geopolitical considerations. The exercise of power by hegemonic countries primarily through the world market and only secondarily, and at specific times, in geopolitical terms is an essential feature of contemporary capitalist globalization (Smith & Cowen, 2009). Thus, capitalist accumulation needs are resolved through a ‘strategic readjustment between geography and economics’ (Smith, 2003, pp. xvii–xviii). In this reconfiguration of an emerging geo-economy, there are three fundamental aspects, namely the reframing of national security to accommodate supranational flows, the recasting of social forms of security through the market, and the reframing of the state as a geoeconomic agent (Smith & Cowen, 2009). Nature plays a crucial role in the latter.

The conservation of nature is a part of the global neoliberal hegemony that aims to be compatible with economic growth (Hartwick & Peet, 2003, p. 189). This is increasingly subsumed into the circulation of capital, clearly demonstrating that it is socially produced (Smith, 1984). One of the major criticisms of ‘green capitalism’ is that it is ‘a major strategy for ecological commodification, marketization, and financialization which radically intensifies and deepens the penetration of nature by capital’ through the emergence of new ecological commodities that ‘embody the appropriation of nature as an accumulation strategy’ (Smith, 2007, pp. 2, 18). The fluctuating nature of capital and the need for its reproduction are revealed through the contradictory connections between capital and conservation (Harvey, 2011). Neoliberalism has turned nature into an interchangeable good, which, when dispossessed of specificity, can be quantified, bought and sold in parts, and reduced to ecosystem environmental services (Büscher et al., 2012).

This conception of nature-oriented toward growth has entailed the creation of a new legislative framework and the reorientation of environmental policies, particularly since 2009 (Apostolopoulou & Adams, 2019). On the one hand, capitalism promotes neoliberal conservation policies through ‘green grabbing’, which is aimed at privatizing and including nature in the circulation of capital (e.g., wetland mitigation banks, habitat banking, ecological offsets, etc.; Harvey,

2014, p. 142). It is in this context that biodiversity offsetting – losses to biodiversity in one place can be compensated by equal gains elsewhere – has become a popular tool world over, and has been used to facilitate the development of infrastructure. In the words of Apostolopoulou and Adams (2017, p. 24), offsetting, rather than a technical solution free of ideology, involves both a profound redefinition of nature and the practice of conservation. On the other hand, the contradictory character of capitalism continues to use environmentally destructive strategies as well, either by exploiting hitherto protected nature enclosures or by taking back environmental regulations, thus obstructing the conservation of species and ecosystems. Apostolopoulou and Adams (2015, p. 16) defined this process as ‘un-green grabbing’ and considered it as the other side of ‘green’ neoliberal capitalism. Irrespective of whether both forms of grabbing have any scope for environmentalism, they pursue the intensification of the capitalist exploitation of nature and add new elements.

There is an upscaling of regulations and in global commonalities on how natural resources are governed: that is, the neoliberalization of nature operates in a similar (or different, but never totally different) way in particular places, regions or countries (Castree, 2008). However, specific practices of neoliberal governments are related to the significance of local political–economic power composition and class relations (Harvey, 2011, p. 6). As Harvey (2011) also observed, the serial reproduction of infrastructure and privatized forms of governance at the local scale are not merely a cumulative result of spontaneous local pressure, but rather reveal the persuasive disciplinary outcome of an interurban competition. Although a few urban governments have been able to alter regulatory changes, neoliberalization continues to be actively promoted and challenged at the same time (Peck et al., 2013).

Far from being isolated events, responses to imposed projects proliferate globally (Thörn et al., 2016). Mass protest movements have emerged rapidly over the last few decades, but some have also disappeared after a short time (Harvey, 2012). Austerity and state repression often impede manoeuvres to achieve a broader anti-neoliberal front (Martinez-Alier, 2014). However, neoliberalism has witnessed wide social contestation against strong austerity policies, social regression, and social–environmental and spatial injustices (Harvey, 2012). They bring the strategies of capital and the scenarios of conflict and contestation of the contradictions of accumulation strategies into play (Brenner et al., 2009). A characteristic feature of collective action is the diversity of strategies to confront hegemonic power (e.g., by creating more varied sites of protest; Köhler & Wissen, 2003), as well as the reconfiguration or rather, jumping of scales as a political chance for social and protest movements to gain access to political opportunities (Smith, 1996). As Lefebvre (2000) argued, urban dwellers have the right to appropriate a city both through physical access to space and by using and occupying it. Thus, rights are the outcome of political struggle, and the value of the ‘right to the city’ stands on its capaciousness, and as Harvey (2008, p. 40) suggested, its utility is a step ‘towards unifying struggles ... as both working slogan and political ideal’.

However, this notion of ‘urban’ extends beyond the city (Marcuse, 2009), for instance, in the case of a fight against dispossession and the loss of quality of life in rural areas (Urkidi, 2010) or islands (Clark, 2013). Nature and biodiversity have gained social and political significance. Clark (2013) highlighted the principle of the ‘right to the island’ in his criticism of the abstract and ‘ideal types’ of island development models by drawing on Lefebvre’s work and the subsequent literature. A common right is bound with spatial justice, namely the deepening of democracy and the de-commodification of space and nature, and can be seen ‘as a means to strengthen social and political processes conducive to fostering just and sustainable island development’ (Clark, 2013, p. 129). Unifying struggles for the ‘right to nature’ and for the ‘right to the city’ has a tremendous political emancipatory potential for social and environmental movements that fight for the production of nature in line with social–environmental justice (Apostolopoulou & Cortes-Vazquez, 2018, p. 29).

NEOLIBERAL URBANISM, CRISIS, AND SOCIAL CONTESTATION IN SPAIN AND THE CANARY ISLANDS

The growth cycle in Spain before the financial crash centred on real estate development (López & Rodríguez, 2011), and this sizeable economic growth was concentrated in major cities and tourist-oriented coastal areas such as the Canary Islands. Some scholars treated Spain as the central node of the secondary circuit of accumulation at a global scale until the end of the 2000s (OMM, 2013, p. 62). This rapid expansion of urbanization in Spain was accompanied by two factors, namely the construction of major transport infrastructure and environmental policy (Coq-Huelva, 2013). Investment in public works and transport infrastructure was prioritized by the local and regional governments (López & Rodríguez, 2011). However, the past few decades have also witnessed a rapid increase in the exploitation of protected areas mainly through the incorporation of new elements, as already seen in the 1980s (Smith, 1984) and in the years that followed (Igoe & Brockington, 2007). In addition, there has been no retreat from neoliberalism.

In contrast, neoliberal ideologies and practices have expanded, especially through the Spanish government's policies that aimed at benefiting the most influential companies and economic groups (Aalbers, 2013). The ruling classes fostered pro-growth policies in strategic areas such as land liberalization, a mortgage policy that created a high rate of mortgage securitization that was even bigger than in other European countries, and a housing policy that favoured ownership through fiscal incentives while reducing the rental housing market and cutting back on the supply of social housing (OMM, 2013, pp. 64–67). Large-scale private foreign investments that ranged above the EU average and closer to levels in the United States fostered an increasingly speculative dynamic of land and real estate prices (García, 2010). The decades of rapid urbanization before the 2008 crisis was supported by a lax environmental policy and led to a profound degradation of natural areas (López & Rodríguez, 2011).

Since the 2008 crisis, the ruling parties responded to the recession with the aim of containment and cuts that had especially affected education, health, housing, and social benefits (Vives & Rullán, 2014), while concentrating investments on satisfying financial and business interests. Thus, the economic crisis also became a democratic crisis and an attack on the already precarious state of the Spanish welfare system (Navarro, 2015, p. 231). This social backing took place in a Spanish region that was most affected by the crisis, wherein widespread poverty, high rates of unemployment and people being evicted from their homes were the most poignant aspects of the new social reality (Colau & Alemany, 2012, pp. 3–6). After over 10 years of recession, the macro-indicators began to indicate mild symptoms of economic recovery (Arrese, 2017). The recovery has, however, not reached the popular classes. The social situation of the Canary Islands is characterized by a dramatic state of affairs operating within the framework of Spain and the EU (Llano Ortiz, 2016, pp. 125–133). Despite the critical social situation, the social response to austerity policies is not comparable with the protests that followed the construction of the Port of Granadilla in Tenerife. Years after the financial crash in 2008, the citizens' and popular movement – which, in islands such as Tenerife had been powerful in the bubble years – lost steam. This was partly because survival was a priority for many, at both personal and family levels, and also because some of the mega-projects that had been opposed by the broad social groups were held back because of the lack of funding. At an economic level, the elites seemed to have successfully achieved their goal of 'disciplining' the working class, and in doing so, they sparked an intensification of the exploitation of nature. The government of Spain and its regions fostered the deregulation of land and minimization of state intervention in planning and environmental legislation after the 2008 crisis (Romero et al., 2018). The neoliberalization of nature expanded to other regions such as Spain and Greece, which were also affected by the austerity regime (Cortes-Vazquez, 2018, p. 106).

However, the financial crisis accelerated the development of groups that had begun earlier, and thus arrived a period of the biggest social upheaval in the recent history of Spain (Abellán, 2015). The demonstrations were for a range of issues that, while devoid of class content, continued to affect labour issues and protest against deficiencies relating to social reproduction to a large extent (Harvey, 2012, pp. 190, 198). After the 15-M movement,¹ a slow process of collective maturing lasted for about three years before the emergence of the third phase. This phase entailed a shift to the political–institutional level that used the electoral arena as the primary mechanism and was accompanied by the indignation and desire for change that was increasingly craved for by large sections of the population (Navarro, 2015, p. 231). This is the context in which the new political formation, *Podemos*, and municipal parties such as *Abora Madrid* or *Sí se puede* arose, whose appearance and political praxis catalysed and accelerated this process of change.

THE PORT OF GRANADILLA: GEOECONOMICS, NATURE AND SOCIAL CONTESTATION

Over several decades, the Port of Granadilla, which was planned in the 1970s, remained in the background of public policy. In 2009, the government of the Canary Islands began constructing the port, over an area of about 273 ha spread along seven coastline-kilometres (Figure 1). The project cost between €145 and €300 million and was funded by national, European, and other regional and local sources (Romero et al., 2018). However, the revival of this project paved the way for a series of uprisings and collective action. With slogans such as *¡Ya está bien!* (Enough is enough!) several environmental collectives, trade unions, other citizen initiatives and the scientific community protested and took to the streets on several occasions, raising their voices against

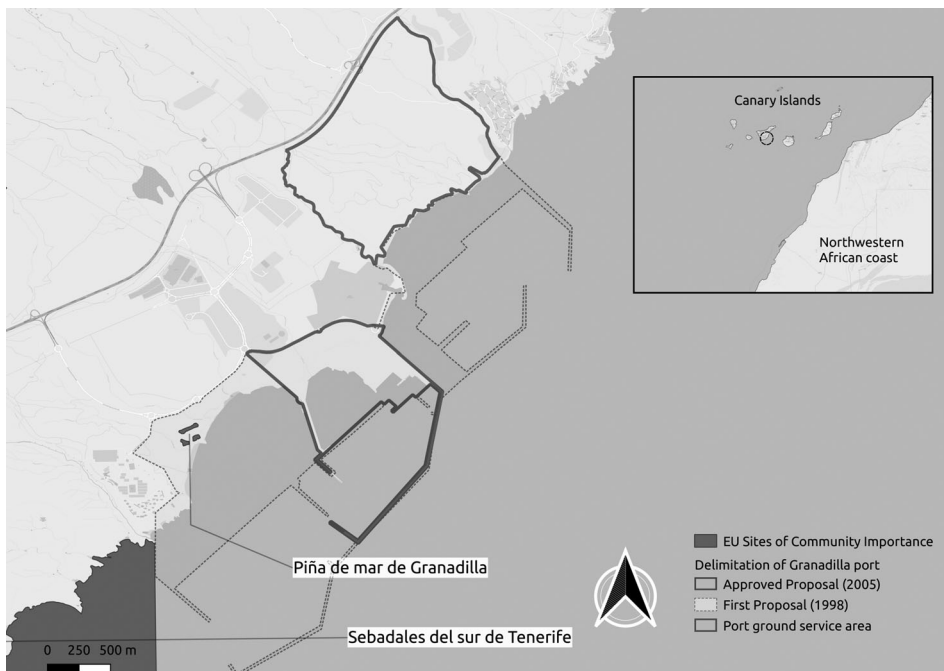


Figure 1. Delimitation of Granadilla port and the affected protected areas (European Union Sites of Community Importance).

Source: Antonio Armas-Díaz based on Open street map, Observatorio Ambiental de Granadilla, and the European Environment Agency.

their exclusion from the decision-making processes, the rampant environmental degradation, corrupt processes associated with urbanization, urbanization itself and the destruction of the island (Déniz, 2014). The contestation put the fostering groups in a corner, forced the reduction of the dimensions of the port, and delayed the realization of construction by almost a decade. The realization of the project led to the destruction of protected and unprotected nature enclosures and incorporated the commodification of nature without precedent, at least in terms of social perception and response in the Spanish archipelago. The port continues to remain (less) contested, unfinished and underused to date. No ships have docked since its inauguration in April 2018 (Autoridad Portuaria, 2019), and the functions of the port are limited to the reparation of oil platforms and the transportation of wind generators that will be installed in the area in future.

The politics and economics of the port

The port proposal was recovered shortly after the nationalist party (Coalición Canaria – CC) attained the political power it needed to accomplish setting up the port in 1996. At almost the same time, the government of the Canary Islands considered a moratorium on increasing the number of tourist accommodation sites in the context of the unprecedented possibilities for accumulation that came into play through the creation of the Canary Islands Investment Reserve in 1994. The reserve was initially conceived as a powerful instrument for the creation of employment through fiscal incentives for company profits, but was mainly used to channel a part of the company profits into real estate, requiring this capital to be deployed in the short term, thus inflating the ‘bubble’ (García-Herrera, 2005, p. 325). Other global factors also came into play. Some of these included the emergence of logistic nodes ‘as critical infrastructures’ to guarantee the global supply chain, the increase in the growth rates of many African economies, the enlargement of ports in West Africa since the mid-2000s, and the enhanced connections between the Global North and South (Stenmanns & Ouma, 2015).

The neoliberal logic of this project cannot be understood without analysing its complex relationships with other levels (Peck et al., 2013). There are three levels in this case: the role of a logistics hub pointing out the interplay of the geopolitical and geoeconomic components (Smith, 2003) at the global scale; an essential element for the implementation of an island development model at the island scale; and an urban dimension pushing forward the processes of commodification and privatization of the waterfront of the capital city, Santa Cruz de Tenerife.

First, from a global geopolitical strategy, the geographical location of the Canary Islands, historically a stopover point, gave the islands strategic value in the political and economic competition among world powers for hegemony in Africa. The islands are also a logistic platform near the Maghreb and north-west Africa, and operate as the southern border of NATO (essential for the surveillance of the North and South Atlantic, and entry into the Mediterranean). The leading groups in the Canary Islands seek to capitalize on this geostrategic position of the archipelago, which is situated at the crossroads of ocean routes and close to West Africa, to promote a new model of accumulation by transforming its ports and offshore areas into ‘global hub ports’ or at least into EU trading and economic platforms for African countries. The goal is to consolidate the strong internationalization of the Canary Islands’ economy through increased foreign direct investment (FDI) in the region (García-Herrera & Sabaté-Bel, 2009). The new Port of Granadilla can drive the region’s role as a centre for the redistribution of goods by encouraging investments by the Canary Islands into the neighbouring African environment, which has presented a very prominent flow of capital since the end of the last century (p. 599). The delay in the construction of the docks in Granadilla has opened up new possibilities for power groups to reap profits from the geostrategic location of the archipelago. Now that the transport of containers is no longer strategic for the Canary Islands, geoeconomic interests are turning to the supply of natural gas in line with the future ‘energy union’ and ensuring energy supply by reducing dependence on gas from certain other regions of the world (Bouzarovski et al., 2015).

Second, the project involves an urban dimension that is linked to land-rent appropriation and entrepreneurial practices of Santa Cruz City Council (Armas-Díaz, 2015). The local government had promoted the restructuring of the waterfront to attract tourism and commercial leadership, and this has been an ongoing endeavour since the mid-1950s (García-Herrera et al., 2007). The construction of a new port tens of kilometres further south of the capital was deemed necessary for the urban government to realize its vision for the capital city. Together with the transfer of commercial port activities to Granadilla, commodification and privatization were planned for the docklands area (Armas-Díaz, 2015). As the ex-mayor (1979–91) argued, ‘Our future is not industrial but logistical and Granadilla is perfect for that. Santa Cruz, however, has room for cruise ships and tourists, and we have to plan for that.’ However, the construction of the Port of Granadilla was not a priority until the 2000s, at least for the port authority. The draft version of the Santa Cruz Plan, released in 2002, proposed a radical neoliberal transformation of the existing city by putting forward various attempts of dispossession in the neighbourhoods, which in turn gave rise to urban protests that were strong enough to put the plan on hold (García-Herrera & Sabaté-Bel, 2005).

Third, on an island scale, the port was an important part of the package of major infrastructure that was aimed at strengthening the Doxiadis Island model, which was conceived in the 1970s, in the final phase of Francisco Franco’s dictatorship. Francoism was characterized by a lengthy period of dramatic social repression, central control and an enthusiastically pro-growth regime that was built mainly through urbanization and industrialization (Hamilton, 2017). The resemblance between the current territorial scheme for Tenerife and the Doxiadis plan is striking. The model is based on the notion of a coastal ‘island-city’ that is highly specialized in services that combine a hyper-transformation of coastal areas – 0–600 m – while leaving the rest of the island territory right up to the mountain peaks de-ruralized and conceived, if at all, as ‘natural areas to protect’ and in certain cases, to be converted into tourist amenities.

The involvement of the Canary Islands in the capitalist globalization framework began in the 1960s and was supported by the expansion of mass tourism. After Franco’s death in 1975 and the advent of democratic councils, the Canary Islands and the rest of Spain witnessed a period of powerful popular and citizen-based mobilizations that succeeded in placing basic social demands at the centre of the political agenda while demanding democratic liberties (Borja, 1977). After a decade-long struggle, popular movements were able to impose their territorial programmes based more on community facilities and social investment than on the abovementioned territorial model that was designed to serve the expanded movement of capital (Sabaté-Bel, 2006). The territorial reconfiguration of the island named the Doxiadis Plan had to be put on hold until the arrival of ‘better times’. Since the mid-1980s, the traditionally dominant power bloc in Tenerife has been slowly but surely rolling out a project that first ‘pacifies’ and later politically subordinates the urban neighbourhood movement. No elite government, however authoritarian, can be maintained over time by imposing its interests exclusively on the population.

On the contrary, it has to develop a well-structured combination of imposition, persuasion and effective granting of some claims or material improvements to subaltern groups (Bayat, 2000). This strategy has been successfully tested in the Canary Islands through class and crony clientele mechanisms that involved the co-optation of neighbourhood associations by giving the leaders in the movement positions in the administration. Clientelism is a tradition in Southern Europe, and the Canaries is one of the Spanish regions with denser clientelist networks based on the emergence of the UCD, the Christian democratic political party, immediately after the Franco dictatorship (Hopkin, 2009, 2012). After the fall of the UCD, some members founded the Tenerife Independent Association (ATI), a conservative, popular island-based party (García-Herrera & Sabaté-Bel, 2005). However, the weakening, subordination or neutralization of a neighbourhood movement that had been a protest movement before was also common in most parts of the country (Recio & Naya, 2004, p. 66).

Since the 1990s, power groups in Tenerife such as the nationalist-oriented parties and allies in the economic sectors of the tourism and building industries have been carrying out political and class-based 'assault' (first on the neighbourhood and labour movements, and then on left-wing forces), which paved the way for their long-sought-after territorial remapping of the island (Sabaté-Bel & García-Herrera, 2005). A crucial aspect was the control of political institutions that wove a network and began at a local scale (city councils) in the mid-1980s and quickly spread to the Tenerife island government, and then to the Canary Islands government in the early 1990s (Armas-Díaz, 2015). At the beginning of the 1990s, almost all the left-wing parties that had fought against the dictatorship in the Canary Islands, together with ATI and other insular-based parties, merged into a single political organization called the *Coalición Canaria* (CC) (Sánchez Herrera, 2004). Immediately after that there was an unusual convergence of the heirs of the Franco regime under the umbrella of the CC, a broad-based political organization that spanned conservative nationalist-oriented populism and left-wing nationalism (Sabaté-Bel, 2005). Since the mid-1990s, the CC has been the ruling party. This unique convergence of the initially opposing political options has only been possible under the banner of nationalism, based on the island in the first phase, after which it was at a regional scale (García-Herrera & Sabaté-Bel, 2009, p. 594). As Harvey (2005, p. 79) pointed out, for example, as it is in the EU and the Mercosur in Brazil and Argentina, despite its apparent contradictory position to the neoliberal agenda, nationalism in the Canaries has become a suitable response for furthering neoliberal policies. Bianchi (2004) noted that the Canarian nationalist government does not limit the growth of mass tourism, but rather fosters it. In doing so, it subordinates the regional economy to external demands, and thus promotes environmental degradation, land-rent extraction and employment at low wages. At the turn of the century, the abovementioned economic and political conditions made the repackaging of the old Granadilla project possible (Sabaté-Bel, 2005), and the European Commission, with the support of the European Investment Bank, approved the port project in 2006, pushed by the Granadilla Port lobbies (Autoridad Portuaria, 2006).

The port before the 2008 crisis

The proposal to build the port was based on the destruction of nature, whether protected or unprotected. It had the potential to affect unprotected areas and lead to the obstruction of current underwater dynamics of sediment movement that fed the sandy beaches that were located further south and included some of the biggest and best natural beaches in Tenerife on which tourist activities and current capital accumulation were based. On the contrary, the proposal affected two sites of community importance (SCIs) of the Natura 2000 European Network (ES7020049 and ES7020116) in its immediate vicinity (Figure 1). Later, at the request of the European Commission in 2006, and reacting to criticism, the regional government introduced compensatory measures. Focusing on the transplantation of certain species of seagrass (CEC, 2006), it followed an approach that was valued as 'either unviable or, at best, a theoretical compensation which is very difficult to demonstrate and which is not based on existing knowledge' (Observatorio Ambiental de Granadilla (OAG), 2010b). However, it created three new protected areas of the Natura 2000 to preserve the 'same' species that were damaged by the construction of the port, two of which were situated in remote locations (ES7011005, ES7020128) and one close to the port (ES7020129). The European Commission's decision reframed nature as an interchangeable, transferable and placeless resource without considering its social and spatial context, and made the processes responsible for the destruction of biodiversity assets 'into the drivers of environmental conservation' (Apostolopoulou & Adams, 2019, p. 222). Not surprisingly, the decision reactivated social opposition.

In the early 2000s, the public debate generated by the port project took place under conditions of profound asymmetry within the public sphere (Toledano, 2010). The dominant discourse of the pro-mega-port groups argued for the obsolescence and saturation of the main port of the island,

which was located in Santa Cruz, and advocated a new model of accumulation that was complementary to mass tourism while being capable of boosting the role of the Canary Islands as a business platform for the African continent and in the south-to-south trade in goods. Business interests (represented by the Tenerife Confederation of Businesses and chamber of commerce along with the port authority) and the perspectives of the mayors of Santa Cruz and Granadilla gradually converged, and soon received the support of the presidents of the Island Council and regional government of the Canary Islands. As a former president of the port authority recalled in an interview with the authors:

I certainly had a lot of institutional support from the Chamber of Commerce and Spanish Confederation of Businesses. They clearly understood ... , but local society, and opinion-makers, did not understand the port project. ... [I]t was part of a joint operation that would eventually generate wealth, employment, a money-making port, and subsequently a city for tourism.

Opposition to the project led by environmental collectives, trade unions, other citizen initiatives, and the scientific community focused on the high environmental impact and absence of economic reasons to justify the new project, while also presenting arguments that deconstructed key points on the supposed obsolescence and saturation of the Port of Santa Cruz (Aguilera, 2009). The regional government tried to control the debate and barely reported on the reality of the project, which is that it had breached the EU environmental legislation and ignored all the technical reports opposing the project. When the Ministry for the Environment issued studies stating that these protected areas were not affected (February 2003), internal reports by senior government members of the regional government describing the project as 'environmentally incompatible with the conservation of protected areas and species' were leaked to the press (OMM, 2013, p. 102).

The opposition to the industrial Port of Granadilla culminated in 2004 with the presentation of a popular legislative initiative (PLI) by the environmental movement before the Canary Islands parliament, but the political powers refused to consider this. Although business organizations demanded urgent implementation, the original project that was supposed to spread over 600 ha (OAG, 2016a) was downsized as a result of both pressure from the impending reduction in European aid from 2006 to 2013 and widespread opposition on the island. In 2004 and much of the following year, several conflicts and forms of social mobilization were organized in response to various attempts at dispossession in the metropolitan area by the authorities (Sabaté-Bel, 2005). These were joined by other groups with considerable experience in opposing plans designed behind the public's back and founded a movement involving neighbourhood groups. The presentation of the PLI against the Port of Granadilla that had taken place a few months earlier exacerbated the toughest sectors of local entrepreneurs. They demanded that the political powers stand firm against conservation pressure and that they seek funding to implement a wide-ranging package of public mega-projects quickly, including the Port of Granadilla. To oppose the business lobby, environmental groups called a citizens' meeting, open to all those who wished to challenge the authoritarian development model. Representatives of the emerging new movement of neighbourhood groups that took shape in the area of the capital city surprisingly appeared alongside professionals and other public activists who agreed with the environmental groups.

Two significant components came together in the social movement that emerged. The first was a popular working-class movement that was defined by the social backgrounds of most of its members and was articulated in the aforementioned Neighbourhoods' Coordination. The second was the Assembly for Tenerife, which was more class-based and had a larger number of students, professionals, intellectuals, and artists as its members. The latter was more concerned with environmental matters without ever excluding the prevailing social demands and the growing demands for improved democratic quality (Sabaté-Bel, 2005). An initial example of the

possibilities of this citizens' and popular movement was the articulation of conflicts and various struggles in a united front; this was similar to events in November 2004 when 80,000–100,000 people (on an island with a registered population of barely 1 million inhabitants) collectively protested both against the Port of Granadilla and other projects.

At the time, the emerging social movement succeeded in unifying the territorial and urban struggles under one slogan of 'love your island', thereby jumping scales as a political response and signalling a different island development model (Sánchez, 2015). Spatial scales are not fixed and are socially produced through political struggle (Brenner, 2001). Some scales may not be useful for all social movements and can limit collective action. From this perspective, scales of struggle are settled on social processes and biophysical characteristics (Urkidi, 2010). As the struggles against the Port of Granadilla demonstrate, the preservation of biodiversity was the main claim, but it was subject to the most obvious limitations faced by social movements: the island, that is, the land surrounded by the sea. The 'right to the island' is a scale of resistance against the neoliberalization, demarcation and quantification of nature in specific areas by the authorities in order for them to transfer the species and urbanize the land, which would then result in an alienated territory stripped of nature. The social movement encompassed the struggles in the capital city with those against the destruction of biodiversity-related to the construction of the Port of Granadilla. The expansion of urbanization and its impact on natural areas brings environmental struggles to the forefront (Cortes-Vazquez & Apostolopoulou, 2019). The main element underlying Clark (2013) idea of the 'right to the island' was Lefebvre's (2000) right to command the urban process even in the countryside. By using the 'right to the island', the social movement overcame the limitation of localness to expand its power (Smith, 2010).

Rooted in the 2004–2006 mobilizations, a new political–electoral movement defined by an eco-socialist ideology emerged in 2007, albeit at a smaller scale (and in a different context before the most acute phase of the crisis began) in some parts of the Canary Islands: *Sí se puede* (Yes you can). The new party rose out of all these struggles in Tenerife, staking a claim for both a 'right' and 'love for the island' while standing up to undemocratic decisions, cuts to social services such as health and education, evictions and high unemployment rates during the economic crisis. This was before the protests against the construction of the port began and before the emergence of the new constellation of municipal parties in several Spanish cities in 2015. Having adapted to the particularities of the archipelago, *Sí se puede* has gradually achieved a significant institutional presence in the main municipalities (Déniz, 2014, pp. 12–15). In 2015, it merged with *Podemos*, a rising force in all of Spain. As Russell (2019, p. 989) argued, 'the municipal is becoming framed as a "strategic front" for developing a transformative politics of scale' in trying to solve problems at the supra-local scale that manifested at the municipal scale (Blanco et al., 2018). Thus, during its expansion phase from the late 20th century to 2007–08, neoliberalism and its material expression in the financial and, above all, real estate bubble, faced a powerful citizens' movement that was opposed to mega-projects in the Canary Islands, which defended the territory, values and vernacular uses. However, the onset of the 2007 crisis signalled a backward turn in social mobilization dynamics in Spain and the Canaries.

The port proposal after the 2008 crisis

In the early years after the financial crash and the fiscal crisis of the government, and in tune with the mild symptoms of economic recovery at the time, the power groups began preparing to launch new projects and revive those that were put on hold, which was the case for the Port of Granadilla. In early 2009, reacting to environmental opposition and legal problems, the government of the Canary Islands rolled back environmental regulations, and restricted the protected nature reserves by redrawing their boundaries. It also declassified the seagrass beds that had hitherto impeded the construction of the port (BOC, 2009b). Although work began, legal action taken by environmental groups resulted in its suspension by the courts. In June 2010, the regional government

reacted with a review of the catalogue of protected species in all the islands. The new document was approved under uncommon circumstances without the participation of the scientific community and a public information stage (EP, 2010), and it reduced the protection given to the endangered species outside of the protected areas (Fernández-Palacios & de Nascimento, 2011). In short, while the endangered species were protected in one place, they enjoyed no protection in other areas. This is an indicative example of the environmental contradictions of capitalism. The construction of the port accelerated the neoliberalization of nature by rolling back environmental regulations to serve urbanization. As a local scientist argued in the newspaper *El País*: 'The new Canarian catalog of endangered species, is an outrage for nature and the lack of protection of endangered species will allow the construction of mega-projects' (Menéndez, 2010).

In July 2010, the port authority restarted work on the Port of Granadilla. Soon after, a population of highly protected beetles was discovered, and it was necessary to offset the population to a protected area nearby (OAG, 2010c). An environmental observatory (OAG) of questionable independence (as the director had long since had political connections with the nationalist party CC) was created in 2008 according to the EU 'compensatory measures' (2006) and handled the offsetting of the beetles. In all, 17 adult specimens were captured and moved to a close protected area (ES7020049) in December 2010 (OAG, 2010d, p. 9), and the port authority was able to restart construction. Biodiversity offsetting relates to government responses to the economic crisis and their aspirations for infrastructure projects, as well as to facilitating urbanization (Apostolopoulou & Adams, 2019). Not surprisingly, after the beetles were offset, the OAG declared that it was reducing its protection not to obstruct the construction of the forthcoming infrastructure.

Offsetting deepens the treatment of biodiversity assets as a decontextualized nature, or a 'second nature' (Smith, 2007). A few years later, in 2016, the seagrasses were included on the national list of endangered species. Although the irregular situation of the seagrass in the regional list persists, work had to be partially halted wherever the specimens remained (OAG, 2016). The position of the OAG mentioned above was very clear: they suggested that eliminating the seagrass specimens that may remain in the area 'does not compromise the viability of this population, let alone that of the species' (p. 6). Offsetting was not foreseen, but the solution was the destruction of the seagrass remaining in the area. Hence, the port authority was able to restart construction. Whether protected or unprotected, the OAG aligned with regional administrations and shared a reductionist vision of nature that was divorced from its context and ignored the socio-ecological transformations that involved urbanization (Apostolopoulou & Adams, 2019) (Table 1).

The authorities deregulated land by rolling back the environmental legislation and the consensus it had achieved in the 1980s on land as an essential resource for the ecosystem; deregulation resulted in a remarkable extension wherein almost 45% of the terrestrial surface of the Canary Islands were placed within the scope of protected areas (Fernández-Palacios & Whittaker, 2008). 'Un-green grabbing' was facilitated by the proposed Land Act that removed supervisory control and rule, thereby diminishing the control of regional bodies over the municipalities. By arguing for public or social interest, the administration can change the status of rural land, which, until 2017 was considered almost as protected, to include 'uses not contemplated for this destination when their location in a rural setting is appropriate for contributing to its development (such as tourist, industrial or service construction)' (BOE, 2017, p. 51). The new law views land in such a way that local institutions can promote it as they wish and act upon it with the exercise of their discretion, without the need to comply with an ordinance or higher planning of natural resources. Finally, the law facilitates the devolution of power to town halls so that they can draw up the plans and regulations and perform the environmental assessments. This goes against the planning regulations that are currently in force. Concerns about these responsibilities in the hands of local authorities are linked to the use of urban planning to generate resources. Further, as demonstrated during the years of the housing bubble, over 40% of the local institutions

Table 1. Timeline of the port's construction, 'green' and 'un-green grabbing', and struggles, 1973–2018.

1973	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Plan for the island includes the port as a mega-infrastructure	Port administration writes up the project		Public information stage of the project	Publication of the Canarian catalogue of endangered species	Port as a public-interest infrastructure (regional government). Complaint to the European Commission (EC) about the negative effects on biodiversity	Green signal for the port's environmental impact statement. Compensatory measures (regional government): replantation of seagrass in remote areas	Popular legislative initiative supported by 50,000 signatures. Reduction of the former port's dimensions. First protest	European Commission analyses complaints received. Second protest
2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2016	2017	2018
EC supports the construction of the port subject to proposed compensation measures. Third protest	EC compensation measures: restoration of a close natural protected area	Financial crash. Seagrass is delisted from the Canarian catalogue of endangered species. Foundation of the Observatorio Ambiental de Granadilla (OAG). Fourth protest	Start of the construction of the port. Fifth protest. Compensation Measures (CM) (2006): creation of two new sites of community importance (SCIs). Construction stops: the High Court requires the listing of seagrass in the Canarian catalogue of endangered species again	Translocation of protected beetles. Sixth protest	EC CM (2006). Transplantation of seagrass to other SCIs. Seventh protest	Seagrass beds included in the National catalogue of endangered species (social movements)	New Land Act. Legal exception to destroy seagrass beds remaining in Granadilla	Inauguration of the port

Source: Author's elaboration based on BOC (2009a), BOE (2000, 2003, 2004, 2009, 2011), CEC (2006), and OAG (2010a).

were involved in urban corruption (Déniz, 2014). This ensures a more intense process of liberalization affecting nature that was already achieved ‘successfully’ by the administration with the experience of the Port of Granadilla.

CONCLUSIONS

The government implemented various neoliberal measures to support the construction of the Port of Granadilla. These measures were based on geoeconomic interests of the ruling class and urbanization patterns that mainly act against nature and democratic decision making. The considerable diversity of nature calls for greater attention to context and scale (McCarthy & Prudham, 2004) as the analysis of the Port of Granadilla project illustrated. Using the case of the port, we unpacked the complex interplay among neoliberal projects, scales, the commodification of nature, and its contestation before and after the 2008 financial ‘crash’.

First, a decade before the 2008 crisis, Spain began a rapid and extensive urbanization process supported by infrastructure and mega-projects and became a hotspot for capital flows into real estate in the main cities and touristic destinations such as the Mediterranean coast and the Balearic and Canary archipelagos. The need to build infrastructure such as port facilities – and to release land and natural areas for its construction – is mainly guided by capitalist logic that requires a means of moving through space and of fulfilling the desire of the ruling classes to engage with the world economy. Specifically, peripheral territories whose geostrategic positions are being exploited have emerged to satisfy these needs (Keshavarzian, 2010). The Canary Islands are no exception. Over and above geostrategic aspects, geoeconomics is revealed as the primary strategy of dominant groups to raise the increased circulation of capital. The Granadilla project clearly illustrates the commitment of island power groups to monetize the geostrategic position of the Canary Islands in world geopolitics in favour of their geoeconomic interests and as a complement to the current model of mass tourism.

Second, the revival of the port project helped envision nature as both an interchangeable and measurable product, stripping nature of its specificity (Smith, 2007). This was hitherto unheard of on the islands. Biodiversity offsets became the main instrument introduced by the EU compensatory measures and the creation of the OAG, as opposed to the ‘un-green grabbing’ strategies used previously. This new approach of quantifying biodiversity was a manoeuvre to relocate some species while mainly arguing against the protection offered to others to build the Port of Granadilla, foster urbanization and not obstruct the construction of future infrastructure. Hence, biodiversity offsetting is linked to the deregulation of environmental and planning legislation (Apostolopoulou & Adams, 2019). Immediately after the 2008 financial crash, the government of the Canary Islands accelerated the neoliberalization of nature. However, a typical response to how protected nature is exploited has not emerged thus far. As noted by Apostolopoulou and Adams (2015), in other locations, ‘green’ and ‘un-green grabbing’ dialectics in the construction of the Port of Granadilla reflect the absence of a common strategy or a commitment to promote neoliberal conservation. ‘Un-green grabbing’ takes the form of environmental regulation where it reduces the grade of protection of species; and planning legislation, where it fosters urbanization of rural land and natural areas.

This case study provides evidence for the central role of the state in deepening the processes of neoliberalization, whereby it acts as a powerful agency that proactively promotes multiple inequalities and oppositions in the service of private capital accumulation (Peck, 2014). As the study of the port demonstrates, neoliberalization is ‘shaped by opportunistic moments’ (Peck & Theodore, 2012), and crises generate new opportunities for gain. A more intense exploitation of nature at a regional scale has been pursued since 2008. Power groups in the Canary Islands are responding to the challenge by deregulating land to liberalize the flow of capital on the island. The decision rolls back environmental regulations and enables ecosystem degradation on a large scale in non-

protected areas, signifying a return to ‘un-green grabbing’ measures. The intensification of such measures, namely privatization and deregulation, is commonplace in several EU countries (Apostolopoulou & Adams, 2015). This is a remake of nature aligned with capitalism to fit the needs of urban development, and to see the degradation of non-human nature as an opportunity for conservation (Apostolopoulou & Adams, 2017). A new environmental regulation (a new catalogue of protected species) not only focused on the Port of Granadilla but also extended this lack of legal protection to all protected areas in the Canary Islands. The role of the OAG, which was set up by the EU to monitor environmental issues arising from the construction of the port, should not be underestimated. However, (1) the OAG’s arguments were aligned more in favour of supporting ‘un-green grabbing’ through environmental deregulation than offsetting; and (2) the OAG exceeds its authority when it requests a reduction in the degree of protection for certain species, as was the case with the beetle that was encountered during the construction of the Port of Granadilla (OAG, 2010c, p. 25). Regardless of whether it is ‘green’, that is, if it offsets beetles and sea-grass or involves the creation of a new SCI to ‘replace’ nature in remote areas or ‘un-green grabbing’ that is involving the destruction of nature without its repositioning, non-human nature is modified to serve urbanization and capitalism. The crisis and social ‘domestication’ was seen as an opportunity to foster the deregulation measure that releases more land to be urbanized. However, the neoliberalization of nature does go unnoticed, although social movements protest against it. This emerges as an opportunity to challenge the logic of capital to extend the search for economic growth in all areas.

Third, this case study demonstrates that in light of specific demonstrations in defence of the environment and the territory, it is possible to build a radically critical discourse with the neoliberal model of capitalist-dependent development by merging social and environmental goals. The battle for particular natural resources in the mid-2000s and the lack of public participation facilitated the emergence of strong opposition to the mega-project in Granadilla against the commodification and replacement of natural resources divorced from its context, and finally, the Doxiadis Island model as mentioned above. This enabled collective action to expand its political opportunities in recent years. A powerful sociopolitical alliance (red-green) has emerged, combining the vindication of social rights with the defence of territory and diversity (Apostolopoulou & Cortes-Vazquez, 2018). Further, as this paper has illustrated, this sociopolitical movement was able to jump scales from local to insular and regional, and then to the EU level, to gain access to political opportunities (Smith, 1996). In Tenerife, protests are linked to a territorial reorganization that is driven by power groups and is oriented toward extensive urbanization regardless of non-human nature, whether protected or not, in which the Port of Granadilla, along with other infrastructure, is a key element. Mobilizations against the construction of some mega-infrastructure in Tenerife in the first decade of the 21st century came up with the slogan ‘another island is possible’, which was associated with the demand for a different social and territorial model that was more in line with environmental preservation, and linked to the demand for a ‘right to nature’ (Cortes-Vazquez & Apostolopoulou, 2019). The ‘right to the island’ overtakes the distinction between rural and urban areas, focuses on socio-natural relations, recognizes the singularities of the island and claims people’s right to command urbanization (Clark, 2013). Based on these mass mobilizations, it was possible to start a sociopolitical movement toward the global contestation of the prevailing political system endowed with anti-capitalist arguments, as pointed out by Harvey (2014, pp. 143–144).

Finally, during the expansion phase of the financial-real estate bubble, it was easier to articulate citizen contestation and promote mass mobilization. Social mobilization in the post-2007 period has subsequently lost impetus in the context of high job insecurity and unemployment. However, the emanating social responses contribute to the questioning and erosion of the hegemony of neoliberal ideology; the experience gained was later transformed into political capital, opening up opportunities for the shared construction of alternative and radical political objectives (as pointed out by Chomsky, 2012, pp. 16–18, 84–85). Thus, protest and desire for change have moved to a

political–institutional dimension, first through the support given to red–green local political forces, and second, to the confluence of these movements with an emerging force at a national scale (revealing another case of jumping scales at the political level).

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NOTE

1. Variegated movement that took to the streets and squares in several cities on 15 May and days later to express their common indignation against austerity, cuts, high unemployment rates and loss of political control in the face of the 2011 elections (Charnock et al., 2012, p. 4).

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