

**Neoliberal restructuring at work in the urban South:
The production and re-production of scarcity and vulnerability
in the Argentine fisheries sector**

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Declaration of authorship

I, Adriana E. Allen Brunet, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

Following the adoption of the sweeping neoliberal reforms adopted in the last quarter of the 20th century, within a few years the Argentine fisheries sector shifted from a relatively stable accumulation process – organised around a Fordist structure of production, domestic capital, waged labour and an ‘under-exploited’ resource base – to a situation of over-fishing, internationalisation of capital and flexible production based on the precarisation of the labour force. While this and similar processes elsewhere have been examined from either an ecological or socio-economic perspective, scholarly studies exploring the socio-environmental articulation and impact of regulation systems emerging from the neoliberal restructuring of production in the urban global south are still rare.

Articulating the perspectives of political ecology and regulation theory, this thesis examines: (a) the driving logic and contradictions of industrial production unfolding in the shift from a Fordist regime to a regime of flexible accumulation in an urban peripheral economy in the global context; and (b) the way in which such shift reshaped the ability of the state, firms and citizen workers to deal with increased scarcity, vulnerability and conflictivity.

The central hypothesis of this study is that neoliberal restructuring operates through a *dispositif* of socio-environmental regulation based on an exclusionary system of social reproduction, labour exploitation and nature expropriation, a *dispositif* that normalises capitalist accumulation through the production and re-production of differential sustainability. However, such *dispositif* is not static but subjected to a socio-spatial dialectical process that might have the capacity to subvert the way in which nature and labour are disciplined under the hegemonic neoliberal rationality. By focusing on the Argentinean fisheries sector in Mar del Plata city (historically, the ‘national’ epicentre of the activity), the thesis seeks to understand how urban-based struggles confront a regulation crisis at multiple scales (e.g. from the workplace to the sea).

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific
AFIP	Administración Federal de Ingresos Públicos (Federal Administration of Public Revenue)
AGP	Administración General de Puertos (Port Authority)
ATE	asociación temporal de empresas (temporary association)
BCN	Banco Central de la Nación (National Central Bank)
BRIICS	Brazil, Russia, India, Indonesia, China and South Africa
CA	catch authorisation
CAAP	Cámara Argentina de Armadores y Procesadores (Argentine Chamber of Ship-owners and Processors)
CAFREXPORT	Cámara de Frigoríficos Exportadores de la Argentina (Chamber of Argentine Fisheries Frozen Products)
CAIPA	Cámara de la Industria Pesquera Argentina (Argentine Chamber of the Fishing Industry)
CAPeCA	Cámara de Armadores de Pesqueros y Congeladores de la Argentina (Argentine Chamber of Freezer Vessel Owners)
CBA	cost-benefit analysis
CCE	Commission of the European Communities
CEA	certificate of environmental aptitude
CEDEPESCA	Centro Desarrollo y Pesca Sustentable (Centre for Development and Sustainable Fisheries)
CEPA	Consejo de Empresas Pesqueras Argentinas (Argentine Fishing Companies Council)
CGT	Confederación General del Trabajo (General Confederation of Labour)
CITEP	Centro de Investigaciones de Tecnología Pesquera y Alimentos Regionales (Research Center for Fishing Technology and Regional Foods)
CFC	chlorofluorocarbon
CFI	Consejo Federal de Inversiones (Federal Investment Council)
CFP	Consejo Federal Pesquero (Federal Fisheries Council)
CPRMdP	Consortio Portuario Regional de Mar del Plata (Regional Port Consortium of Mar del Plata)
CPUE	catch per unit of effort
CTA	Central de los Trabajadores de la Argentina (Argentine Confederation of Workers)
DNPYA	Dirección Nacional de Pesca y Acuicultura (National Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture)
EAP	economically active population

ECLAC	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
EEC	European Economic Community
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EM	ecological modernisation
EMS	environmental management systems
EP	executive power
EPH	Encuesta Permanente de Hogares (Permanent Household Survey)
EPZ	export production zone
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations
FDI	foreign direct investment
FECOOAPORT	Federación de Cooperativas de Trabajo de Actividades Portuarias, Navales, Pesqueras y Afines Limitada (Federation of Cooperatives Affiliated to the Fisheries Sector)
FEL	Fisheries Emergency Law
FFL	Federal Fisheries Law
FO	free onboard
FONAPE	Fondo Nacional Pesquero (National Fisheries Fund)
FVSA	Fundación Vida Silvestre Argentina (Wild Life Foundation Argentina)
FTAA	Free Trade Area of the Americas
GDP	gross domestic product
GoA	Government of Argentina
GPV	gross production value
GRT	gross registered tonnage
HAACP	Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point
H&G	headed and gutted
HP	horse power
IAC	Instituto de Acción Cooperativa (Institute for Cooperative Action)
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INAP	Instituto Nacional de Administración Pública (National Institute of Public Administration)
INDEC	Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos (National Institute for Statistics and Census)
INIDEP	Instituto Nacional de Investigación y Desarrollo Pesquero (National Institute for Fisheries Research and Development)
ISI	import substitution industrialisation

ISO	International Organization for Standardization
ITQ	individual transferable quota
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
IVQ	individual vessel quota
LDC	less developed countries
MCN	Mercado de Concentración Nacional (National Concentration Market)
MCS	monitoring, control and surveillance
MERCOSUR	Common Market of the Southern Cone (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay)
MEY	maximum economic yield
MGP	Municipalidad de General Pueyrredón (General Pueyrredon Municipality)
MNC	multinational corporation
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MSG	Multi-Sectorial Group
MSR	mode of social regulation
MSY	maximum sustainable yield
NAFTA	North America Free Trade Agreement (Canada, Mexico and United States)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NEM	New Economic Model
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NICs	newly industrialising countries
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSSE	Obras Sanitarias Sociedad del Estado (Sanitary Works State Society)
PE	political ecology
PEST	political, economic, socio-cultural and technological
PROMEX	Programa de Promoción de Exportaciones de Productos de Base Agrícola No Tradicionales (Programme for the Promotion of Exports of Non-Traditional Agricultural Products)
RMBA	Región Metropolitana Buenos Aires (Metropolitan Region of Buenos Aires)
RoA	regime of accumulation
SAGPyA	Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería, Pesca y Alimentación (Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Food)
SAON	Sindicato de Obreros Navales
SAP	structural adjustment programme
SENASA	Servicio Nacional de Sanidad y Calidad Agroalimentaria (National Agro-food Quality and Safety Service)
SIC	Standard Industrial Classification

SICONARA	Sindicato de Conductores Navales de la República Argentina (Argentine Naval Sailors Trade Union)
SIPES	Sindicato de Trabajadores del Pescado y Afines de la República Argentina (Union of Fisheries Workers and Associated Sectors)
SM	sociedad mixta (joint enterprise)
SME	small and medium enterprise
SOIP	Sindicato Obrero de la Industria del Pescado (Fish Industry Workers Trade Union)
SOMU	Sindicato de Obreros Marítimos Unidos (United Maritime Workers' Union)
SRNyDS	Secretaría de Recursos Naturales y Desarrollo Sustentable (Secretariat of Natural Resources and Sustainable Development)
SSP	Sub-Secretaría de Pesca (Under-Secretariat of Fisheries)
SUPA	Sindicato Unido de Portuarios Argentinos (Argentine Dockworkers' Union)
UAC	Unión de Asambleas Ciudadanas (Union of Citizen Assemblies)
UIA	Unión Industrial Argentina (Argentine Industrialists' Union)
UOP	Unión Obrera del Pescado (Fisheries Workers' Union)
TAC	total allowable catch
TNC	transnational corporation
UCIP	Unión del Comercio, la Industria y la Producción (Entrepreneurial Union of Trade, Industry and Production)
UOP	Unión Obrera del Pescado (Fisheries Workers' Union)
UNCLOS III	Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
VPA	virtual population analysis
WFCN	World Fund for the Conservation of Nature
WTO	World Trade Organization
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature
XSA	extended survivors analysis
ZCP	Zona Común de Pesca Argentino-Uruguaya (Argentine-Uruguayan Common Fisheries Zone)

Introduction

This thesis has been 12 years in the making and was developed in tandem with multiple demands and changes in my professional and personal life. I started my doctoral journey in 1999, when I developed the research that took me back to Argentina and more explicitly to Mar del Plata – the city where I grew up and spent the first decade of my professional life, as a researcher, planner and a political activist. My endeavour at the time was to explore why and how dramatic increases in fishing capacity brought about by the neoliberal restructuring of the national fisheries sector – historically hosted by Mar del Plata city – resulted in a profound socio-environmental crisis that persists even today. Initially documented by the media as a ‘local conflict’, this case study provides an opportunity to explore the way in which nature, labour, firms and the state became unwittingly imbricated across the local and extra-local levels. This process involved the shift from a relatively stable accumulation process – dominated by a Fordist structure of production, organised around domestic capital, waged labour and operating within an ‘under-exploited’ resource base – to a situation of fisheries overexploitation, internationalisation of capital and flexible production based on the precarisation of the labour force.

The content of neoliberal reforms in Latin America has been subjected to intense scholarly scrutiny, particularly in relation to their macro-economic impact and, to a lesser extent, to their social effects during the so-called New Economic Model (NEM) implanted in the 1990s throughout the region.¹ In a nutshell, the NEM refers to a major regional reversal from a state-led, inward-looking model of import substitution industrialisation (ISI) to a free-market regime that placed the private sector as the “key agent of dynamism in the economy” (Ramos, 2000: 1703). Whilst this and similar shifts elsewhere have been conceptualised as typical of the post-Fordist scenario, there is as yet no agreement as to whether such processes represent a new accumulation regime or just a reconfiguration of Fordism. Thus, many scholars refer to this transition as ‘after-Fordism’ or even ‘neo-Fordism’ (Boyer and Durand, 1993), ‘flexible accumulation’, ‘neoliberal capitalism’ or ‘liberal productivism’ (Lipietz, 1992), a debate to which I return in Chapter 1.

Encompassing the above terminology there is however general agreement on the fact that the neoliberal shift has effectively transformed the previous Fordist model – widely understood to include its hybrid expressions in the global south – bringing about a new geography of capitalist accumulation with far-reaching political, socio-economic and environmental

¹ See for instance: Bulmer-Thomas (1996); Veltmeyer et al (1997); and Ramos (2000), among others.

consequences. But surprisingly, the impact of neoliberal reforms embodied in the NEM on the environment, and more specifically on the way in which the regional introduction of a new market-oriented paradigm altered the governance framework ruling the appropriation of nature, has received little attention, particularly with regards to the fisheries sector.

The key tenets of the NEM – and more widely of neoliberal capitalism – were forcefully introduced and propagated by the ideologues of the so-called ‘Washington Consensus’ prior to the 1990s, through a number of bold reforms imposed as a condition for external debt renegotiation and access to new funds. These reforms were commonly encapsulated in the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs). For over a decade, the impact of the adjustment imperative on the environmental performance of the adjusted countries in Latin America and elsewhere was largely overlooked, both by national governments and international lending organisations. In the early 1990s, a few studies started to concentrate on this topic revealing that SAPs initially improved the macro-economic performance of the adjusting countries, while moving them away from a sustainable development path.² Although the nature and intensity of environmental impacts differ in each country, the aforementioned studies reveal some commonalities.

In most cases, SAPs accelerated the integration of the adjusting countries in the international market system by facilitating and enhancing international capital flows, shifting economic growth to the realm of extractive export-oriented activities, diminishing the regulatory capacity of the state and promoting the expansion of the private sector’s role in the economic process, while deregulating and restructuring domestic labour markets. However, economic growth failed to alleviate poverty and improve social income distribution, as the economic reforms resulted consistently in increasing inequity. The conjecture that the negative environmental externalities resulting from the adjusting process were to be addressed by national governments and more competitive markets also proved to be wrong. Increasing market competition was mainly based on the externalisation of environmental costs and increasing pressure on environmental resources and services, while the ability and strength of the public sector to correct and mitigate negative environmental outcomes diminished.

² The first two studies were launched by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and examined the outcomes of SAP in four countries (Mexico, Ivory Coast and Thailand) in a study undertaken by Reed (1992), and the Philippines in a study by Cruz and Repetto (1992). In 1994, the World Bank published its own overall assessment and in 1996 the WWF released the findings emerging from the analysis of nine additional countries: Jamaica, Venezuela, El Salvador, Cameroon, Mali, Tanzania and Zambia, and Pakistan and Vietnam (World Bank, 1994; Reed, 1996).

Concerning the fisheries sector, only a handful of studies address the impact of neoliberal reforms in Latin America, focusing primarily on the leading fishing countries in the region: Peru, Chile and Mexico (Aguilar Ibarra et al, 2000; De Andrade, 1999; Thorpe et al, 1999, 2000). In addition, the focus of attention appears to be on the changes experienced in the harvesting sub-sector, with less consideration given to the urban-based fishing industry. This oversight might be partly explained by the fact that, until recently, the position of Argentina in the world rank of fish producers was marginal. But also because, in comparison to other issues such as the Amazonian indigenous struggles to secure land rights and protect natural resources, the struggles of the various stakeholders of the Argentine fisheries sector appear to be 'less colourful' and clear cut. Furthermore, within critical studies on the evolution of the fisheries sector worldwide, the focus is recurrently on the contrasting trends between industrial and artisanal fleets, often overlooking the way in which economic, technological and environmental changes in harvesting impact upon the urban-based manufacturing sector. In empirical terms, this study aims at filling in the aforementioned gaps by examining the complex constellation of far-reaching socio-economic and ecological changes prompted by the NEM and rippling throughout the Argentine fisheries sector, and more specifically the way in which such changes unfolded in the context of a medium-sized city, outside the more studied metropolitan settings of capitalist accumulation in the global south.

Intellectual project and hypothesis

Acknowledging that case-based research is open to criticism concerning its generalisability (Ragin, 1987), the intention is to use the above case primarily as a basis to problematise the theoretical grounds of a number of theses concerning: (a) the driving logic and contradictions of industrial production as unfolding in the shift from a Fordist regime to a regime of flexible accumulation in an urban peripheral economy in the global context; and (b) the way in which this shift reshaped the ability of the state, firms and workers to deal with increased scarcity, vulnerability and conflictivity. Thus, beyond the empirical challenge at hand, throughout the development of this research my aim has been to contribute to the understanding of how societal responses are shaped in the face of socio-environmental struggles prompted and accelerated by the latest phase of the 'treadmill of production'. Originally coined by Schnaiberg (1980), this notion captures the ever-increasing levels of production and resource extraction driven by the intensified commodification of labour and nature from the second half on the 20th century onwards.³

³ Over the years, the notion of 'treadmill of production' has been further elaborated by Schnaiberg and others, including the work of: Gould et al. (1995, 1996); Gould (1991, 1992, 1993); Schnaiberg (1994); Schnaiberg et al. (2002); Weinberg (1997a, 1997b); and Weinberg et al. (1996).

In doing so, I set out to explore how and why the governance framework regulating the appropriation and transformation of nature and labour in the Argentine fisheries sector has evolved throughout the restructuring process of industrial production that took place within the adoption of sweeping neoliberal reforms. The timeframe examined covers the 1976-2002 period, throughout which such reforms were introduced through a sequence of authoritarian and democratic political regimes. Recognising that changes in the social regulation of production cannot be captured as static events but rather as historical processes, the analysis extends backwards to the origins of Fordism in Argentina and the national and local fisheries sector and forwards to the first decade of the 21st century to explore the extent to which the neoliberal legacy persisted after 2002, when Argentina entered the 'post-neoliberal era'.

My central hypothesis is that neoliberal restructuring operates through a complex machinery of socio-environmental regulation⁴ – conceptualised as a *dispositif* – that normalises capitalist accumulation by producing and reproducing conditions of 'differential sustainability', the latter defined as an exclusionary system of social re-production, labour expropriation and nature appropriation. However, this *dispositif* is not monolithic but subjected to an urban-based socio-spatial dialectical process that might have the capacity to subvert the way in which nature and labour are disciplined under the hegemonic neoliberal rationality. Whilst the theoretical discussion underpinning this hypothesis unfolds throughout the next two chapters, the clarification of a number of key terms is in order.

By neoliberal restructuring, I refer here to the transformation of a nationally confined Fordist production system to an internationally open one. The transition to 'flexible accumulation' is characterised by changes in the number and type of actors involved in the production process, and also by the exacerbation of unequal power relations between local and extra-local actors. Harvey (1990: 173-9) describes such a transition as entailing three elements devised to cope with the contradiction of overproduction at a point in which conventional coping mechanisms appear to have been exhausted: flexible production and less-secure employment patterns, spatial and decentralised integration of production under power-uneven negotiations, and the withdrawal of the state from regulating the social contract between capitalists and labour. This thesis investigates how these elements unfold in the urban-based fisheries sector of a peripheral country in the global context of fisheries production. A further issue examined concerns the transition trigger or, in other words, the locus of the crisis of overproduction that

⁴ As observed by Barbrook (2007), "the word 'regulation' has a much wider meaning in French than in English. Régulation does not simply describe certain types of law or bureaucratic watchdogs; it also covers the culture, manners, myths and dreams of a society" [<http://www.imaginaryfutures.net/>] [Last accessed: 25/09/2010].

prompted the neoliberal shift. I argue that this 'crisis' was not intrinsic to the Argentine fisheries sector but to the crisis of accumulation faced by a handful of capitalist advanced economies in the global north.

Although I adopt a regulation theory perspective to scrutinise the structural process of the aforementioned transition, I refer to a '*dispositif*' rather than a 'mode' of socio-environmental regulation, as a means to capture "a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid" (Foucault, 1980: 194). The notion of *dispositif* denotes a less stable and more contingent regulation process than that cemented through the Fordist's 'Great Compromise' (Jäger, 2003), acknowledging of course the differences between the way the Great Compromise unfolded in Argentina and more generally in the global south, and more advanced capitalist economies. In summary, *dispositif* analysis opens the room to critically interrogate the way in which the perceived or actual crisis of the previous regime of accumulation has been reconstituted, without prematurely defining the emerging reconfiguration as a new stable mode of social regulation and development.

The third concept that requires clarification is that of 'differential sustainability'. Systems theory refers to differential equations in sustainability analysis aiming at correlating rates of change to multiple variables (Clayton and Radcliffe, 1996). Whilst sharing a number of concerns with system theorists about the need to approach the analysis of complex systems as non-linear systems, I use the term 'differential sustainability' in reference to an emerging (and still underdeveloped) debate in the Spanish-written literature concerned with the social and environmental differential impacts that can be produced in the pursuit of 'sustainable development' (Fernández, 2005). My contention is that under the latest phase of the treadmill of production, the emerging geography of capitalist accumulation is increasingly being shaped under conditions of 'differential sustainability', that is by adjusting thresholds to meet the needs and wants of certain privileged social groups and territories at the expense of others. Scarcity and vulnerability play a crucial role in the socio-environmental conflict examined and in framing the society-nature relationships emerging from neoliberal restructuring in the Argentine fisheries sector and elsewhere. Thus, another aim of this thesis is to explore how differential sustainability and more specifically simultaneous conditions of scarcity/abundance and vulnerability/wealth are produced, reproduced and challenged under specific historical and contextual conditions.

The above considerations will also lead to the examination of key principles (e.g. economic growth, social justice, environmental sustainability) against which concrete outcomes are valued, prioritised, subordinated or neglected within a given *dispositif* of regulation. In this sense, it could be argued that this *dispositif* not only regulates the practices and strategies adopted by different agents but also normalises the boundaries of the ‘conceived’ (construction of meanings) and the ‘lived’ (practice of everyday life) (Lefebvre, 1976, 1991; Jabareen, 2006). For instance, environmental justice articulates two key development principles in which the actual and potential tensions and synergy in the articulation of social justice and environmental sustainability are expressed. However, while there are strong arguments favouring the synergy between these two principles, it cannot be taken for granted that all development projects are geared towards transforming the world into environmentally sustainable and socially just outcomes. Furthermore, environmental justice – like other principles – might not feature at all as a core value within a hegemonic socio-environmental or developmental project. However, the ideological configuration of any such project is not monolithic or static, but opened to dialectic reconfigurations. In this sense, a further layer of the analysis concerns the examination of the emerging discursive and material practices of workers and capitalists that erode or sustain the project of flexible accumulation facilitated through neoliberal restructuring.

In summary, this study examines the emergence of a socio-environmental struggle prompted by flexible accumulation, its socio-political process and spatial-environmental expressions, and the extent to which the emerging sites of socio-political regulation produced throughout this struggle find the capacity to contest or transform a new hegemonic rationality in the appropriation of nature, expropriation of labour and production of the urban fabric. While the theoretical framework underpinning the analysis is discussed in the following two chapters, I would like to place up-front a number of articulated assumptions upon which the research has been developed.

On bridging regulation theory and political ecology

As an intellectual project, this thesis aims at articulating the perspectives of regulation theory and political ecology (PE). This bridging approach could contribute, in my view, towards a comprehensive and radical understanding of the roots, consequences and ramifications of socio-environmental conflicts and of uneven development as they unfold under the post-Fordist scenario.

Regulation theory has been prolific in unpacking the political economy of the Great Compromise forged throughout Fordism, opening important questions as to how Fordism and the processes of social regulation that followed its disarticulation in the 1970s dealt with the antagonism ingrained in the relationship between capital, salaried labour and the state. More widely, regulation theorists have helped us to conceptualise different historical regimes of accumulation as the product of the struggle between the two poles in the capital-labour relation (Boyer, 1990; Peck and Tickell, 1992). In this context, the historical development of different phases of capitalist accumulation can be understood as a sequence of specific regimes containing such antagonism through different modes of social regulation that normalise the productive exploitation of labour, supporting its expropriation by capital within a wider social contract. However, this perspective has been less explicitly adopted as a lens to understand how not just labour but also nature features in the process of regulating the necessary conditions for capitalist accumulation. As argued by Neis (cited in Rogers 1998: 103), most studies of the transformation from Fordist to post-Fordist accumulation tend to “neglect the barriers to capital accumulation which nature imposes”.

From an environmental perspective, it is possible to recognise at least two main currents in the effort of reconceptualising the political economy of modern capitalism. One can be found in the work of ecological economists, such as Herman Daly, who challenge neo-classical economics for failing to recognise the dependence of the economy on the natural environment (Daly, 1977; 1993; 1996; Daly and Cobb, 1989). A second group includes PE scholars such as O’Connor, Harvey, Altvater and Lipietz, who reframe the Marxist anti-capitalist critique by placing socio-environmental struggles at the centre of such critique. This study falls within the latter group, as it is argued here that in order to understand the logic and contradictions underpinning emerging socio-environmental conflicts driven by the neoliberal restructuring of production, it is essential to examine the reconfiguration of political and policy processes that regulate the relations between state, capital, labour *and* nature in specific times and localities and across different scales.

While the first generation of PE studies focused on ‘ecological distribution’ conflicts (Martínez Alier, 2002), over time, several authors have further problematised the PE boundaries to unveil not just the economic and ecological configurations of capitalism but also the social and cultural meanings and practices that explain society-nature relationships beyond the dictate of economic social relations (Escobar, 2008 among others). Encompassing the above expansion or problematisation of its focus, in the last four decades, PE has evolved from the structuralist analysis of ‘chains of explanation’ in the production of socio-environmental conflicts across

locally situated exploited groups and environments and distant exploiters (Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987) to what Bryant (2001) has termed as 'progressive contextualisation', the latter encompassing a post-structuralist attention to discourse as a standpoint where different environmental narratives are fleshed out, represented and contested, articulating knowledge and power (Escobar, 1995).

In the light of the above considerations, it could be argued that while regulation theory offers a solid ground to examine contemporary socio-environmental conflicts as a consequence of universalised capitalist accumulation, a PE perspective allows us to read such conflicts as 'fragments' of non-economic rationalities that might persist or even emerge both at the margins and the core of what otherwise would appear as solid materialisations of the omnipotent capacity of capitalism to transform all: nature, social relations, knowledges and practices. In this sense, building both historical chains of explanations and a genealogy of contextualised narratives is therefore an essential task to trace the spatial, material and discursive practices that explain why and how social relations of exploitation and subordination among people turn into social relations of exploitation and subordination between people and nature, and also to unearth the opportunities for transformation that might emerge throughout this process.

On the 'urban' condition at the periphery of capitalist accumulation

A second decision underpinning this study concerns the understanding of 'urban', as the material and immaterial locus and product of capitalist accumulation and subsequently of socio-environmental conflicts. Lefebvre (1976, 1991) defines the production of urban space as a means through which capitalism has managed over time 'to attenuate' its internal contradictions. However, understanding the 'urban' as dialectically produced in social and spatial terms (Dovey, 2008) implies that the city is not simply the outcome of ruling relationships but also mediates the practices of the 'subaltern' in challenging "the controlling forces of the state, the market and the bureaucracy working together to foster mass consumerism and heightened social control" (Soja, 2010: 99).

The fact that the focus of the analysis is on an urban setting is not a random decision, nor just the context of the conflict examined. Instead, it represents a conscious effort to examine the 'sustainability problematic' as it unfolds throughout the social production of the city. Thus, the emphasis is not just on examining the specific effects that unfurl at the urban level but rather on the role of 'the urban' as a fundamental and strategic condition upon which industrial and de-industrialising modernity unfolds in the context of the so-called global south. This

undertaking fills in a number of significant gaps in the two intellectual perspectives articulated through this study.

On the one hand, the bulk of PE literature focuses on the non-urban realm. Keil (2005: 640) argues that “[t]he ‘urban’ in political ecology still has to be asserted in each conversation as it apparently continues to be counter to prevailing expectations that locate nature outside the city”. Swyngedouw and Heynen (2003: 899) rightly protest about this omission, observing that “[i]n the emerging literature on political ecology, little attention has been paid so far to the urban as a process of socio-ecological change, while discussions about global environmental problems and the possibilities for a ‘sustainable’ future customarily ignore the urban origin of many of the problems”. In other words, whilst the production of nature by capitalism has been at the core of PE studies, less work has focused on the relationship between urban environmental injustices and ‘capitalist urbanisation’. Swyngedouw and Heynen (2003: 900) go on to argue that “under capitalism, the commodity relation veils and hides the multiple socio-ecological processes of domination/subordination and exploitation/repression that feed the capitalist urbanisation process and turn the city into a kaleidoscopic, metabolic socio-environmental process that stretches from the immediate environment to the remotest corners of the globe”.

On the other hand, regulation theory has been prolific in permeating the understanding of urban politics, urban labour force and local governments (Goodwin et al, 1993; Mayer, 1992). But as argued by Painter (1995: 292), “[i]n practice, however, the application of regulation theory to [post-Fordist urban] issues has been very patchy”. Even extending the list to the work produced well into the 21st century, we find that the geographical reach of such applications remains mostly limited to a handful of cities in the advanced capitalist economies. As observed by Roy (2009: 825) most of “[t]hese theoretical positions have been produced in the context of the EuroAmerican urban experience”. Referring not just to regulation theory but to urban theory more generally, Robinson (2002, 2003, 2006) portrays the field as suffering from ‘asymmetrical ignorance’, with knowledge and policy produced in the cities of the global north to solve the problems of the urban global south. Although the contribution of this study is miniscule in relation to the magnitude of such task, I hope to add a humble but novel input by exploring what light can be shed through an articulated perspective of PE and regulation theory applied to the urban realm.

In addition, while the socio-environmental impacts of neoliberal reforms in Argentina and in Latin America have been examined by various authors, the bulk of this literature has tended to

privilege non-urban settings. A number of studies take the challenge of exploring the impact of neoliberalism in the urban context but – with very few exceptions – favouring Latin American metropolises and in most cases focusing exclusively on social and economic dimensions. By contrast, this study ventures into a cross-scale examination of the socio-environmental conflicts emerging, sustaining and, at points, threatening flexible accumulation in the Argentinean context by zooming into the urban locus of such process in Mar del Plata city, a medium-size city and a peripheral urban context in the geography of capitalist accumulation. Given the prominence of small- and medium-sized cities in absorbing the highest rates of population growth – not just in Argentina but more generally in the global south – it is surprising that little has been published on the specific impact that neoliberalism has had on these cities.

The above choice is not simply guided by empirical or personal reasons but more fundamentally taken as an opportunity to explore the way in which the ‘urban’ acts as a “a key point of integration of the political-economic move towards flexible accumulation” (Harvey, 1990: 254). Urbanisation, nature and society are intimately articulated in historical-geographical production processes (Castree, 2005; Smith, 1984, 1996). This means that the dialectical relation between urbanisation and environment materialises a specific set of social relations through “an ecological transformation, which requires the re-production of those relations in order to sustain it” (Harvey, 1996: 94). I therefore approach the ‘urban’, not just as the context where socio-environmental changes might take place, but also as a social construct through which spatial and discursive practices favouring or threatening the articulation of a new accumulation regime manifest both as ‘theatres of accumulation’ and of ‘uneven development’ (Armstrong and McGee, 1985).

On ‘transformed’ and ‘transforming’ class-struggles

In the last 40 years or so, ‘class’ politics has become increasingly seen as an anachronism. This is to say that the traditional worker-capital struggle has somehow lost its analytical appeal, in favour of new angles to social struggles, such as those introduced by the feminist, racial justice and environmental movements. However, whilst asserting a new dimension of capitalist exploitation and marginalisation, a separate understanding of gender, race and environmental struggles from those struggles traditionally associated with class runs the risk of overlooking the similarities (which does not mean ‘sameness’) among socio-environmental struggles, therefore fragmenting the emergence of a shared understanding and political action. Drawing on the aforementioned critiques and acknowledging the intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) inherent to the social construction of social relationships and subjects formation, the decision to focus on ‘class’ is inspired by the recognition that the domain of work is central to wider

processes of social integration or exclusion and vulnerability. As argued by Castells (1997), for most people, work is a key factor in supporting or threatening their articulation within the social structure.

The above discussion not only reminds us of the multi-layer lens required to understand the different forms that exploitation and marginalisation take for the sake of capitalist accumulation, but also emphasises the importance of adopting a dialectic understanding of the relationship between agency and structure. If on the one hand, the structures of capital accumulation help us to understand how human agency is shaped and conditioned, on the other hand, agency – through the assertiveness of ‘multiple otherness’ – also shapes structures. Both structure and agency are embedded in particular historical and geographical conditions that reject universal and deterministic explanations. As argued by David Harvey (1996: 359) “class is not a thing, an entity, or a ‘permanence’ (though under given conditions it can indeed assume such a form) but fundamentally a process”. Thus, class formation is not just defined by the command or lack of command over the means of production – as defined by Marx – but by the “situatedness or positionality (of each individual) in relation to processes of capital accumulation” (ibid.: 359). This means that individuals are in fact not just defined by a single dimension (production in Marx’s terms) but according to their relative position in multiple processes and circuits of capitalist accumulation, as producers, labour sellers, consumers, citizens, and so on. Class politics is often identified with the doing of certain ‘permanences’, such as trade unions, which are formed through long processes of social change. However, such processes are also constituted through discourses, imaginaries, institutions, material practices, social relations and power relations. Furthermore, these permanences are subject to processes of dissolution and reformulation that give rise to new forms of resistance or subordination to capital accumulation.

Whilst political ecology has been highly influential in expanding the understanding of socio-economic conflicts beyond the realm of class relations, I believe that the struggles between labour and capital emerging under the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism merit a specific re-examination. This is not to be done at the expense of other dimensions of socio-cultural and political identity (such as gender, age, ethnicity and so on) but rather the opposite. I then aim at reconstructing the multiple – economic, social, political and cultural – identities through which workers are perceived by others and by themselves, as their ‘class’ identity is reconstituted throughout the shift from a Fordist scenario to one of increased vulnerability and uncertainty. This exercise is in my view essential to understand their collective agency to confront or be subordinated to a new hegemonic accumulation regime, in particular because

this regime relies on the dislocation of labour as a unionised social sector. In this sense, I am not just interested in ‘confirming’ the levels of alienation experienced by disenfranchised workers but in exploring the extent, why and how, if at all, workers’ alienation from the social contract built up during the ISI regime – structured in Argentina between 1930 and 1972 – opened up other forms of collective identity and social representation not only in relation to the state and capitalists but also to nature.

On policy, policy-makers and policy making

While political ecologists focus on the politics and impact of policy, less common in the field is the analysis of policy and planning in the production and re-production of socio-environmental conflicts and more specifically in attenuating or controlling the inherent contradictions of capitalist accumulation by which the very basic conditions for its maintenance are eroded. A concern with the role of policy spans throughout the thesis, from the examination of SAPs and labour deregulation policies to fisheries management as fundamental nodes in the creation of scarcity, informality, and so on. The intention here is to offer a critical evaluation of the way in which institutionalised responses to socio-environmental conflicts are often at the heart of the production of such conflicts but also to explore the extent to which a PE perspective can help to construct possible ‘liberation’ routes for policy making and planned interventions towards environmental justice.

I was inspired by Dianne Rocheleau (2008) when she recalls how while working as a Ford Foundation Program Officer in Rural Poverty and Resources for East and Southern Africa, she embarked in one of her first field visits expecting a dry and bureaucratic exchange with an official of the Kenya Institute for Agricultural Research. Contrary to her expectations, the official greeted her by flagging in the air a copy of *The Political Economy of Soil Erosion in Developing Countries* by Piers Blaikie (1985) and enthusiastically asked: “Have you seen this?” (Rocheleau, 2008: 717). This event reminded Rocheleau “of the extent to which the leaders and staff of national bureaucracies and technocracies use and create indigenous and hybrid knowledge. ‘Local knowledge’ in this case included the experience and memories of colonial occupation that informed a critical political perspective among even highly placed technocrats in a decidedly conservative government” (ibid.: 717). Through my own professional life as an academic and planning practitioner, I have also often found that the discourses and practices in which we exist, value things, seek explanations and make decisions are far more imbricated and complex than we tend to think, therefore challenging the perceived need to choose from one of our identities. In other words, seeking ‘better’ explanations that will give us ‘better’ clues on how to seek change can be two simultaneous pursuits.

An additional conclusion to be extracted from Rocheleau's anecdote is that policy-makers are not a consistent and direct product of hegemonic thinking in the field in which they operate or of the politics of the institutions for which they work. A similar observation can be raised about policy, which can be defined as a negotiated outcome by a wide or narrow set of agents, rather than a straightforward rational definition of the best means to achieve specific aims separately defined by political representative structures. My contention in this respect is that during the NEM, policy making in specific areas (e.g. labour, fisheries, industrial production) was increasingly subordinated to macro-economic policies, whilst the networks within which policies were crafted became almost unequivocally aligned with the private capital accumulation of the national elite and transnational agents. This is not to say that sectoral policies do not embody problems that transcend the neoliberal mantra and relate in fact to the wider epistemological and axiological modernity frameworks within which knowledge and policy-making are socially constructed.

Taking fisheries and more widely resource management as an example, back in the 1950s, Innis (1954) argued that our scientific understanding of nature has developed in the service of economics rather than in the service of biological preservation. This is reinforced by the fact that, still today, we know far more about those species that are subjected to intensive economic exploitation than about those ones which are not. As contended by Rogers (1998: 105), in fisheries management as in many other sectors, "[t]he resource management myth that for each economic imperative there is an equal and opposite regulatory response in the name of conservation bears no relation to the events". In other words, the subordination of fisheries policies (and therefore of nature) to an economic rationality predates neoliberal capitalism and underpins in fact the very foundation of the field. Paraphrasing Polanyi (1968: 174), Rogers (1998: 110) goes on to argue that "the critical ability of resource management perspectives is limited by its implicit acceptance of the working of modern economy. In other words, resource management strategises with – but does not question – the demands that appear on the market".

Even if resource management is a more obvious example whereby nature becomes a commodity or service as the result of a process "shaped by human attitudes, technology, financial and economic arrangements, and political realities" (Mitchell, 1979: 1-5), other policy areas are not so different. In this sense, an additional aim of this thesis is to scrutinise the role of policy, policy-makers and policy making in fleshing out the neoliberal restructuring process, in seeking to guide and change the behaviour of economic agents and in dealing with the intended and unintended consequences of this process.

On method

Though the details of the methodological framework are presented in Appendix A, this section outlines some of the key decisions taken with regards to the methods applied as well as the data collected during the fieldwork that informs the analysis. Operationalising the intellectual approach previously delineated required a number of considerations, the first of which concerns how to articulate a regulation theory and PE perspective whilst respecting the core methodological principles embodied in each perspective. On the one hand, regulation theorists are concerned with the “analysis of concrete conjunctures through a rich and complex range of economic and political concepts directly related to the nature of the capitalist exploitation and domination” (Jessop, 1990: 66). But as noticed by Aglietta (1979: 66) the empirical world and its theoretical construction are not two separate entities:

...facts are not atoms of reality to be classified, linked and assembled. Facts must rather be treated as units in a process, or articulations between relations in motion, which interfere and fuse with one another. They can only be grasped by the collaboration of different modes of investigation, and this is why the concrete can be reached in thought only at the end of a globalizing procedure in which deductive and critical moments interact.

On the other hand, political ecologists privilege cross-scale analysis or, in other words, the analysis of interactions between actors and processes occurring at different spatial scales, as an essential method to understand how ‘non-place-based’ forces (such as the practices of transnational corporations) operate over ‘place-based’ activities such as fisheries exploitation and industrial production (Bryant, 2001).

Acknowledging the differences between these two perspectives (which hence partly explain the value of complementing them) both – or rather specific strands of thought within each perspective – share a number of methodological principles. The first concerns their iterative approach to travel between the ‘real-concrete’ and ‘the concrete in thought’ (Jessop 1990: 13:14; cf. Althusser 1969, 1975; Aglietta 1979: 15). In other words, they share the assumption that there is no such thing as a theory-free empirical world but instead and paraphrasing Althusser, the ‘real-concrete’ is socially constructed into the ‘concrete in thought’ as we try to apprehend and explain it. The second and related shared element refers to the emphasis on the role of structure-agency dialectics in helping us to understand change (both social and environmental) and its drivers. Again a dialectical approach is advocated by both regulation theorists and political ecologists, though the way in which dialectical analysis is approximated differs in its content but not necessarily in its epistemology. Thus, whilst political ecologists attribute agency also to nature, foundational authors from both perspectives such as Lipietz

and Blaikie privilege this approach through historically contextualised bottom-up narratives and chains of explanations.

A key challenge in bridging these two perspectives concerns how to approach the multiple scales at which a regulation *dispositif* is fleshed out, through provisional blocks, where for instance explanations at the macro level (e.g. the international and national economy) are not presented and interpreted as having an absolute downwards deterministic power and where explanations emerging at the micro level (e.g. the workplace) are not voluntaristically exaggerated in their upwards interpenetration. As discussed before, accumulation regimes and the societal contracts that regulate them are not coherent entities that unfold upon firms, workers and nature but, as put by Lipietz (1987), institutional stability within capitalist societies is the result of ‘chance discoveries’, inherently transient processes that emerge through complex webs of interpretation between often apparently unconnected discourses, policies and practices.

It is through the diachronic reading of continuities, discontinuities and permanences that we get to apprehend transient building blocks in the way the world (or rather fragments of it) operate. But, this approach also requires immersion into the economic and non-economic strategies and practices of ‘hegemonic’ and ‘subaltern’ actors, and into the symmetries and asymmetries between their rationalities, risks, gains and power relations. In this context, power is not just read as a social relation exclusively determined by control over the means of production but as articulated “in the interactions among, and the processes that constitute, people, places, and resources” (Paulson et al, 2003: 205). It is from the above assumptions that throughout the research I adopted a heterodox approach to data gathering and analysis, placing emphasis on constructing and deconstructing emerging explanations through an iterative process and a multi-scale analysis of bio-physical and socio-political change.

Following the above considerations, a first step in the analysis consisted in building up the constituting components of a provisional periodisation, aimed at identifying key stages of maturation and turning points in the role of the state, the development of industrial production, the social integration of workers through waged labour, the appropriation of nature and its regulation, and so on. Such periodisation was constructed at two levels juxtaposed in the analysis: first in relation to the wider process of capitalist accumulation and regulation in Argentina, and second and more specifically in relation to the emergence and historical transformation of the national fisheries sector, which for some time coincided neatly with the development of the sector in the city of Mar del Plata. This first step was addressed

mainly through the analysis of secondary information, including a large body of studies, census data and grey literature. This wider periodisation allowed me to examine the closed correlation but also differences between changes in the wider national political economy and that of the fisheries sector since the introduction of the NEM in 1991.

A second step entailed exploring the articulation of the neoliberal restructuring process in the fisheries sector throughout the 1990s, which was supported by a combination of qualitative and quantitative primary data collected through three fieldwork periods. The first period took place between December 1999 and January 2000 and was dedicated to the collection of a wide range of official statistical series concerning the evolution of catches, structure and fishing capacity of the fleets, industrial fishing establishments and onboard and onshore workers. The first fieldtrip also provided an opportunity to identify and contact a wide range of key informants and to test a pilot of the local census of establishments in the fishing industry of Mar del Plata, conducted a few months later.

The bulk of fieldwork was carried out between the beginning of August 2000 and the end of January 2001, with the support of four research assistants in the most extensive and quantitative fieldwork component. Primary data collection involved a survey of all active establishments in the hake fishing industry of Mar del Plata, operating in the main processing types of production⁵ as well as the so-called 'cooperatives of services' created in the early 1990s through which workers sell their labour force through piecemeal contracts and a wide spectrum of conditions of informality. All together, the survey covered over two thirds of all active plants at the time (58 establishments),⁶ interviewed through a structured questionnaire that gathered information on the control of each establishment over the harvesting, manufacturing and commercialisation processes. Out of all the surveyed units, 46 establishments were also interviewed through an in-depth semi-structured questionnaire that explored their perception of the 'business environment' in which they operate (broadly defined in terms of key policy, economic, socio-cultural and technological pressures), their assessment of key policies with a direct impact on the sector, and of their own resources and strategies and prioritised solutions to the crisis affecting the fishing industry at the time of the

⁵ These included the processing and filleting of fresh and chilled finfish and shellfish and processing, filleting and freezing of finfish and shellfish.

⁶ A total of 174 fishing manufacturing establishments were identified through the triangulation of several official registries, depurated down to 154 actual establishments whose addresses were verified on the ground. Out of this, 77 plants were found to be temporarily or permanently closed down and 19 rejected the survey. Which means that the total number of plants effectively interviewed represented over 75 percent of all the active fishing establishments in the production sub-headings covered by the survey. For more details see Appendices A and D.

fieldwork. In addition, the second fieldwork also involved 42 semi-structured interviews with a wide range of key informants from the local fisheries sector, including scientists, politicians, policy-makers, leaders of entrepreneurial chambers, environmental NGOs, trade unionists, industrialists and female and male workers. A third two-month fieldtrip undertaken between June and August 2001 gave me the opportunity to revisit some of the interviewees, in particular workers, who were then approached through in-depth interviews and observation at work, at home and at public assemblies.

Prior, during and after the fieldwork the analysis was complemented by the systematic perusal of archived and online local and national newspapers throughout one of the main peaks of the conflict (2000-2001), labelled by the media as the 'Fisheries War'. Further updates in gathering print media data were undertaken in 2005, 2007 and 2010, which allowed the examination of changes in the framing of this socio-environmental conflict, as experienced by the national and local fisheries sector after 2003, when a left-centre Peronist candidate assumed the national presidency and explicitly abandoned the political direction set out during the NEM.

The unusually long timeframe through which the research supporting this thesis was developed turned involuntarily into an advantage, in the sense that it allowed the prospective examination of the fieldwork findings ten years after its completion. In a similar way, a repeated number of visits to the field between December 1999 and August 2001 opened the possibility of verifying a number of trends during and outside the periods recognised as the peaks of the crisis. An additional asset was my deep familiarity with the specific local context under analysis. As mentioned at the beginning, I grew up and started my professional career in the city of Mar del Plata, but I was born in the Patagonian region, where many of the processes of change discussed throughout this thesis took place, and I have remained personally and professionally connected to this region throughout my life. As argued by Heidegger (1962), 'familiarity' implies an unthought capacity to relate to a given context or culture that gives it unit and meaning. This is not to suggest that researchers are handicapped in unfamiliar contexts but to highlight the capacity to relate, communicate and read the said and unsaid is enhanced by familiarity.

Needless to say, the research also has a number of limitations, perhaps the most obvious is that keeping a balance between wider and deeper explanations meant at points that further width or depth had to be sacrificed. For instance, it would have been interesting to conduct a similar fieldwork to the one carried out in Mar del Plata in the Patagonian localities, where part of the national fisheries sector shifted during the neoliberal restructuring process. Instead, I

was only able to approximate the differences and similarities between Mar del Plata and other localities through secondary literature, grey reports, the media and electronic correspondence with key informants. In a similar vein, the local census conducted for this study was an extensive and novel effort to survey the local fishing industry from other angles than the economic perspective that prevails in most sectoral surveys. Furthermore, still today, the fieldwork represents the most comprehensive quantitative and qualitative effort to examine the cooperatives of services. However, some details about the cooperatives, as well as other elements of the research, data gathered and findings had to be eliminated from the final writing up in the interest of length and time.

There are of course not just empirical but also intellectual concerns that had to be put to the side. Any piece of individual research is nothing more than a stepping stone in the collective quest for answers. I have done my best to warn the reader along the road about potentially interesting or relevant avenues of interrogation that are not fully explored in this thesis. In the final chapter I provide a retrospective and prospective evaluation of the answers developed throughout the thesis but also of the questions raised for future research. The readers will ultimately be better placed to judge the real contributions and limitations of the work presented in this thesis.

Structure of the thesis

It is always difficult to decide how to best tell a story. Although the construction of the analysis was iterative – travelling between the macro and micro levels of the problematic under investigation and between the offshore and onshore ‘realities’ – the thesis is structured in a relatively conventional way, moving gradually from the bigger to the smaller picture and building multi-scale connections as the discussion progresses.

The first two chapters unpack the theoretical grounds underpinning this thesis. Chapter 1 explores the theoretical debate surrounding socio-environmental change under the treadmill of production. The discussion starts by seeking clarity on the content of the transition from Fordism to what followed after its apparent dissolution in the 1970s. In doing so, the first section explores the main interpretations put forward from a regulation theory viewpoint in dialogue with contrasting approaches seeking to explain change from the specific perspective of the global system ‘periphery’. The second section examines the differences between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ architecture of capitalist regulation, as emerging in the societal contract between workers, capitalists and the state, but also in relation to the social economy, the production of nature and the production of urban space.

Having set up the main components of a regulation theory approach, Chapter 2 explores socio-environmental change in the treadmill of production from a PE perspective. The first section unpacks the hypotheses, interpretations and methods put forward from a structuralist and post-structuralist PE perspective, examining the internal tensions but also strengths of articulating wider chains of explanation with the analysis of material and immaterial practices emerging at the micro level. The second section presents the analytical framework deployed throughout the thesis for a dialectic understanding of socio-environmental conflict and change. In doing so, the discussion seeks to bridge the perspectives of PE and regulation theory moving across the macro, meso and micro levels in which nature, workers, firms and the state are weaved together through a dynamic *dispositif* of neoliberal regulation.

As argued before, changes in the patterns of capitalist accumulation and its socio-environmental regulation can only be traced through a long-term diachronic perspective, thus Chapter 3 sets up the context in which the analysis is focused, investigating the continuity and discontinuity between seemingly different regimes defined not only in economic terms but also in socio-cultural and political terms. The first section provides a brief overview of the main hegemonic phases in capitalist accumulation and regulation terms displayed throughout the history of Argentina as a modern nation. The discussion focuses in particular on the transition from the ISI to the NEM phase and examines how the country experimented with all the most identifiable dimensions of the neoliberal mantra. From the rolling back of the state's resources and functions to regulate the negative social and environmental effects of capitalist production, through the wide-scale privatisation of public services and companies, trade liberalisation and the dismantling of protectionist barriers and the introduction of excludable private property rights facilitating the mining of nature.

Departing from the previously examined wider periodisation, sections 3.2 and 3.3 explore the emergence and transformation of the fisheries sector, focusing respectively on its regulation prior and during the neoliberal turn. These two sections pay particular attention to the early articulation of the sector as an urban-based activity, with its epicentre in Mar del Plata city. Section 3.2 travels from the origins of the sector in the turn of the 19th century as an artisanal activity, led by impoverished European immigrants at the margins of the national agro-export model to its consolidation and expansion under the ISI umbrella, which gave birth to a dynamic manufacturing sub-sector forged under a hybrid Fordist organisation. Section 3.3 examines the way in which neoliberal orthodox thinking became to replace the ISI model from the mid-1970s, launching the sector into a restructuring process pursued both under military and

democratic governments until the turn of the 21st century. The fourth section within this chapter assesses the way in which fisheries governability was transformed as a consequence of the neoliberal restructuring process and concludes by discussing a number of processes hypothesised to be the gears and cogs that put the neoliberal regulation *dispositif* in motion.

Changes in the governance framework regulating the appropriation of nature not only have an impact on the natural resource base or on economic and social functions (such as production value and employment) but on the political environment in which firms and workers operate and on their relations with each other, the state and nature. Such changes need to be understood in the light of a complex web of agents – notably the state, capitalists and workers – whose rationality and relations are not simply shaped by economic interests. Against this background, Chapters 4 and 5 examine the expected and unexpected outcomes produced by the neoliberal *dispositif* in the fisheries sector.

Chapter 4 looks at the implementation of key neoliberal tenets through the commodification of the sea and explores how this process simultaneously engendered economic wealth and ecological scarcity. The analysis sets forth a number of chains of explanation revealing the interconnections between international and national processes of change; for instance, between those exporting and those importing ‘excess’ fishing capacity. Chapter 5 examines the complex taxonomy of economic agents born out of the neoliberal turn and then analyses how the restructuring of the fisheries sector unfolded in the processing sub-sector, creating a new geography of capitalist accumulation. The spatial and social implications of this process are examined in the third section of this chapter, which travels from the meso to the micro level looking at the material and immaterial impacts of industrial restructuring upon the physical and social fabric of Mar del Plata. The fourth section inspects how the flexibilisation of the labour force impacted upon female and male workers and their trajectories through precarious work. The chapter concludes by offering a brief recapitulation of the efficacy of the neoliberal regulation *dispositif* in socialising costs whilst privatising benefits.

By the turn of the 21st century, the fisheries sector was immersed in a profound crisis and high level of conflictivity, with its epicentre in Mar del Plata city. Chapter 6 scrutinises the experiences and interpretations of local workers and capitalists under a new set of uncertainties resulting from the neoliberal restructuring process. In doing so, the discussion explores the way in which the new business environment is conceived and lived, moulding the strategies adopted by labourers and entrepreneurs. Adopting a discourse analysis perspective, Chapter 7 examines the claim-making process unravelled by the increasing conflictivity

threatening the stabilising capacity of the neoliberal regulation *dispositif*. In doing so the analysis pays particular attention to the multiple coalitions and antagonisms emerging among different claim-makers, the content of their claims and the way in which scarcity and vulnerability were socially defined and redefined throughout the claim-making process.

Finally, the Conclusion offers a retrospective and prospective evaluation of the thesis as a whole. Retrospectively, the discussion examines the efficacy of the neoliberal regulation *dispositif* and the machinery that kept it in motion even after Argentina entered a post-neoliberal era of stabilising capitalist accumulation upon the production and re-production of differential sustainability. The discussion then moves to examine the continuities and discontinuities that allowed the differentiation of the neoliberal *dispositif*, vis-à-vis other hegemonic economic and political regimes. The key arguments set forward throughout the analysis are revisited by examining the role of scientific management, of workers' struggles and of the urban condition in facilitating or threatening the normalisation of neoliberal premises. The final section assesses the potentials and limitations of the analytical framework to navigate across the macro, meso and micro levels, and offers a prospective look at further research quests to be undertaken for a fruitful articulation of political ecology and regulation theory.

In the last three decades, industrial production has experienced a significant change, shifting from a Fordist nationally confined accumulation system to an increasingly transnational, free-trade system, commonly termed ‘post-Fordism’, ‘flexible accumulation’, ‘neoliberal capitalism’ or, as suggested by Lipietz (1992), ‘liberal productivism’. While we tend to think about accumulation regimes as solid blocks that explain the economic behaviour and worldwide destiny of nations, firms and workers, such convergence is a matter of debate. Are we witnessing a new global order? Or, as contented by Brunelle (2007), a new era of global disorder heralded by the wearing down of the tripartite foundational principles of the post-World War II order (security, justice, and welfare)?

This chapter examines the logic and consequences of the latest shift in the treadmill of production, exploring the internal coherence and contradictions of the emerging societal paradigm from the perspective of the ‘south’, redefined more recently as the ‘global south’.⁷ While the details of how Fordism and liberal productivism have been forcefully implanted and/or willingly adopted in Argentina (and almost simultaneously in the rest of Latin America) are explored later, this chapter scans the main pillars of the old and new societal contracts, each understood as a complex set of institutional norms, policy paradigms and other practices designed to support the operation of capitalist accumulation. Regulation theory has been fertile in providing a number of influential theses on the contract cementing the relationships in the capital-labour-state triad. However, less attention has been given to non-economic factors. Thus, the discussion examines not just the nature of the contract between labour, capital and the state but also the role of the social economy, gender, space and nature in providing the necessary conditions for the re-production of capital.

1.1 From Fordism to post-Fordism

1.1.1 The ‘Great Compromise’

⁷ I use these terms acknowledging the dense debate that has over time populated notions such as ‘Third World’, ‘non-aligned countries’, ‘developing countries’, ‘non-industrialised countries’ and ‘less developed countries’, among the most significant terms dominating the debate during the Fordist era. The post-Fordist shift has resulted in a terminology explosion with further distinctions applied to the ‘south’. As in the previous era, some encompass a wider political view, such as the ‘global south’, others take a more economic perspective to designate the emerging winners in the new world order, as reflected by the notions of ‘newly industrialising countries’ (NICs) and ‘BRIICS’ (Brazil, Russia, India, Indonesia, China and South Africa), the latter encompassing the largest non-OECD emerging economies.

Several strands of regulation theorists argue that a regime of accumulation (RoA) can be unpacked into three components: a labour process model, an accumulation system and a mode of social regulation (MSR). The first component captures the principles governing the labour process; the second involves the macro-economic performance and output of production and how this is put to social use (e.g. household consumption, government spending); while the third one captures the institutionalised “mechanisms which adjust the contradictory and conflictual behaviour of individuals to the collective principles of the regime of accumulation” (Lipietz, 1996: 2).

From a regulation perspective, Fordism can be described as a model of societal-economic integration, widely adopted by the advanced capitalist countries but also propagated over time to the so-called ‘developing world’. Underpinning this model was a ‘Great Compromise’ between capital and labour to share productivity gains and to avert a crisis of overproduction accruing from increased rationalisation. In this context, the Taylorist revolution involved not only increased emphasis on the mechanisation (or automation from the 1950s) and rationalisation of the production process leading to increased productivity but also led to the supremacy of skilled managers and technicians overseeing semi-skilled or unskilled workers.⁸

After World War II, three key mechanisms cemented the Fordist MSR in advanced capitalist economies: (1) social legislation to ensure the sharing of national productivity gains between employers and workers through the establishment of minimum wages and collective agreements; (2) credit or paper money issued in accordance with the demands of the accumulation regime instead of available gold reserves; and (3) a welfare state designed to ensure the re-production of wage-earners and non-earners as consumers throughout their whole lifecycle. Within this Keynesian framework, the state was conferred multiple responsibilities and roles: to oversee the financial system, restricting or easing the credit flow and regulating private investments; to stimulate growth through government spending or budget deficits; and to lay out an advanced system of social security, protecting the ill, the unemployed, the retired, the sick and so on. The last of these was an essential part of the Great Compromise; the state was to complement the fair distribution of production gains by taking over many functions previously attributed to the social economy and performed by households and communities. Of course, these new state responsibilities were not just a calculated step to

⁸ The effects of capitalist mechanisation of labour and ‘degradation of skills’ under Fordism have been examined by Walker and Guest (1952) in *Man on the Assembly Line* and Aronowitz’s (1973) in *False Promises*. In the 1970s, Braverman (1974) took the ‘degradation of skills’ thesis one step further, arguing that just as workers were deskilled through mechanisation in early capitalism, both blue and white collar workers were deskilled through the Fordist expansion of automation, with the consequence of building up a reserve army of labour.

support accumulation but also the outcome of multiple social struggles. Beyond the driven forces at play during Fordism, social but economically inspired policies abstracted the non-monetary economy from the 'real world', and social integration became primarily a function of waged employment matched with increased purchasing power and mass consumption.

Despite the many variations found among advanced capitalist countries, the architecture of the Fordist mode of regulation was therefore based on three combined notions of progress: economically defined 'social progress', 'technological progress' and the 'progress of the state', as the custodian of the public interest. Fordism also relied on a complex architecture of international affairs. The key partners within this RoA (USA, Europe and Japan) operated within a semi-free-trade system, supported by capital transfers and technological assistance led by the USA and channelled through programmes such as the Marshall Plan.⁹ In contrast, most Third World countries were excluded or self-excluded from this phase of international trade. Beyond later liberal attempts to engage them into the emerging world order – such as the Alliance for Progress – there was no equivalent to the Marshall Plan for the Third World.¹⁰

The 'crisis of Fordism' or the 'end of the Golden Age' (Lipietz, 1996) refers to the breakdown of a relatively stable world order, manifested through falling productivity gains in most industrial sectors, slow or nil economic growth, rising inflation and growing unemployment, as experienced by the Western economies between the late 1960s and mid-1970s. In this context, a chain of interconnected events eventually rendered the disciplinary power of Fordist regulation ineffective. When confronted with falling productivity gains coupled with sustained increases in real wages – at least during the initial stages of the crisis – and also the rising cost of fixed capital in relation to the total workforce. As price rises outstripped wage increases, purchasing power declined leading not only to falling investments and real profit margins but also to increased unemployment.

During the first half of the 1970s, a 'safety net' of unemployment benefits and social welfare prevented the fall of domestic demand in major capitalist countries. But these social transfers (paid through taxes or contributions) eventually "placed too great a burden on the active part of the economy... [leading] to a further drop in the profitability of investment. In the end, the very legitimacy of the welfare state and welfare benefits was called into question, and with it, the whole Fordist compromise" (Lipietz, 1992: 16). This process took different trajectories in different countries and was accompanied by the intensified interpenetration of national

⁹ For a detailed and critical discussion of the Marshall Plan, see Cox and Kennedy-Pipe (2005).

¹⁰ There is a dense body of literature populated by various schools of thought dealing with the position of the Third World during the establishment and dismissal of Fordism (see for instance, Amsdem, 1990; Sidaway, 1990; Tickell and Peck, 1992; and Amin, 1994), aspects of which are examined later.

economies. Following the increasing competitiveness of Japan and Europe, a trade war arose in the late 1960s and was intensified by the 1973 oil crisis, which imposed further cuts from Fordist revenues. As a way to avert falling profitability, reduce labour costs and the 'constraints' imposed by government control, multinational corporations started to expand the establishment of subcontracting links in a number of Third World countries, changing the architecture of international trade from the previous semi-free to an 'open' system, rendering the international component of Fordist regulation increasingly ineffective.

1.1.2 What after Fordism?

Different scholars have termed the phase of capitalist accumulation resulting from the crisis outlined above in different ways. A first division surfaces between those who see the emerging world order as 'neo-Fordism' – an updated/transformed face of Fordism in which some elements of the previous RoA persist – and those who broadly defined it as a 'post-Fordist' era, emphasising the discontinuity between the old and new regime of accumulation. Some scholars propose the notion of 'after-Fordism' (*Après-Fordisme*) as a reminder of the provisional labelling of the yet insufficiently understood process that followed the dissolution of Fordism. The book co-authored by Robert Boyer and Jean-Pierre Durand in 1993¹¹ is paradigmatic of this debate. While Boyer argues that a new production system/model/paradigm is emerging from the breakdown of Fordism, Durand counter-argues that the emerging regime "cannot be interpreted as a change of production paradigm" (ibid.: 67) but rather as a refinement of Fordist and Taylorist principles.

The map of what followed after the break down of Fordism is highly complex and cannot be described as a single world path. As regulation theorists would argue, an important distinction needs to be made between national and international trajectories. Thus, while some countries entered a period of post-industrialisation and dematerialisation of production around the 1970s, others were experiencing 'peripheral Fordism' (Lipietz, 1987: 78), through increasing "mechanization and a combination of intensive accumulation and a growing market for consumer durables". Two paths can be further differentiated within that process, on the one hand, in some countries the new RoA was based on an earlier import substitution phase, a significant segment of skilled workers, a sizeable middle class and the availability of autonomous national capital; on the other hand, peripheral Fordism became also increasingly based on the exporting of raw materials.

¹¹ English translation published in 1997.

A central concern in this study and underpinning the ‘post-neo-after Fordism’ debate – from now onwards referred to as ‘post-Fordism’ – is about the continuity and discontinuity between the previous and current paths of capitalist accumulation. What came after Fordism needs to be explored in light of the specific transformations occurring in relation to the emerging modes of social regulation, models of labour process and the specific ways in which economic growth and accumulation are pursued in macro-economic terms, but *also* in relation to the role played by nature and the social economy, to which I return later in this chapter.

In terms of production and the organisation of work, post-Fordism is often characterised – albeit not without disagreements – as a process of flexible specialisation (dominated by multinational corporations), relying on adaptation and innovation. A process by which modern industrial production moved away from mass production in large factories and mass consumption of standardised goods towards specialised niche markets demanding varied and customized products and services and based on flexible manufacturing units through just-in-time or lean production. The newer ‘flexible manufacturing systems’ are assumed to be better placed to overcome – at least in theory – capital’s tendency towards overproduction. The labour process model is accordingly based on a wide range of methods seeking flexibility in the organisation of work, such as subcontracting, home working and hot-desking. New information technologies are presented as playing a key role in building flexible and intelligent systems of labour and machines that could quickly respond to the whims of the market.

In political and social terms, post-Fordism can be more sharply characterised by the abandonment of Keynesian universalistic policies to one of neoliberal *laissez-faire*, deregulation and privatisation, a shift that, as demonstrated in the following chapters, reshaped the role of the state dramatically. Social inequality – the ‘one-third winners, two-third losers society’ – is accepted as an unavoidable feature of capitalist accumulation, an economically naked formulation that promises growth for some without progress for all. In cultural terms, post-Fordism promises individual freedom and choice from “the structural rigidity of the Fordist labour process” (Lash and Urry, 1994: 5), freeing individual agency through ‘lifestyle choices’ and ‘entrepreneurial capacity’.

Fordism was more unequivocally identifiable due to the solidity of the socio-economic Great Compromise, aligning the state, capitalists and workers under a hegemonic contract. This contract was concerned with achieving progress through the organisation of social demand beyond competition among firms and was to a large extent shared by political projects as diverse as conservatism, Christian democracy, socialism and communism. By contrast, under

post-Fordism, the 'free' market becomes the main institution for social regulation, with a reduced role for the state. The welfarist state is indeed blamed for the collapse of the previous regime, through the bureaucratic, expensive and outmoded constraints imposed on capitalist firms through social welfare, environmental and labour protection, and so on. In other words, the role of the state shifted from being "a mediator between capital and labour to the disciplination of labour on behalf of capital" (Moulaert et al., 1988: 16). Thus, as a societal paradigm, post-Fordism involves "an overall reduction of administrative-type solidarity based on belonging to a national collectivity, with 'civil society' (meaning quite simply the family) supposed to take over responsibility for what the welfare state can no longer guarantee" (Lipietz, 1987: 33-34).

In international terms, the above components require oiled global mechanisms to facilitate the geographical mobility of international capital. In other words, accumulation under the new system relies on the deployment of capital-intensive technological innovation on a global scale to recover the investment required. It is often argued that as trade becomes increasingly internationalised, the state loses its direct control, becoming more marginal in directing flows of capital and investment. But this does not imply a complete reshuffle of previous hegemonies in international trading. In his *Global Restructuring and the Power of Labour*, Dunn (2004) shows that patterns of foreign direct investment (FDI) "remain skewed towards the Triad economies of Europe, North America and Japan, and where there is investment beyond these economies it is highly localised" (cited in Blackledge, 2007: page unknown).¹²

1.1.3 Views from the south

I now turn to examine the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism from the perspective of the 'south', a term used to designate the complex political economy 'geography' that throughout the time differentiated 'advanced capitalist countries' from the rest of the world. It is important to notice a number of features in the Fordist/post-Fordist terminology transition. The first and most striking one refers to the passage from a political world map – in which the south either self-proclaimed itself as the 'non-aligned' or 'Third World'¹³ – to one in which their economic performance in the global market became more generally used as a way to describe

¹² [<http://www.isj.org.uk/index.php4?id=282&issue=113>] [Last accessed: 15/09/2010].

¹³ Coined by Sauvy in 1952 in an article published in the French magazine *L'Observateur*, the expression 'Third World' (*Tiers Monde*) was originally used as an analogy between the countries of Asia, Africa, Oceania and Latin America with the 'third estate', that is, the commoners before and during the French Revolution (the first and second estates being priests and nobles). The notion became appropriated by the south at the famous 1955 conference of Afro-Asian countries held in Bandung, Indonesia, and was later popularised in academic circles by a group of social scientists associated with Sauvy's National Institute of Demographic Studies and by Perroux's *Le Tiers-Monde* journal.

the current world order.¹⁴ Through this shift the world became organised more explicitly according to the position of individual countries in relation to the hegemonic RoA and less in terms of their specific MSR. By contrast, the term 'global south' alludes to the multiple cultural responses to globalization, on issues of the environment, poverty, immigration, gender, race, hybridism, cultural formation and transformation, colonialism and post-colonialism, modernity and post-modernity, referring to a complex web of transatlantic encounters, homes and diasporas, resistance and counter-discourses emerging from and at points challenging the super-ordinate umbrella of globalization.¹⁵

Central to the above discussion are the contested notions of 'development' and 'underdevelopment'. But while these notions were the subject of prolific debate on Fordism, with some exceptions theoretical discussions on the post-Fordist era exhibit a more universalistic and Euro-Americanist perspective. As argued by Sidaway (1990: 301) "[s]ometimes the debates concerning post-Fordism, flexible accumulation and so on do not make it clear that while such phenomena may be part of a global process, 'transition to a new regime of accumulation' does not describe the results of interconnected global change everywhere, particularly so for the peripheral parts of the global system". This observation opens a number of questions on 'peripheral development' or, more precisely, on 'development in the periphery'. Has the periphery – so central to dependency theory – become redundant in the post-Fordist era? Has globalisation permeated all corners of the earth to such an extent that the old periphery has been transformed beyond recognition? Has peripheral development become a transitory position that can be actively transformed or overcome? If so, how and by whom? By the whims of the market? By the entrepreneurial capacity of firms and workers? By the steering hand of the state? Or by the muscle of international financial institutions?

My aim in the discussion that follows, is to explore how these and similar questions feature the south in debates about the shift from Fordism to the post-Fordist era. Two main schools of thought have been highly influential in articulating a number of explanations about Third World trajectories throughout these two periods: the French regulation school and the dependency school, as opposed to the liberal tradition in theories of development, in which the difference between the developed and developing world is mostly explained through a taxonomy of

¹⁴ Since the beginning of the Cold War and throughout the Fordist era, a political international discourse from the south articulated its distinction from a bipolar First and Second World – non-aligned with NATO or the USSR – rejecting the emulation of the industrialisation path pursued by the advanced capitalist world and, more importantly, opening the space for a problematisation of development and underdevelopment as more than the outcome of economic performance.

¹⁵ For a map of the complex constellation of geographies and identities spanning critical responses to globalisation, see the work of Bayat (2000), Cohn (2004) and Rigg (2007).

'stages of economic growth' (Rostow, 1960) centred on how 'underdeveloped' countries might eventually 'catch up'.

Underdevelopment and dependency

Centre-periphery-structuralist theory originated in the late 1940s with the so-called 'Singer-Prebisch thesis'. Put simply, this thesis refers to the deterioration of the terms of trade between underdeveloped and developed countries through which the former had become over time less able to purchase manufactured goods from the latter in exchange for a given quantity of their raw materials exports. Over time, this thesis led a whole generation of scholars associated to the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)¹⁶ to argue that some degree of trade protectionism was required if developing countries were to find a sustained development path. Their criticisms of the neo-classical belief in self-stabilising price mechanisms became widely accepted, as faith in liberal theories and policies became increasingly undermined by the increasing gap between rich and poor nations. Their work was highly influential in guiding ISI policies among non-aligned countries from the post-World War II period until the mid-1970s.

In the early 1960s, a group of Latin American intellectuals began to develop an overall criticism of modernization theory and structuralist theory, as seen by ECLAC's scholars, spurring a set of theoretical approaches that became generically known as dependency theory.¹⁷ The core of their methodology was class analysis, shedding light on the internal and external conditions of individual societies that reproduce the use of mechanisms of exploitation. In his 'capital satellite model', Frank (1967, 1975) argues that production surplus flows through a number of satellites from the periphery to the centre, from local satellites (e.g. farmers) in the underdeveloped world through regional and national satellites (e.g. landlords and regional capitals respectively) all the way to core capitalist countries. Frank sustains that such exploitative flows are regulated by colonial relations rather than by the class structure of the peripheral countries. Amin (1974, 1976) takes this model one step further, arguing that the bourgeoisie in the core benefits from the re-production of the periphery in a number of ways and therefore plays a functional role in sustaining such exploitative flows. While the Third World export sector secures cheap goods, firms in the centre realise cost reductions through

¹⁶ ECLAC (CEPAL in Spanish) was created in 1948 and originally known as ECLA. The scope of the Commission was broadened in 1984 to include the Caribbean countries.

¹⁷ In addition to the Latin American *dependentistas*, typified by the work of O. Sunkel, E. Faletto, T. dos Santos, A. Quijano, F. H. Cardoso, J. Ramos, R. Rojas and A. G. Frank among many others, dependency theory was developed by a number of Marxist scholars, notably P. Barán (1957) and the Egyptian economist Samir Amin (1969, 1974, 1976, 1984).

low wages in the periphery. In this context, “[t]he policies of the core countries aim at realizing these cost reductions irrespective of whether a dynamic multiplier relationship is established between the mass-consumer goods production sector capital goods sector or not” (Schuurman, 2004: 37). The outcome is ‘growth without development’, as both national and foreign investment goes almost entirely into the export sector instead of the production of mass-consumer goods.

In line with the above argument, by the late 1970s, Latin American structuralists had become more critical of ISI strategies, focusing instead on examining plausible explanations for the persistence of poverty, unemployment and unequal distribution of national income even in the context of relatively successful ISI.¹⁸ This led to a new focus on the re-production of dependence and of centre-periphery dualism through the hegemonic role played by advanced capitalist countries in the generation of modern technology and the hosting of multinational corporations (MNCs). According to Singer and Ansari (1977: 37), dualism in science and technology plays a key role in reproducing underdevelopment, as:

... the rich countries are the home of modern technology and the seats of the multinational corporations. It is because of this that the rich industrial countries will tend to be the chief gainers from any type of commercial relationship with the Third World – be it in the form of trade or investment. Over the long run the LDC [less developed countries], irrespective of the commodity it produces, will not share the gains fairly, except in the case of those groups or sectors which become integrated into the economy of the rich country.

In the case of *dependentistas*, a central concern in the 1970s was not just the role of science and technology but of the international division of labour as a key variable explaining the reproduction and/or possible transformation of the relations between the core and the periphery. Reflecting on the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism experienced during the 1970s from the perspective of the south, Sunkel (1984) argues that the change from an international into a transnational order – symbolised by the increased power of MNCs – has tightened the integration of socio-cultures into a new whole, in which the ‘transnational community’ is at odds with emerging counter-forces at the national level, striving for national identity through cultural and political movements.

By the 1980s however, ‘development theory’ entered an ‘impasse’ (Schuurman, 2004), in which over-encompassing explanations like those produced by *dependentistas* and structuralists

¹⁸ For Seers (1976), the emerging international division of labour in the 1970s challenged the First-Second-Third World division. Instead he proposes a finer grain distinction based on the composition of imports (e.g. oil, corn and technology inputs) between ‘least dependent’ countries (e.g. USA, USSR, China), ‘semi-dependent’ countries (e.g. Japan, Nigeria, Argentina) and ‘dependent’ countries (e.g. Brasilia, Cuba and Portugal).

became increasingly replaced by empirical research about specific development and underdevelopment trajectories within the south. This impasse cannot simply be explained by the hegemony of the neoliberal paradigm at the time – symbolised by Fukujama’s end of history (1989) and presumably of the Third World – but rather by a number of critiques generated from within the neo-Marxist camp (Booth, 1985; Sklair, 1988), to which I return later in this section. However, as argued by Aldo Ferrer (2010: 7), three core messages in the work of Prebisch – consolidated and expanded through the contribution of both structuralists and *dependentistas* – encapsulate the dilemma of development in today’s global world:

Firstly, central countries form visions of the world order that serve their own interests; and peripheral countries need to rebel against this theoretical framework to resolve the dilemma. Secondly, it is possible to transform reality and achieve a symmetrical non-subordinate relationship with the world’s power centres. Thirdly, the transformation requires a fundamental change in productive structures to incorporate knowledge into economic and social activity, since this is the fundamental instrument of development.

The following section explores these questions through the contributions of the French regulation school, who argue that regularities in the trajectories of Third World countries cannot be simply deduced from the hypothesised universal regularities of imperialism and dependence but require instead historical comparative research.

Peripheral Fordism

Since the early 1970s, a number of scholars associated with the regulation school have focused on examining how, historically, specific systems of capital accumulation are ‘regularised’ or stabilised as a function of social and institutional systems.¹⁹ A central contention of this school of thought is that the inherent contradictions of capitalism can be temporally controlled through specific forms of social regulation but “over time, the accumulation process will again grow out of the set of institutional forms which contoured it” (Moulaert et al, 1988: 12). In essence, regulationists argue that a larger economic crisis will emerge until controlled by a new set of stabilising institutional forms. Thus, each MSR can be seen as a ‘stage’ within succeeding periods of growth and crisis, in which a particular set of social relations dissolves while another set is developed. From this perspective, the ‘miracle industrialisation’ experienced by countries such as South Korea, Taiwan, India, Brazil and Mexico between the 1960s and 1970s has been interpreted as a result of multinational capital strategies, which faced increased international

¹⁹ Among the most representative and influential members of this school of thought are M. Aglietta (1979), R. Boyer (1985 and 1986) and A. Lipietz (1992).

competition by shifting production to the global south, particularly South-East Asia, “where the social contract with labour was either weakly enforced or non-existent” (Harvey, 1990: 141).

Looking at specific trajectories of industrialisation in the global south, Lipietz (1985, 1997) distinguishes two different paths: ‘primitive Taylorism’ and ‘peripheral Fordism’, exemplified by South Korea and Brazil respectively. The former encapsulates the model followed in the 1960s by ‘the tax-free zones and sweatshop states of Asia’ and widespread in the 1990s through the geographical delocalisation “of certain limited Taylorist industrial activities towards social formations with very high rates of [labour] exploitation... the products principally being re-exported to the more advanced countries” (Lipietz, 1997: 10). By contrast, ‘peripheral Fordism’ combines intensive accumulation and the growth of final markets based on previous ISI trajectories. Such process is ‘peripheral’, “in the sense that, in the global circuits of production, skilled labour... remains largely outside the country in question. In addition, [production] outlets correspond to a specific combination of local middle-class consumption, the growing consumption of durable goods by the workers and the export of low-price goods to the central capitalist countries” (ibid.: 11).

In this context, regulation theorists question the celebration of ‘clear signs’ of industrial growth in developing countries.²⁰ Furthermore, Moulaert et al. (1988) notice that by the late 1980s only about 20 percent of commodity imports in developed countries came from the global south, mostly in the form of primary and intermediate products. “As such, LDCs have on average, inherited only a small part of the accumulation side of Fordism” (ibid.: 14). A closer look reveals that the integration of the global south economies into the global economy has been unevenly confined to a few urban industrial enclaves based on imported inputs, technology and foreign capital and led by the accumulation needs of a handful of advanced capitalist economies. In Lipietz’s view (1987: 38) late industrialisation in the Third World is intimately linked to the ‘ever-present crisis’ in the First World, and a result of capital’s operations expansion from the centre to the periphery, expanding Fordism not only as a labour process but as a mode of consumption. For Christian Palloix (1979), this expanding process takes place through the rise of the international credit economy: “... developing countries buy industrial equipment with international credit that increasingly comes from private sources... It remains to be seen whether this foreign currency flow, which at most allows means of production to be bought from the developed countries, really does involve a process of industrialization and a new international division of labour” (cited in Lipietz, 1982: 38).

²⁰ Denoted, for instance, by the increasing proportion of industrial jobs in the developing world from 5-15 percent in 1960 to 20-35 percent in 1978 (Lipietz, 1997).

Critiques of 'peripheral Fordism' have attacked regulationists' characterisation of the labour process for being 'unproblematically homogeneous'. For instance, Maller and Dwolatsky (1993) argue that in the context of South Africa the structuring and restructuring of the labour process has been far more complex. In contrast with an idealised view of the 'prevailing labour process' characterised by the standardisation of production and the 'deskilling of an homogeneous workforce of semiskilled operators', they argue that 'racial Fordism' (Gelb, 1991) – as established in South Africa during apartheid – should be characterised instead by "[i]ts unevenness, its overlaps with other methods of organising work and the modifications introduced by an active and resistant workforce" (Maller and Dwolatsky, 1993: 71). In a similar vein, Amsden (1990: 9) criticises regulationist explanations, arguing that "to recognise and label the emergence of more complex production in the 'Third World' as 'peripheral Fordism' is not to explain it". However, a preliminary conclusion of relevance to the core questions investigated in this thesis is that these arguments do not undermine the value of regulation theory in helping us to make sense of the cyclical processes of capitalist growth and crisis but rather cast caution in accepting this grand narrative as unproblematically capable of accounting for the diversity of processes unfolding in the global south. They also remind us of the importance of exploring the hybrid expressions that both Fordism and post-Fordism assume in the global south, in comparison to the global north. Lipietz (1982: 40) himself warns us against the possibility of reducing the different models of capital accumulation pursued in the developing world as simply a function of capital needs in the centre, arguing that "[w]e must now consider the 'peripheral' countries for themselves, as social formations with their own social relations and policies corresponding to their own dominant classes."

However, a question remains as whether or not the systematic coherence of the Fordist and post-Fordist phases of growth and crisis of uneven capitalist development are enough to explain the specific trajectories and modes of social regulation of the global south at the meso and micro level. Thus, a latest wave of regulation researchers have argued that emerging modes of regulation cannot be explained relying on a primary focus on the nation state-international trade context but require a finer-grain differentiation of spatial differences observable in local processes of economic, political and social restructuring (Peck and Tickell, 1992; Goodwin et al., 1993; Low, 1995; Painter and Goodwin, 1995). In other words, if we accept that global neoliberalism has deepened the spatial expression of uneven development, then we should also acknowledge that "while processes of capital accumulation are increasingly global, the patterns of accumulation, regulation and social reproduction that emerge in each region are formed within a local context and therefore are different and distinctive" (Broomhill, 2001: 121).

1.2 The 'old' and 'new' architecture of regulation

Acknowledging the external and internal critiques previously outlined, it could be argued that regulationists still offer a coherent framework and a number of solid hypotheses to investigate the crisis-growth cycles of capitalist accumulation and the way in which dependency and underdevelopment are produced and reproduced through such cycles. In this context, the conceptualisation of social regulation is particularly useful to understand how social relations are configured and reconfigured under different accumulation regimes. However, regulationists – like structuralists and *dependendistas* – over-rely perhaps on the hegemonic power of capitalist accumulation, reducing all aspects of structural formation (social, political and technological) to the economic realm. In addition, little is said in these schools of thought, about the role of the social economy, of nature and of the urban condition. The rest of this section offers a number of reflections on the way in which the old and new architecture of social regulation could be expanded to capture not just an economic expression of the world but one that acknowledges the role of socio-political and environmental struggles in the structuration of socio-environmental regulation, and the need to identify stability and instability not only at the macro level but through contingent and dialectic 'irregularities' observable at the meso and micro levels.

1.2.1 Workers, capitalists and the state

For Aglietta (1998: 62) capitalism tends to undermine the conditions on which it depends but "is a force for change which has no inherent regulatory principle". As a consequence, its stability depends on constraining structures but unlike neoliberal claims, regulationists argue that these are not the result of rational individual economic choices but "emanate from the creation of social institutions, legitimised by collective values from which societies draw their cohesion. This cohesion is the product of social interactions that take a variety of forms: conflicts, some of which may be violent; debates that find their way into the political arena; associations that lend collective strength to groups of employees; and legislative provisions that institute and enshrine social rights" (ibid.: 50).

As previously discussed, regulation theory scholars place particular emphasis on how such cohesive social institutions are structured across a compromise between the state, capitalists and workers through mediating mechanisms to reconcile economic growth and social progress. From this perspective, the first and most obvious transformation experienced in the shift from the 'old' to the 'new' regime has been the breaking down of the Fordist social contract

between 'big business', 'big labour' and the 'state' (Harvey, 1990), and therefore the transformation of its mediating mechanisms. Under the post-Fordist era, "the relationships between corporations and their territories of origin are far weaker, and there are important constraints on the autonomy of national state policies of which the most important are financial and are connected with high interest rates, the cost of servicing public debt and the negative impact of slow growth on government revenues" (Dunford, 2000: 31).

Dunford's argument suggests one significant transformation of the role previously played by the state – lengthily discussed as the 'hollowing out of the state' by authors such as Rhodes (1994) and Jessop (1990, 1993, 2002) – in which its power and autonomy are weakened through the transference of some of its former roles upwards to international bodies and MNCs and downwards to the local state. But has the national state effectively become redundant in cementing a new social contract and in mediating conflicts between capitalists and workers? Has its power to structure an economic and political regime being fundamentally transformed? Furthermore, can we assume such a clear and coherent alignment between national elites and capitalists within whatever role has been left to the nation state? Is it correct to assume that the action of the state is mainly geared towards mediation between capitalists and workers' struggles? What about other social and environmental struggles? Questions like these are not simply interrogating the emerging forms of social regulation in the post-Fordist era but also well-established theoretical explanations, such as those reviewed in the previous section. In fact, it could be argued that through the erosion of the Fordist Great Compromise, the entity and agency of each of these subjects (the state, labour and capitalists) has been reopened to new questions and answers.

For instance, Jessop (1983: 141) has criticised the structuralist approach for assuming: (a) that state elites are unproblematically aligned with the notion of supporting accumulation as their overriding priority and (b) "that the state can always reproduce the complex requirements for accumulation as long as politicians have the will to do so". By contrast, he argues that the interests of the state elite might be more *sui generis* than usually assumed and subjected to pressures from non-capitalist forces. This implies that the state cannot be treated as a coherent subject but rather a complex and conflictual conglomerate of state apparatus, institutions and practices, whose 'unity' is not pre-given but politically defined through struggles that exceed the labour-capitalist equation (Jessop, 1982).

Capitalists also appeared to have experienced a significant transformation throughout the shift, with most accounts referring to the increased power and diversified strategies deployed by

MNCs. In this context, the national state in less developed countries is often portrayed either as an opportunistic, allied or a hopeless agent, losing control over the flows of international capital while local and regional government structures become more engaged with geographically decentralised entrepreneurship. But does this mean that in doing so capitalists operate within a transnational 'free' market in which they can do without previously necessary bargaining with states and trade unions? In their study *The Logic of International Restructuring*, Ruigrok and van Tulder (1995) examine the strategies adopted by the world's 100 largest companies and conclude that the restructuring race is not so much between individual firms but rather between industrial complexes, defined as 'bargaining networks' organized by large core firms and a large number of bargaining partners, including suppliers, distributors, governments, financiers and trade unions. They argue that in seeking expanded forms of accumulation, the largest corporations have not necessarily become 'borderless' or 'truly global' but rather followed the logic of domestic restructuring, benefiting significantly from national and regional governmental trade and industrial policies. In short, bargaining happens not only inside but also outside the value chain, and this in turn produces and reproduces old and new international dependencies but through complex mechanisms in which national states and their policies still play a crucial role.

While a large part of the literature has focused on MNCs' impact on the economies of the global south, far less attention has been given to the very mixed pool of industrialists in the developing world that emerged over decades of semi-closed ISI, encompassing not just national holding companies but also small and medium firms. How have the latter in particular faced the structural macro- and micro-economic changes introduced with the opening up of the national economies within which they operate? How have they responded to a new set of uncertainties? Can their strategies be better understood from an 'evolutionary' approach (Low and Macmillan, 1988) in which process and context interact in a dynamic way? What can be said about their political and social bargaining strategies inside and outside the value chain? My contention in this respect is that a further problematisation of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) is required to understand them not just as economic rational actors but as agents who are simultaneously constitutive of and constituted by wider networks and societal contracts, a discussion to which I return in the following chapters.

Last but not least is the consideration of the reorganisation of labour in the production value. Under flexible accumulation, regulation theorists have identified two key trends in labour spatial and social organisation. The first trend concerns the spatial integration of flexible 'just-in-time' production systems in advanced capitalist countries, requiring a combination of low-

and high-skilled labour. The second trend refers to the dispersal of unskilled labour-intensive processes to peripheral countries in parallel with “increasingly automated production and fewer, but higher skilled workers in advanced centre countries” (Oberhauser, 1990: 221). In the latter, the labour process has been redefined through spatial displacements giving place to new geographic configurations. Massey (1984: 24) claims that a better understanding of the labour process “can help to make the link between changes in the broad pattern of accumulation and changes in location”. Oberhauser (1990: 214) takes this argument further, contending that:

... the spatial division of labour is linked to the spatial differentiation of class struggle between labour and management. Class struggle, race, levels of exploitation and other factors affecting capitalist social relations of production vary among regions. Advanced capitalist firms take advantage of this regional variation, shifting different segments of production to separate locations partly depending on the availability and character of labour. Thus, space itself plays a key role in capital expansion, providing new areas of production and consumption.

The above points to the need not only to render the reorganisation of labour as a deeply spatial (and unequally distributed) process, but also of re-embedding the understanding of labour in the specific historical trajectories of workers’ struggles for integration or against marginalisation within the societies in which they operate. For Zolberg (1995) the so-called ‘dissolution of the working class’ can be understood through the four levels proposed by Katznelson (1986) to explain its formation in the first place: class structures, class-based ways of life, class dispositions, and collective action. First and most obviously class structures refer to the way in which “class has been patterned by economic development” (ibid.: 28), as the process by which specific sectors of the population have been incorporated or excluded from the camp of the effectively economically active. Second, class can be understood through experienced “patterns of life and social relations” (ibid.: 29). Such patterns are defined and transformed by the ways in which the welfare state succeeds or fails to integrate workers to the citizenry, but also by the expansion of a set of class cultural values promoting the growth of middle-class lifestyle and consuming patterns – whether as an aspirational dream or a reality. Third, class can also be understood as ‘formed groups, sharing dispositions’, in other terms the self-perception of being part of a collective with shared struggles.²¹ Fourth, class can be regarded as collective action and also appraised in terms of its political party appeal as a privileged constituency.

As discussed in later chapters, under neoliberalism, the working class in semi-peripheral economies such as Argentina’s has been deeply shaken by the forceful integration into a new

²¹ Zolberg (1995) argues that in the early 1960s, in most advanced capitalist economies, affluence played a significant role in the demobilisation of the working class, as did the advent of universally available electronic mass media, in which workers became ‘the general public’.

economic order. One significant element is that with the reconfiguration of the labour market, enclaves of the informal economy are becoming more than ever a permanent feature of the formal economy and of flexible accumulation strategies. But, how could the shift to flexible accumulation and labour's responses to it be conceptualised beyond simply circumscribing these to strictly economic changes? How can we overcome the tendency to model our understanding of contemporary working classes by mirroring the well-documented trajectories of the north? We return to these questions throughout the analysis, examining not only the economic but also political, social and cultural post-Fordist transformation of the working class in conjunction with that of the state and of capitalists.

1.2.2 Social economy, gender and nature

Following the previous discussion, it could be argued that an accumulation regime is supported not only by the effectiveness of the institutionalised mechanisms deployed by the state and the labour process model adopted, but more fundamentally by the social economy and nature. These two dimensions have been neglected not only by neo-classical economic theorists but to some extent also in the early work produced by *dependentistas* and regulation scholars. While the latter acknowledge the role on non-economic mechanisms in the production of labour (Aglietta, 1979; Lipietz, 1987), specific attention to the overexploitation of nature and the social economy in capitalist accumulation has been rare.

Polyp's 'economic totem pole' (1996) helps to illustrate the above point (see Figure 1.1). A neo-classical economic look at modern industrial economies focuses on the official market economy, government expenditure and, at best, takes into account the so-called 'underground economy', encompassing both the 'illegal' and 'informal' economies. In short, attention is given to all the economic transactions and relationships that involve money, ranging from wages, consumption, production, investment and savings through to public expenditure on social services, infrastructure and so on, to unregistered cash flows. But conventional economic analysis (and policy making) has historically left out the non-monetary areas of activity supporting the top elements of the market economy, rendering the social economy and nature both invisible and undervalued. Both under Fordism and liberal productivism, the social economy and nature are often considered in terms of the impacts generated by capitalist accumulation but not as constitutive conditions that could sustain or threaten capitalism.

Figure 1.1 The economic totem pole

Official market economy

All transactions and relationships involve money - including wages, consumption, production, investment and savings.

Government expenditure

Money spent by government on social security, defence, education and infrastructure like roads, bridges, airports, sewers and public transport.

Underground economy

Cash transactions which are hidden to avoid taxes or illegal like drug trafficking, prostitution and pornography.

Social economy

All non-market economic activities. Includes subsistence farming, housework, parenting, volunteer labour, home healthcare and DIY. Also includes barter or skill exchanges. In Northern economies the informal economy is estimated to be one-and-a-half times the size of the visible market economy.

Mother Nature

The natural resource base is the largest and most basic support for the monetary economy. All economic activity depends on the survival of healthy, natural ecosystems.



Source: Adapted from Polyp (1996, page unknown).²² Redrawn by the author.

Regulation theorists have thoroughly examined how under Fordism, the functions traditionally performed by the social economy have been ‘statised’, as the welfare state – at least in the context of the advanced capitalist economies – became responsible for providing the necessary support for the re-production of labour. Under liberal productivism, this role of the state has been significantly eroded, with functions such as caring for children, the disabled, the ill and the elderly left to the private realm of the family. Meanwhile the state has been called on to reduce its role to the minimum regulation of market affairs and to enable entrepreneurs to get on with expanding capitalist accumulation. This shift is clearly symbolised through a series of popular definitions of what the social realm is by British prime ministers Margaret Thatcher and David Cameron. Thatcher is still remembered for her infamous 1987 statement²³ “there is not such a thing as society... There is living tapestry of men and women and people and the beauty of that tapestry and the quality of our lives will depend upon how much each of us is prepared

²² ‘The economic totem pole’, *New Internationalist* Issue 278 [online] [<http://www.newint.org/features/1996/04/05/totem/>] [Last accessed: 01/09/2010].

²³ Prime minister Margaret Thatcher, talking to *Women’s Own* magazine, 31 October 1987 [online] [<http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689>] [Last accessed: 07/10/2010].

to take responsibility for ourselves and each of us prepared to turn round and help by our own efforts those who are unfortunate”. Twenty-three years later, Cameron’s 2010 call to build a ‘Big Society’ – described as “the biggest, most dramatic redistribution of power from elites in Whitehall to the man and woman on the street” – could not have been more consistent with that of his predecessor. In both cases, the third sector – be it individuals, families or ‘communities’ (whatever these are) – are called back to hold the social economy together.

In recent years, scholars such as José Luis Coraggio (2008), among others, have put forward a less instrumental and more progressive argument of why the social economy (or *economía solidaria*) matters. Coraggio starts by challenging the notion of ‘development’ as the creation of wealth and production, distribution and consumption of mass merchandise, and the definition of ‘individual wellbeing’ as the wealth quota that each person could potentially obtain. Instead, he argues that an alternative economy should be built on the basis of what Polyp identifies as the shoulders of the economic totem pole: supporting the possibility of ‘other’ social relations than those developed in purely economic terms and of an alternative relationship with nature ‘other’ than the extractive logic reproduced by individualistic capitalism.

Central to Coraggio’s argument is the notion of social justice as something that cannot be merely achieved through market rules and redistribution efforts. Within contemporary capitalism, the production and redistribution of wealth – defined in monetary terms, as income, credit and so on – tends to be inevitably functional to the re-production of the same practices and system that polarise a society and alienate and exclude the masses. For Coraggio, the challenge is the transformation of the social ways in which work, distribution, property, circulation and consumption are currently organised towards alternative practices of reciprocity, self-determination and redistribution rather than competition. Such alternatives should seek to support what he calls the ‘amplified re-production’ or quality of life of individuals, groups and communities. This notion is resonant of what Polanyi (1957) has termed in the *Great Transformation* as the decommodification of ‘fictitious commodities’, such as labour, land (nature), money and knowledge, typically expanded at the expense of other dimensions of existence. While Coraggio unfolds a progressive vision in which the social economy plays a central role, he does not go further into unpacking how such transformation should/could be achieved.

In a similar vein, regulation scholars such as Jessop (1990) has drawn on Gramsci’s notion of the ‘integral state’ (Gramsci, 1971), extending some of his ideas to the framework required for an ‘integral economic analysis’ able to capture the “socially embedded, socially regularised

ensemble of economic activities, organisations and institutions that combine to give a distinctive dynamic to specific capitalisms in distinct times and places” (Jessop and Sum, 2006: 7). However, while consistently treating capital as a social relation, there seems to be little concerted effort among regulationists to examine the role of nature and intersectionalities of class, gender, race, age, ethnicity and ability in the dynamic configuration of social relations regulating capital that, as noticed by Harvey (1990), have emerged in the post-Fordist system of flexible accumulation. For instance, among such intersectionalities, the architecture of gender relations presents some significant differences with that of the Fordist era, both in terms of production and re-production.

First, the gender order of the Fordist regime has been deeply transformed by the emerging forms of work organisation, for instance, through a clear polarisation between the ‘feminisation of work’ and the creation of female ‘cheap-wage zones’, but also through the increasing weight of working women across different classes and geographies, either as part of dual wage-earner households or as single household heads. Second, as pointed out by Brigitte Young (2000: 317), “[t]he flexibilisation of the labour market has also undermined the separation between the productive and reproductive economy that was once the hallmark of the Fordist gender order”. Karin Hossfeld (1990) describes this as the ‘triple shift’ in which women find themselves engaged in a combination of formal and informal production activities and in the subsistence economy of their families. “The borders of this ‘triple shift’ are quite fluid for women, but relatively rigid for men. Women often spend up to sixteen hours in this ‘triple shift’ in order to survive. In contrast, males do comparatively little work in the household economy and work either in the formal economy or as subcontractors or workers in the informal economy” (Young, 2000: 317-18).

In addition to increasing gender inequality, a significant difference between the Fordist and post-Fordist accumulation regimes is that in the former, reproductive work was at least socially recognised as a function supporting the productive sphere. This was done through a combination of the stigmatisation of reproductive functions and by secluding re-production to the ‘private’ division of labour within the household. By contrast, from a neoliberal viewpoint, reproductive work represents a social and economic externality – to be addressed privately at household level or through the market. This not only reinforces the invisibility of the social economy in supporting capital accumulation but has worsened gender inequality through the ‘re-privatisation of the domestic’ (Brodie, 1994).

The production of nature under flexible accumulation has much in common with that of intersectional social identities, as it has also been subject to a process of narrow commodification. In the 1980s, a number of Latin American *dependentistas* started to acknowledge the environmental problematic as a major basis for a new critique of economic theory. According to Sunkel and Leal (1985), from its earlier stages, capital accumulation has perpetrated through colonial and imperial domination a productive irrationality in the management and exploitation of natural resources characterised by energetic and ecological inefficiencies. For instance, in tropical ecosystems natural biodiversity has been typically undermined by monocropping practices, leading to higher vulnerability to natural catastrophes and less flexibility to adapt to changing market demands. According to Leff (1995: 27), the ‘development of underdevelopment’:

... represents more than structural dependency within a larger process of global accumulation. It is not a relative stage of growth that could be accelerated by ‘liberating’ the relative advantages of different countries based on their availability of productive factors, or by reordering international trade to break the gap between rich and poor countries. Underdevelopment is an effect of the *net loss of a nation’s productive potential*; it refers to a social formation where exploitation has undermined the ecological and cultural mechanisms for recuperating its productive forces, for regenerating its natural resources.²⁴

The process described by Leff has also been articulated to what Driessen (2003) calls ‘eco-imperialism’, by which southern countries have lost the productive potential that could have led – under an ‘alternative productive rationality’ – to different social relations and strategies in the articulation of these societies with their own ecological and cultural conditions.

The contemporary ‘environmental crisis’ has many of its roots in the specific history of Fordism and its crisis in the 1970s. As argued by Keil et al. (1998: 7) “[t]he geo-political economy of Fordism was equally a geo-ecology of resourcism”. Under Fordism, the economic component of the system was geared towards the goal of expanding industrial production and economic growth. The political component held together the coalition of the state, private capital and labour in promoting and achieving this goal, with cities playing a key role as ‘theatres of accumulation’. The confluence of interests among the state, capitalists and workers was “based upon the increasingly widespread social belief that advances in public welfare [could be] achieved through economic growth. Such interests are manifest in private investment in fixed capital, in public institutions developed by the state to facilitate economic growth, and in the orientation of organised (and non-organised) labour towards these investments and institutions” (Gould et al., 1996: 5).

²⁴ Emphasis in the original.

Although the benefits accruing from this coalition have historically been unequally distributed, the above three groups have historically tended to support economic growth at the expense of nature. The expansion and acceleration of industrial production is intimately dependent of increasing withdrawals (raw materials) and additions (wastes) to ecosystems, which result in environmental depletion and degradation. Therefore, the support of the state, private capital and labour to economic growth has systematically implied conscious or unconscious support for ecological disruption, even in those cases in which environmental protection measures were advocated by any of these three groups.

In many ways, liberal-productivism perpetuates some of the main assumptions deeply ingrained in the previous paradigm. Lipietz (1992: 321) reminds us that “[a]s with Fordism, liberal-productivism fosters a use of natural resources which makes no sense, as the ecological debt which past and present generations are handling on to future generations... will have to be paid for in the next forty years”. Although there is a certain degree of continuity between the older and newer system, their main difference lies on the increasing domination of transnational *market* institutions and actors over national and local *political* ones.

The above discussion suggests that in order to understand the regulation of capitalist accumulation we need to go beyond the organisation of the international economy and the macro-contract established between capitalists, workers and the state, to examine how these conditions impact and are impacted upon by socio-environmental regulation. Emerging efforts to reconceptualise the crisis of Fordism and the rise of flexible accumulation from the perspectives of gender, cultural and environmental political economy analysis have much to offer to deepen the regulation theory approach. I examine the opportunities for cross-fertilisation across these fields in Chapter 2.

1.2.3 Space, place and the urban crisis

It is often claimed that the post-modern and global transformation of time and space has modified the world geography and the role of cities in supporting capitalist accumulation. Urban areas now concentrate both the opportunities and the problems associated with the current stage of advanced capitalism. The global economy has become a system that tends to relativise spaces, distances and national borders. Furthermore, many argue that the ‘liquid’ character of the global economy overcomes and penetrates the national borders that were before subject to protectionist measures contributing to the fall of the nation concept (Leyshon, 1992). Channels, ‘corridors’ and networks are some of the geographic and functional

forms emerging from the opportunistic and often monopolist concentration of new urban functions. In a sense, this tends to dissolve the traditional centralised functions of urban areas and gives way to new forms of territorial settlement often around dispersed spatial patterns.

Saskia Sassen (1991) refers to the reorganisation of new forms of urban settlement as a concomitant process with that of globalisation, focusing on the emergence of global cities as a few points in the world geography that operate as the control centres of today's globalised culture and economy. From a more optimistic perspective, Borja and Castells (1997) argue for the emergence of a new relationship between the global and the local, where the latter could benefit from some of the advantages of the expanded spatial flows of goods, services and information in the globalisation process, which could in turn help to strengthen certain localities able to engage with opportunistic advantages and successful competitive strategies. The process of territorial reorganisation driven by the globalisation of the economy implies significant changes in infrastructural networks and also the writing off of the necessary investments of per capita cost of such networks and services. Given that the emergent cities and territorial forms in the global south often lack the accumulation of capital required to improve and expand their infrastructure, the result is a new gap in terms of the capacity of the built environment to respond to new functions. This often happens in conjunction with the privatisation of service provision and infrastructural development, which in turn leads to higher costs for the provision of such services and infrastructures. The same applies to intra-urban transport, as rapidly emerging urban expansion is often accompanied by poor physical connectivity and high transport costs.²⁵

In addition, the emerging forms of urban settlement have a larger impact on the carrying capacity of their supporting territories, due to the exponential expansion of the natural areas affected by the energetic and material demands of these settlements. The concept of 'urban ecological footprint' developed by William Rees (1992) reveals the effects of this pressure over finite natural resources. Ecological footprint calculations show that if the consumption rates that characterise cities in the developed world were to be adopted by the world population, the carrying capacity of the earth would already be unsustainable or, in other words, would be affected by a serious deficit in terms of the appropriated ecological carrying capacity. This 'deficit' is often bluntly expressed in terms of urban inequality. For instance, the average inhabitant in Calcutta consumes less than half a hectare of eco-productive terrain, whilst one in Santiago de Chile demands just below three hectares and the average New Yorker consumes

²⁵ For instance, in the case of the metropolitan region of Buenos Aires, over half of the economically active population earn on average USD120 per month. The cost of travel to and from work (40 km per day on average) constitutes 27 percent of their income (Fernández, 2005).

over 20 hectares per capita. The possibility of partly substituting the energetic-material flow demanded to support the current global ecological footprint with technological innovations would only deepen the gap between development and underdevelopment. Considering that about 75 percent of the earth's eco-productive terrain is located in the developing world, a fairer balance between natural and financial capital would mean that the north owes the south for the depletion and consumption of its natural capital over 20 times the equivalent of the financial capital that the south owes to the north (Fernández, 2005).

The study *Cities Transformed* (Montgomery et al, 2004) examines the dynamic of the world urban population and its effects on substantial components of urban quality of life in terms of health, education, work and urban economic performance. In doing so, this study looks at the hypothesis of 'total urbanisation', revealing that while at the beginning of the 20th century there were only 16 cities with more than 1 million inhabitants, by the end of the century there were 400, with three of every four of these cities located in the poorest regions of the globe. *Cities Transformed* challenges the optimism of neoliberal and globalisation advocates, who argue that the full transition to a tertiary economy of some cities at the centre of the global economy would create multiple opportunities for industrialisation in many other cities in the periphery of the system. By contrast, the study reveals that this hypothesis has not materialised so far. Although regional economic growth appears to be linked to urban population growth, new urban dwellers do not appear to enjoy better living standards than in their previous rural or small town settlements. They are closer to many services but often unable to access such services (Allen et al, 2006).

In summary, the dilemma confronting a 'liquid modernity' – in contrast with the previous 'solid modernity' that Marx already saw as dissolving in the air – is that the free circulation of capital has resulted in a deep and continuous transformation of territories and cities and into a higher vulnerability of urban dwellers who were before somehow protected by a certain stability and inertia in the prevalent urban socio-economic relations (Bauman, 2000). Vivianne Forrester (1997) describes the current exposition of urban dwellers to the fluctuations of the global economy as one of 'economic horror'. This is particularly manifested in the absolute decay of the social salary (basis of the welfare state) and the increasing fall of formal employment.²⁶ This process is intimately linked to the disarticulation of Fordism – the classic form of solid capitalism – with its notions of assembling chains and stock but also of paying the working force not only enough for its biological re-production but also to become a consumer of the

²⁶ A similar argument is supported by other contemporary sociologists, including Sennet (2000), Gorz (1998) and Rifkin (1998).

commodities produced under this form of production. By contrast, the post-Fordist mode of production implies the disappearance of assembling chains and stock and the emergence of the socio-labour and urban-territorial effects discussed above, including more volatile labour markets and a higher exposition of female and male urbanites to the effects of the periodic crises of the global economy. Thus, more than ever, a full understanding of the multiple ramifications and impacts of capitalist accumulation requires the examination of how this process impacts on the production of urban space and nature on the basis of 'differential sustainability', a discussion to which I return in Chapter 2.

Differential sustainability does not just imply the regulation of contemporary capitalist accumulation by controlling the non-urban realm from which environmental resources are usually extracted (the sea, the forest, and so on). It also determines and is determined by the urban condition. Surprisingly the intersection between capitalist accumulation, nature and the urban condition in the global south has received little attention from the perspectives examined throughout this chapter. This thesis endeavours to contribute towards the reduction of such a deficit, a task unpacked in the last section of the following chapter.

Chapter 2 Bridging regulation theory and political ecology

In the last quarter of the 20th century, the deepening and expansion of the so-called ‘environmental crisis’ have given rise to a wide range of perspectives seeking to explain its causes how to respond to it. These two questions have since become the focus of numerous explanations and normative solutions that draw on a rainbow of theoretical and ideological positions. On one extreme we find the radical positions of greens and reds who, notwithstanding significant differences, agree on their call for radical changes in current patterns of consumption and production. On the other extreme are those who call for the need to insert an environmental dimension into economic rationality, mainly through more efficient and environmentally sound planning instruments. What is perhaps most paradoxical is that most environmental discourses claim to be beyond politics and inspired by a ‘more’ primordial objective, while spelling out diverse political projects ranging from right to left within the ideological spectrum. However, most ‘development’ discourses also fail to spell out their environmental implications, just as much as environmental discourses are often silent about their socio-political programmes.

A large number of English speaking scholars – including Andrew Dobson, Robin Eckersley, Tim Hayward, John Barry and John Dryzek – have thoroughly mapped the wide range of discourses in green thought (including deep ecology, social ecology, liberal environmentalism, bioregionalism, and so on). I do not intend here to examine these maps but have chosen instead to explore the contributions of PE as a critical-progressive approach to the understanding of socio-environmental change and regulation. While the first section scrutinises the most valuable insights that are aligned with the intellectual scope of this thesis, the second section argues for an analytical framework that draws both on regulation theory and PE, aiming not just at articulating their strengths but also at addressing their respective shortcomings.

2.1 Political ecology: Too little ecology, too much politics?

PE offers a diverse but robust line of theoretical interrogation and explanation to explore how capitalist accumulation affects and is affected by the so-called environmental problematique. Its focus is on *whose* rather than *what* crises, but this focus does not simply explore who is affected and who benefits from processes of environmental change but rather interrogates the political economy that facilitates the exploitation of both nature and social groups and the

production and re-production of relations of exploitation and dependence within societies and out and into society-nature relationships.

In this context, it is not surprising that PE has been accused for focusing too much attention on politics rather than ecology, a critique substantiated by anthropologists Vayda and Walters (1999). For them, political ecologists have gone too far in attributing ecological outcomes to political economic forces and should instead focus on pursuing 'event ecology', defined as the "answering of "why" questions about specific environmental changes of interest, instead of evaluating causal theories, models, or factors that are thought in advance to influence such changes" (Walters and Vayda, 2009: 534). While exploring this and other criticisms, the next part of the analysis turns to evaluate what PE has to offer as an analytical approach. Since its emergence as a disciplinary field on inquiry in the 1970s, PE has benefited from a structuralist approach concerned with the understanding of socio-environmental conflict and change through complex 'chains of explanation' as well as from post-structuralist inputs that acknowledge the role that discourse, power and knowledge play in framing gender, class and ethnic asymmetries in the appropriation and transformation of nature. This section does not aim at providing a comprehensive review of the field – a task well performed by authors such as Bryant and Bailey (1997) and Robbins (2004) – but rather focuses of a number of key contributions from a neo-Marxist and post-structuralist perspective that inform the analytical approach adopted in this thesis.

2.1.1 The production of nature through a historical materialist lens

Marxist theory has much to say about the links between the historical processes, conditions for and consequences of capital expansion and re-production. However, the link between such processes with natural processes has been until recently underdeveloped. A systematic account of Marx's reflections on the role of nature under capitalism is to be found in the work of Alfred Schmidt (1971). According to Schmidt, Marx insisted on a dialectic relation between nature and society in which each term is mediated by each other through the labour process. As put by Raymond Williams (1980: 76), "[o]nce we begin to speak of people mixing their labour with the earth, we are in a whole world of new relations between people and nature and to separate natural history from social history becomes increasingly problematic". For Marx, men (and women) are part of nature, and like non-human nature their labour capacity is subjected to capitalist appropriation through a system of socio-environmental regulation "predicated on class relations, competition and accumulation" (Castree and Braun, 1998: 8).

From a historical materialist viewpoint, nature is therefore implicit in three processes: first, natural processes affect the re-production of labour, which is part of nature; second, nature is present in the production of natural use values such as raw materials and natural resources, which are transformed in the process of producing commodities; and third, natural processes such as the functional structure and productivity of ecosystems affect the conditions of production of value and surplus value. By differentiating use value from surplus value, historical materialism reveals how in the context of capitalism, surplus value not only conditions the re-production of capitalist relations in production but also determines the pace of and technical ways in which nature is appropriated and transformed (Leff, 1995).

In a paradigmatic formulation, Neil Smith (1984, 1996) contends that a materialist perspective constitutes a solid basis to investigate the 'production of nature' in capitalist and semi-capitalist formations. The problem for Smith is that capitalism is incapable of regulating the metabolic society-nature interaction in an environmentally sustainable manner. In a later piece of work, he masterly argues that capital not only has the ability to produce space in its own image through daily practices but more specifically, "it produces the real spatial scales that give uneven development its coherence" (Smith, 1984: 7),²⁷ transforming not only every inch of the earth but also all relations between societies and nature. For Smith (ibid.: 6), the uneven development of capitalism can therefore be seen as the "geographical expression of the more fundamental contradiction between use-value and exchange-value". Thus, throughout capital accumulation, surplus rather than use value tends to over-determine the way in which nature is incorporated into productive processes. The organisation and development of science and technology play a key role in facilitating the transformation of nature but, as this happens through compartmentalised knowledge and fragmented practices, inevitably the productive potential of natural use values and ecosystem processes is overlooked through the process of capital accumulation.

However, the production of nature is not a unidirectional process, as "[n]atural processes also affect the production of value and surplus value when they limit or extend the availability, the preservation, and the reproduction of natural resources – thereby 'imposing' 'natural' conditions on capital expansion" (Leff, 1995: 23). Until the emergence of the 'limits to growth'

²⁷ First published in 1990.

thesis in the late 1960s, ecological scarcity was not perceived as a concern.²⁸ This might partly explain the ‘delay’ of most economic schools of thought (including Marxism) to fully acknowledge the role of nature in conditioning – both as a potential and constraint – social processes of production. Since then, in neo-classical economics, the ecological conditions for sustainable production have been treated either as ‘externalities’ to the economic system or have been encapsulated under the concept of ‘natural capital’, in which the valorisation of nature is typically defined through cost-benefit analysis (CBA) and contingent valuation.

This line of reasoning not only neglects ecosystemic processes but also excludes and marginalises non-economic social and cultural ways of valuing, accessing and transforming nature. In this way, “the specific differences between processes that produce use values and the production of exchange values are ignored, [impeding] an analysis of ecosystem transformation derived from the social appropriation of natural resources as objects and means of labour for commodity production” (Leff, 1995: 19). Thus, prevalent economic interpretations treat the environment as an ‘external dimension’ that can be internalised into the economy, neglecting the analysis of the epistemological-ontological and political-institutional barriers that obstruct this internalisation. By contrast, in political ecology:

the concept of environment emerges with a critical and strategic meaning to suppress the ‘externalities’ of development – environmental degradation, social inequalities, economic exploitation – that persists despite the internalisation of the ecological conditions of commodity production and a systems approach to the interdisciplinary development of knowledge. (ibid.: 118)

While debates about the production of nature under capitalism are not new (Marx, 1963; Williams, 1980; Smith, 1984), political ecologists have raised new questions and provided new interpretations on the role of nature in the general conditions of production, on the relationship between property rights and struggles over the production of nature in capitalist societies, and on the displacement of social conflicts and ‘agendas’ about the environment through the increased commoditisation of new areas of nature, revealing that “struggles over

²⁸ The limits to growth thesis was consolidated from the late 1960s through the work of a number of scientists, mainly population biologists, ecologists and global modellers, who brought global attention to the limited carrying capacity of the earth and the finite nature of environmental resources and services. In addition to the influential publication by Meadows et al. (1972), this perspective also encompasses the work of Edward Goldsmith, editor of the journal *The Ecologist* and leading co-author of the 1972 *Blueprint for Survival*. These and other authors such as Hardin, Ehrlich and Commoner were highly influential in calling attention to an, until then, almost invisible dimension of the development process: the ‘natural limits to growth’, in which growth is defined both in economic and demographic terms. Their thesis constitutes a turning point that opened to public scrutiny the notion that, in the long run, capitalist accumulation is fundamentally constrained by the ecological carrying capacity of the earth. Inasmuch as this argument particularly predicted the unsustainability of industrial economic growth, it constitutes a fundamental building block in explaining the Fordist crisis, although surprisingly little if any attention has been paid to this connection in the post-Fordist literature. See also Meadows et al. (1992).

nature remain fundamentally political and economic struggles over who will gain or lose depending upon what kinds of nature are produced where” (McCarthy 1998: 128).

A paradigmatic exponent of this line of argumentation can be found in the early work of Piers Blaikie, who transverses the PE field injecting over time new political impetus and challenges to the analysis of socio-environmental change. In his famous books *Nepal in Crisis* (Blaikie et al., 1980) and *The Political Economy of Soil Erosion in Developing Countries* (Blaikie, 1985) he consolidated a structuralist PE approach, pointing to the conflicts between environmental degradation and social marginalisation, scientific conventional wisdom on environmental change and the management institutions charged to deal with environmental problems. In the latter publication, he concludes by highlighting “soil erosion in lesser developed countries will not be substantially reduced unless it seriously threatens the accumulation possibilities of the dominant classes” (Blaikie, 1985: 147). Although several authors, including Blaikie himself (Watts, 1997; Blaikie et al., 2002), in later years criticised this chain-of-explanation perspective for its structuralist *apriorism*, it pioneered the attempt to move away from the description and measuring of environmental problems by re-embedding such ‘problems’ in the political economy in which they are generated.

By scrutinising the structural sources and political implications of hegemonic definitions of the environmental problematique, PE sheds new light on the way in which environmental concerns have been framed under a limited number of theses that are still vividly alive in the contemporary debate. For instance, the reasoning of influential scholars such as Garret Hardin (1968, 1976), Robert Heilbroner (1991) and William Ophuls (1977) exhibits a common authoritarianism in which some form of global coercion is advocated to avert the maladies of ecological devastation.²⁹ This is based on the assumption that there is a direct and pervasive link between population size, resource scarcity and the impossibility of meeting the subsistence needs of the mass of the world population. By contrast, PE Marxist scholars argue that the Malthusian population growth-poverty-environmental degradation link is deeply flawed. In contrast with other vegetable and plant communities, the relationship between population growth and well-being is, in the case of human societies, regulated and determined by social relations and not by size. In this sense, Pepper (1993: 98) contends that:

We may say that overpopulation is evidenced by the existence of groups who do not have enough to eat (they are presumable the surplus people), which is what resource scarcity implies... But It does not really follow that this starvation is produced by ‘natural shortages’, i.e. an absolute inability of the earth to produce more food.

²⁹ For these authors, coercion and central authority informed by expert knowledge are required to control the innate tendency of human beings to abuse the commons and to overpopulate the earth (the causes) leading to resource exhaustion and environmental degradation (the consequences).

Rather, the 'surplus' population may not be able to buy food simply as a result of the inability (or unwillingness) of an economic system to create enough jobs, and therefore incomes, or to pay enough to those who do work.

Through a historical materialist perspective, the 'inability' of the system to deal with starvation is then de-naturalised and re-linked to the functional social organisation that relies on the reproduction of masses living in substandard conditions (the poor) as an 'industrial reserve army', robbed from their control over socially produced scarce resources. In a similar vein, whilst some greens would portray self-egotistic humans immersed within consumerism as the root cause of environmental degradation, historic materialists would argue that it is the mode of production itself and not just 'greedy individuals' who are to be blamed.³⁰

Like environmental degradation, poverty is another necessary condition for capitalism to work. In this respect, a central thesis advanced by PE scholars is that both social and ecological processes are over-determined by capital's logic of extracting surplus value from the productive process by enforcing the highest sustainable differential between the market price of goods and costs of producing such goods.³¹ The particular problematic of capitalism inherent in its dynamism is that it premises no end-state other than a perpetual expansion of productive capacity through a constant replenishment and expansion of capital stock through the profits of the preceding round of production. Daly (1996), accordingly, notes the self-reinforcing character of free market capitalist competition, namely that the heavily capitalised tend to have greater success, thus further boosting their dominance while eliminating competition. It follows from the above arguments that what I have referred to as 'differential sustainability', entails the notion that normalising the differential appropriation of nature is also an intrinsic mechanism of the self-re-production of capital accumulation.

2.1.2 Redefining the contemporary crisis of capitalism

Retaining Marx's emphasis on the process of capitalist commodification of nature and on the inherent economic contradictions of capitalism, several PE scholars have expanded his argument, notable among these is James O'Connor's (1988, 1996) well-known work on the 'second contradiction of capitalism'. According to O'Connor, the first contradiction of capitalism is internal to the system and "expresses capital's social and political power over

³⁰ For instance, Johnston (1989: 95) argues that rather than 'greedy humans', it is in fact more accurate to claim that it is "the way in which human 'interference' with nature is managed under capitalism that is the cause of much land degradation and the appalling consequences that stem from this".

³¹ Following this line of thought, authors such as Martínez Alier (1987) and Guha and Martínez Alier (1997) contend that the logic of profit maximisation/cost reduction not only drives corporations to maintain artificial depressed wages, but also, to obtain natural resources at the lowest possible cost.

labour, and also capitalism's inherent tendency toward a realization crisis, or crisis of capital over-production. If capital exercises much power over labour, the rate of exploitation will be high, and the risk of a realization crisis will be great; hence, the need for a vast credit structure, aggressive marketing, constant product innovation, and intensified competition will be greater" (O'Connor, 1991: 1).

O'Connor contends that the second contradiction of capitalism is its inherent tendency to reduce the ability of the environment and of workers to sustain economic growth, threatening the conditions that support the system and therefore the system's own existence. Thus even if the capacity of capitalism to spread out its economic support at the global scale is impressive, it is not unlimited. Even if the system can afford to shift from one to another ecosystem through geographical displacement and technological replacement, these strategies are bound sooner or later to become ineffective due to the fact that while the system is able to innovate to overcome existing problems, such innovations introduce new problems.³²

Put simply, capitalism faces two main inherent contradictions, one 'internal' crisis stemming mainly from class struggles and a second 'external' crisis deriving from the erosion of ecosystemic processes and of the human metabolism of nature. The former contradiction is 'internal' in the sense that it derives from capitalist social relations of production between those who sell labour (the 'proletariat') and those who own and control the means of production, distribution and exchange (the 'bourgeoisie'). The second contradiction is defined as 'external' in the sense that it undermines the 'conditions' on which production depends, namely the conditions associated with: the re-production of human labour power; the external non-human conditions associated to the existence of nature (or 'primary' nature); and the communal human-produced conditions of production, such as the urban environment and its infrastructure (or 'secondary' nature). As argued before, what these conditions have in common is that they are not produced by capital but rather treated by capitalism as virtual or 'fictitious commodities' (Polanyi, 1957).

The ecological contradiction of capitalism questions the possibility and effectiveness of green(er) capitalism as protracted by the ascending discourse of ecological modernisation (EM), whose central thesis is that the restructuring of the capitalist political economy *can be*

³² For instance, nuclear power was celebrated in the 1970s as an alternative to carbon-intensive non-renewable fossil fuels, averting the threat of an energy crisis, but the creation of long-term radioactive waste and associated health and security risks soon outweighed the perceived benefits.

designed to promote more environmentally benign patterns of production and consumption.³³ By contrast, political ecologists contend that this is not a matter of more environmentally conscious producers or consumers, as both are ingrained within a systemic logic that makes sustainable capitalism impossible. Producers – individual firms or capitalists “have little or no incentive to use production conditions in a sustainable way – i.e. in the race to cut costs capital has impaired its own profitability” (O’Connor, 1991: 13). Similarly, O’Connor (ibid.:15) argues that the possibility of taming capitalism through an army of environmentally conscious consumers is also of limited effect, as “all the green consumption in the world will not change the fact that aggregate consumption must stand in a certain relation to investment for capitalism to work, and that aggregate consumption is not regulated by consumers but by the rate of profit and accumulation – and the limits of the credit system”.

An important question emanating from the above discussion concerns the locus of resistance counteracting capitalist contradictions; while class-based struggles and mobilisation have been historically identified as a product of the first contradiction, the emergence of ‘new social movements’ is often associated with the second contradiction of capitalism. Thus, for many scholars, social mobilisation and resistance is not any longer fundamentally connected to labour-based struggles but to environmental, gender and cultural struggles. By contrast, I would argue that this is an artificial and unproductive division, as both contradictions redefine labour and nature dialectically. It is therefore necessary to examine class and environmental mobilisation in an articulated way, interrogating the extent to which socio-environmental struggles are able to transcend or not their most obvious source of contention, whether or not explicitly associated with nature or with labour.

‘Alienation’ is a major element in Marxism’s explanation of the by-products of capitalism, and this is manifested in human’s separation from the product of their own activity, from nature, from others and from themselves. Alienation is not a state of individual consciousness (of capitalist, workers or consumers) but derives from the social conditions of capitalist relations and production processes. In the same way in which products are often presented to the consumer hiding the conditions of labour behind their production, so are the ecologically destructive behaviours and environmental injustices embedded in the relationship between production and nature. The first and second ‘contradictions’ that characterise the dynamics of capitalism are entangled throughout most socio-environmental conflicts.

³³ EM could be described as the post-Fordist formulation of an environmental but capitalistically plausible answer to the limits to growth thesis. Initiated in the 1980s through the influential work of Huber (1984) and Jänicke (1985) and propagated outside academic circles by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) 1984 Conference on Environment and Economics.

Underlying the above critique is an assumption regarding the nature of capitalist production, namely its failure to harmonise the standards of efficiency, equity and sustainability. As argued by Daly (2007), there is a tendency among partisans of the market to view aggregate human productive activity as either a small open system within an infinitely larger but ultimately finite system, or as synonymous with the system itself (possessing nothing outside it). Such visions fail to acknowledge that markets do not have an inherent tendency to cease expansion at the ecologically optimal level of throughput. Instead, in pursuing allocative efficiency, markets can and do exceed the bounds of the ecologically sustainable. However, some EM advocates argue that EM entails more than just the technical and managerial re-tooling of businesses through self-regulatory mechanisms, rejecting the notion that the market alone could deliver a greener future.³⁴ Political modernisation is also required to build innovative and corporatist partnerships, ideally featuring the governance style characteristic of The Netherlands, Sweden and Germany. However, as argued by Dryzek (1997: 151-2), “[i]f the ecological modernisers are right, the United States, along with Canada, Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand are going to be left standing in the transition to a new green capitalist era”, let alone countries in the global south.

In summary, the hegemonic debate on sustainability is in fact concerned with the possibility of establishing consensus around a sustainability model to guarantee the long-term viability of the current historical mode of advanced capitalism. It is in this sense that the transition from industrial capitalism to immaterial advanced capitalism is often celebrated as a congruent process with the imperatives posed by the sustainability crisis. However, advanced (financial and tertiarised) capitalism is not only linked to the immaterial production of knowledge and information and the maximisation of a potentially global market of consumers – but also to the geographical displacement of material production to the global south. Both processes have accelerated the process of differential accumulation and sustainability, resulting in a dramatic growth of the social asymmetries between the rich and the poor and a phenomenal concentration of wealth in the hands of a few in a very short time. This transition has a number of consequences linked to: (1) acceleration in the obsolescence of products and services (that have to be substituted by new ones); (2) the speed in the mobility of capital and its territorial applications – marking a transition from gravitatorial economies and scale economies to liquid economies or economies of scope; and (3) the passage from the classic Fordist mode of production – linked to serial production, definition of a social salary in relation to the cost of production, and stock economies – to a post-Fordist or ‘Toyotist’ mode of advanced

³⁴ According to Hajer (1995), among others, these features are associated with a weak version of EM in contrast with a more radical or strong version of EM. The latter argues that the path to EM also requires “the self-conscious redesign of social institutions” (Dryzek, 1997: 148).

production, characteristic of 'just-in-time' production that, as previously discussed, rests upon assembling logistics, maximum externalisation of labour costs in the formation of market prices and delivery circuits.

The growing speed implicit in the formation of value in the context of advanced capitalism is directly connected with a deepening incompatibility between production times and the time required for the sustainable management of natural capital. This is manifested both through a growing tendency to dismiss the biological re-production of human labour and to expand the reserve army of labour and to ignore the resiliency thresholds that allow the regeneration of renewable resources. Therefore, it could be argued that in the context of neoliberal global capitalism, the sustainability debate needs to be re-politicised by asking not 'how to sustain the ecological viability of the planet' but 'why such ecological viability is not sustained'.

2.1.3 From the 'production of nature' to its 'social construction'

In the same way in which political ecologists have drawn new lines of interrogation and chains of explanation to the understanding of socio-environmental change and conflict through a historical materialist reinterpretation of the production of nature, post-structuralist PE scholars have shed new insights on such processes by examining the role of discourse, power and knowledge in the 'social construction of nature'.

Unsurprisingly, many of these contributions have arisen from a close examination of the links between postmodernism and environmentalism (Gare, 1995). First, both perspectives approach the understanding of today's world as an outcome – and failure – of the culture of modern civilisation. Rejecting the grand narratives that characterise modernity as feasible explanations holding the whole together, these two discourses argue for a subversive critical attitude towards the conditions in which society and nature are embedded today, in other words, a critical reflection on modernity itself, its tenets and outcomes. Second, postmodernists share with environmentalists a strong sense of discontent and dissent with conventional politics and the notions of progress and Enlightenment rationality, endorsing a new form of politics and social mobilisation.

Despite strong commonalities in their shared assumptions, little work has explored the disjunction between both discourses, partly, as contented by Gare (1995), because of the 'disjunction between literature and science'. Whilst reflection on the postmodern condition has mainly developed with a focus on literature and popular culture, the environmental crisis has been predominantly articulated through reflections on science, technology and economics.

Gare (1995: 2) goes on to argue that “while the post-structuralists, the thinkers most closely aligned with postmodernism, have highlighted many of the root causes of oppression in the modern world, when measured against the environmental crisis they are totally inadequate as guides for political action or for how to live”. But while historical materialism offers more coherent tools for this task, the critical thinking proposed by post-structuralists cannot be ignored, as it reveals “what kind of cultural politics to avoid if the causes of the environmental crisis are not to be reproduced by efforts to overcome it” (ibid.: 3).

The above discussion implies that environmentalism – and in particular the so-called ‘environmental crisis’ – has been one of the most significant contemporary conditions in revealing the hollowness of modernity’s premises and promises. This has also been fuelled by the process of economic and cultural globalisation – described by Roland Robertson (1990) as a process of ‘integration of the world’ and the way in which new forms of communication, technology and management have radically transformed the relationship between time and space within capitalism. Harvey’s work (1985, 1990, 1996) is paradigmatic in exploring how time has conquered space in the postmodern era, resulting in a new ‘geography of inequality and difference’. Paradoxically, while capital has become almost endlessly mobile, bringing the affluent throughout the world in close contact and expanding nature’s limits to growth to virtually every corner of the planet, greater social distance has been produced within geographical localities, revealed for instance through the binary and systemic process of ‘slumification and yuppification’ (Friedman, 1992: 334). This perspective opens new interrogations on the multiple ways in which the urban condition is produced under contemporary globalisation, which surprisingly have been less commonly embraced by PE scholars, particularly in reference to the global south.

Despite the above shortcoming, several PE scholars have embraced the task of deconstructing essential categories in previous chains of explanation, seeking to deepen the analytical tools of political ecology but also to build a reflexive and vigilant scrutiny of its normative objectives. This should not be read as an attempt to prescribe political avenues to address the environmental problematique, and neither as a mission to unpack endless ‘otherness’ in the relation between nature and society for the sake of it – a relativist exercise for which many post-structuralists have been criticised – but rather as a way to understand how social values and environmental knowledges are framed and co-produced. Thus, by deconstructing hegemonic narratives of socio-environmental change – such as those of limits to growth and ecological modernisation – and through the exploration of non-hegemonic narratives of ‘subaltern’ subjects, PE scholars such as Blaikie have over the last two decades shifted away

from a structuralist analysis of socio-environmental change to a locally embedded and participatory interrogation of change, aiming at “diversifying the social framings of environmental analysis, [which] may result in more socially just environmental knowledge and policy” (Forsyth, 2008: 757). Forsyth (ibid.: 758) goes on to highlight that “this new focus on the politics of environmental explanation also encouraged a rethink of *a priori* assumptions about structural connections of capitalism and environmental degradation”. It is precisely because of the capacity of post-structuralist PE to prevent the potential *apriorism* of historical materialist approaches that the analytical framework developed and applied in this thesis combines both.

Furthermore, from the examination of a number of significant contributions produced in the field by scholars who adopted post-structuralist insights to interrogate environmental narratives,³⁵ such an approach is relevant to the scope of this thesis for a number of reasons. First, post-structuralist research has helped expand the notion of ‘politics’ from the most conventional domains of party politics, the state and class politics to the daily politics of the household and workplace, unearthing the ways in which within these political arenas gender divisions of labour, property rights and differential access to nature have been traditionally framed under contemporary patterns of accumulation.³⁶

Second, a post-structuralist approach has nurtured a critical examination of the imbricate roles played by gender, class, age, ethnicity and ability in framing not only differential access to and control over natural resources, but also ‘differential vulnerability’ to environmental risks and hazards (Miller et al., 1996; Rocheleau et al., 1996). Furthermore, this line of work has challenged naturalised relations between people and nature – such as the one that portrays women as closer to the environment, claiming their natural role as environmental stewardesses. As argued by Robbins (2004: 60), not only the experiences but also “[p]riorities and environmental knowledges of women vary tremendously, whether between wealthy and poor women in a Bulgarian village, between farming and herding women in Morocco, between white and black women near a hazardous New York sewage plant, or between women producers in an African peanut field and women consumers of peanut butter in a Canadian supermarket”. Considering the tendency within environmentalism to refer to ‘people’ as ‘human beings’, ‘human ecosystems’ and the like, this contribution has been significantly

³⁵ Such contributions range from the analysis of the ‘ecological establishment’ of the World Bank and other international institutions (Rich, 1994) to domestic politics and gender-based socio-environmental struggles (Agarwal, 1992; Carney, 1993; Schroeder and Suryanata, 1996, among others).

³⁶ See for instance the work of Hart (1991) and Jewitt and Kumar (2000).

powerful in rejecting universal categories by instead politicising social identity categories as deeply imbricate in historically defined social relations with nature.

Third, a recurrent theme addressed by structuralists and post-structuralists alike is that of resistance and social mobilisation against the commodification of nature. This is where perhaps the discussion of PE normative objectives and the possibility for political emancipation becomes more explicit. Peet and Watts (1996) propose embracing the articulation of PE Marxist and post-structuralist insights into the understanding of complex development-environment relations through the discursive arena of 'liberation ecology'. In their own words, "[t]he intention is not simply to *add* politics to political ecology, but to raise the emancipatory potential of environmental ideas and to engage with the larger landscapes of debates over modernity, its institutions, and its knowledges" (ibid.: 37).

Key contributions along the above lines include the conceptualisation of moral economy and everyday resistance in the early work of James Scott (1976) and his subsequent *Weapons of the Weak* (Scott, 1985), in which he explores why some forms of exploitation are accepted by peasants while others – specially those that persistently put their minimum subsistence at risk – foment social mobilisation and resistance; Gillian Hart's (1991) analysis of gender-different motivations in social and political action; Nancy Peluso's (1993a, 1993b) in-depth exploration of how coercive patterns of conservation criminalised grassroots everyday resistance in Indonesia and Kenya; and the work of Robert Bullard (1993) and David Camacho (1998), which reveal the pervasive link between environmental injustice and environmental racism and assess the key factors that explain 'successful grassroots insurgency'. However, with few exceptions, the bulk of PE research on social mobilisation and resistance emanating from environmental struggles has been largely concerned with the rural context.

The work of Joan Martinez Alier (2002) on what he calls the 'environmentalism of the poor', has been highly influential in mapping some important commonalities in the mobilisation of grassroots groups to defy exploitative, coercive and unjust socio-environmental changes. He highlights that regardless of whether or not grassroots groups explicitly identify environmental concerns as the focus of their resistance and mobilisation, in most cases, often such practices derive from 'economic and ecological distribution conflicts', in which the economic and ecological overlap. Such distribution conflicts "are not only conflicts of interest, they are also often conflicts on values" (ibid.: 44). Although Martinez Alier does not further elaborate this distinction, it reinforces in my view the need to examine not only the extent to which grassroots environmental mobilisation emanates from the reassertion of their threatened

rights over natural resources and services but also from contesting the coercive way in which their cultural practices are alienated by the ways in which nature is measured, controlled, valued and commodified by experts, the state and the market. Another commonality throughout the various narratives explored under the umbrella of 'environmentalism of the poor' refers to the fact that such narratives are rarely isolated local or regional processes but instead the conflicts from which they emanate can be traced through multiple nested scales, from the global level to the household or workplace, another important consideration to which I return in the last section.

Considering the prominence of workers' struggles in the case study examined in this thesis, it is pertinent to explore a recurrent debate among researchers concerned with processes of social mobilisation. This refers to whether or not the questions of environment, gender and other 'otherness' have become chief in driving social movements, displacing working-class struggles, a debate influenced by the work of post-structuralists Laclau and Mouffe (1985).³⁷ For Laclau (1985: 29) "[c]ategories such as 'working class', 'petit bourgeois', etc. [have become] less and less meaningful as ways of understanding the overall identity of social agents. The concept of 'class struggle' for example, is neither correct nor incorrect – it is, simply, totally insufficient as a way of accounting for contemporary social conflicts". This suggests that the central question is not about the pedigree of social movements ('old' versus 'new'; 'class' versus 'non-class') but about recognising that the multiple identities of social groups have become increasingly plural and intertwined throughout the 20th century to the extent to which it is almost impossible to refer to coherent systems of 'subject positions' along the lines of a separate understanding of class, gender, race and so on.

Returning to the main contributions emanating from a post-structuralist perspective in PE, a fourth strand of work relevant to my discussion adopts many of the insights provided by postcolonial theory (Said, 1994, 2003), aiming at unveiling not only the role of colonial narratives in naturalising relations of political domination and differences between the coloniser and the colonised, the west and the east, and so on, but by rewriting history from the view of the 'colonised', and indeed of a variety of 'subaltern' postcolonial subjects ('illegal immigrants', 'informal workers', 'slum dwellers', among others) (Guha, 1982). Mirroring the key arguments of postcolonial and subaltern studies to the narratives produced by this line of work, Spivak (1987, 1988) wonders 'if the subaltern can ever speak'. Her question does not challenge the task of interrogating history through the social construction of otherness but

³⁷ See also: Laclau (1985).

rather warns of the risk of adding new simplistic 'otherings' to colonial narratives by forgetting that the subaltern's voice is always mediated through dominant discourses.

Escobar (1996) has explicitly advanced the elements for a post-structural PE, articulating most of the above insights into an analytical praxis. The first element he advocates is that of 'discursive materialism', "where ideas, matter, discourse, and power are intertwined in ways that virtually defy dissection" (Yapa, 1995: 1, cited in Escobar, 1996: 47). This is because "the constructs of political economy and ecology as specifically modern forms of knowledge, as well as their objects of study, must be analysed discursively" (ibid.: 46) In this sense, he masterly argues that 'material reality' is inseparable from its social construction and materialist analysis inseparable from discursive analysis, thus the central task for PE is "to reiterate the connections between the making and evolution of nature and the making and evolution of the discourses and practices through which nature is historically produced and known" (ibid.: 46).

The second key element of a post-structural PE outlined by Escobar is the need to focus on the 'cultural' rather than just the 'social politics of nature'. This is to be done through the coproduction of alternative narratives of "cultural resistance to the symbolic reconversion of nature" (Escobar, 1996: 62) present, for instance, in the discourses of sustainable development and biodiversity conservation. In this sense, Escobar notices that such discourses represent much more than an attempt to stabilise the expropriation of nature and labour by capitalist accumulation. Under contemporary capitalism, "[n]ature and local people themselves are seen as the source and creators of value – not merely as labour or raw material" (ibid.: 62). In other words, they have been semiotically conquered, resignified not merely as 'resources' but as 'reservoirs of value'.

Although Escobar does not deny the persistence of conventional forms of capitalist exploitation of people and knowledge in the Third World mediated by the modern discourses of science and experts administration, he agrees with O'Connor's (1993) observation about a noticeable qualitative change in the way in which capital accumulation (or at least part of this process) operates today. In his own words, we currently witness "a novel internalisation of production conditions" – particularly effective in the discourse of biodiversity – that involves the "triple cultural reconversion of nature, people, and knowledge" (Escobar, 1996: 57). This is manifested, for instance, in the proliferation of biodiversity projects all around the world through which communities are to become the "stewards of the social and natural 'capitals' whose sustainable management is, henceforth, both their responsibility and the business of the world economy" (O'Connor, 1993: 5, cited in Escobar, 1996: 57).

I referred above to the notion that such alternative cultural narratives should be coproduced by the voices of the subaltern, rather than described and interpreted by academics. However, this poses a number of questions that are not easily resolved. Echoing some of the concerns voiced by Spivak (1987, 1988), Robbins (2004: 67) adds some additional questions: “What might the archaeology of the apparent emancipatory theories of the political ecologist look like? How do we hear local voices if they are only mouthed through the foreign researcher? Can a non-indigenous observer effectively participate in an effort to write ecology from the point of view of the colonised [or oppressed]?”. Robbins’s answer is that “deconstructive theory mandates an ethical evaluation even of what critical environmental researchers say and do” (ibid.: 67). In his view the ‘critical toolbox’ of knowledge/power theorisation can greatly assist PE scholars in remaining vigilant of the above questions. Escobar’s own approach to these challenges is twofold, combining critical deconstruction and political activism. On the one hand, he engages in a careful deconstruction of the narratives of ‘normalising discourses’ as they unfold historically and globally and under specific time-space coordinates. On the other hand, he actively engages in building political arenas where the socially marginalised can speak for themselves. Taken together, both pursuits can be powerful in facilitating the slow formation of alternative narratives of nature in which culture, power and knowledge are deeply imbricated.

2.1.4 Hybrid modernity, uneven development and differential sustainability

As argued throughout this chapter, through industrialism and post-industrialism nature has become a commodity made and remade within the logic of capitalist accumulation. This is why Marx’s political economy remains a fundamental tool to understand this process and to contest its logic. Although the links between natural processes and the conditions for and consequences of capital expansion and re-production for nature have been until recently underdeveloped, Marxist-inspired political ecologists have encapsulated the inherent attitude of capitalist production towards nature as the ‘second contradiction of capitalism’.

Capitalism’s inherent trend to mining nature gives rise to what Johnston (1989) calls ‘ecological imperialism’, referring to the expansion of the system to new ecosystems where there is more potential for initial fast profit increases. As argued by Leff (1995: 23), “[t]he overexploitation of labour power and natural resources in ‘peripheral’ countries also contributed to the production of ‘differential rent’ from the productivity of their ecosystems”. Ecological imperialism not only works by appropriating fast the ecological productivity of the global south but also by using peripheries as a preferred location for the externalisation of costs in air, water and land pollution. This is not only made possible through the use of coercion but also

and more widely through means of co-option. Thus, it is not uncommon to see governments in the south defending the strategies of big businesses and facilitating environmentally destructive paths towards fast economic growth in the name of 'national and workers interests'. Neither it is rare nowadays to see them defending the same strategies in the name of 'sustainable development' – popularised by the 1992 Earth Summit, as the possibility of addressing simultaneously current signs of social and environmental inequality while sustaining economic growth.

The way nature is valued changed dramatically with the processes of decolonisation, the oil shock of 1973 and the emergence and expansion of the environmental movements in the 1960s and 1970s. As argued by Cindi Katz (1998: 47):

Without absolute control over the mineral and vegetation resources of the former colonies and other parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America, or the security of cheap access to seemingly bottomless fuel reserves of the oil exporting states, Western capital no longer found nature so unproblematically there for exploitation. The environmental language of nature as an 'investment' in the future took on an explicitly capitalist meaning with increasing privatisation, whether in the form of 'preserves' or as a component of intellectual property rights, and as a result, nature was scrutinised and 'mapped' in wholly new ways. The entailments of this prescribing of nature are witnessed in, as much as driven by, the rise of corporate environmentalism, the re-ascendance of 'preservation' and 'restoration' as environmental politics, and the increasing privatisation of public environments.

As previously discussed, whilst up to the 1970s, corporate capitalism rejected the 'limits to growth', viewing nature as a free good, by the 1980s it became proactively engaged in the preservation and restoration of nature, embracing the possibility of an EM project. This shift was a reaction to several and different types of limit. 'Nature's limits' to the endless expansion of capitalism became evident through the acknowledgment of the anti-economies generated by resource depletion and degradation. But more importantly, the limits were related to the international world order and geopolitics that followed the process of decolonisation, through which the once-readily available resources became, at least in theory, regulated by new nation states whilst other south nation states 'discovered' the value of natural resources as a 'national comparative advantage' and the power derived from this advantage.

The differentiation between Fordism and post-Fordism could be paralleled to Escobar's (1996) distinction between 'modern' and 'postmodern' ecological capital. This distinction disentangles the difference between the Fordist regime of capitalist accumulation through nature's exploitation and the post-Fordist incorporation of ecology into economic thinking, which argues for the sustainable management of nature in the interest of capital accumulation and survival strategies. The transition between these two regimes marks the turning point from the

dismissal of nature and environmental concerns by corporate capitalism to the ascendance of EM, sustainable development and corporate environmentalism. Controversially, EM advocates believe that globalisation is not a threat to environmental sustainability but rather the path to drive capitalism in a green direction. As most environmental problems are global in scope, so should be our responses to them.³⁸

However, this transition is not neatly expressed across the uneven geography of global capitalism, nor necessarily displayed in strict chronological order. By contrast, under the contemporary phase of capitalist accumulation experienced by peripheral economies, the second contradiction of capitalism manifests itself in two contrasting ways. On the one hand, under the neoliberal free-market imperative propagated through macroeconomic reforms since the mid-1970s, the drive to increase productivity and maximise surplus value has exacerbated a disregard for resource conservation, recycling and pollution control and also for labour re-production. On the other hand, the second contradiction is somehow being internalised by capitalism through new mechanisms to preserve the conditions of production, including a regard for the sustainability of nature (and sometimes labour) as sources of value. Thus, the restructuring of production in the global south should be examined not simply as part of a nature-mindless mode of regulation but – using Escobar’s distinction – as a ‘hybrid’ product of modern expansionary capitalism and postmodern ecological capitalism.

The hybrid character of contemporary capitalism in peripheral economies does not imply that ecological imperialism is over, but rather that its means and content are changing, making the role played by the state, capitalists and workers and their implicit social contract to regulate capital accumulation more ambivalent. The notion of ‘hybrid modernity’ is therefore useful to interrogate wider Fordist/post-Fordist periodisation as they unfold under specific socio-historical and geographical conditions. Escobar (1995: 128) contends that hybridity indicates the blurred boundaries between old and new, traditional and modern, colonial and postcolonial, denoting “complex processes of cultural hybridisation encompassing manifold and multiple modernities and traditions”. García Canclini (1995) argues that in the case of Latin America, nation states have not only embraced modernisation but also the foundation of a distinctive national culture as their projects. These two-fold projects produced distinctive

³⁸ For instance, Mol (2001) contends that globalisation was essential to foster the formulation of international treaties such as the Montreal Protocol to protect the upper-atmosphere ozone layer by reducing the production of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). Of course Mol did not have at the time of writing the hindsight of the not-so-forthcoming ecological rationality of leading participants at the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference, which as claimed by many, led to an ‘anti-democratic, anti-transparent and unacceptable’ outcome, with no firm target for limiting the global temperature rise, no commitment to a legal treaty and no target year for peaking emissions.

narratives to justify the subordination and exclusion of the region's original inhabitants, embedding relations of social and cultural inequality in hybrid modernities and struggles against such inequalities between the tension of entering and leaving modernity. Following this thesis, it could be argued that this tension runs across the macro projects of the nation state and the micro practices of popular culture and daily life, but cannot be apprehended through clear antitheses (e.g. modern/indigenous) but rather as active processes of hybridisation that recreate this tension over time and space through discursive and material practices that might simultaneously reinforce and contest different elements of inequality and uneven development across the multiple layers of Polyp's totem (e.g. the formal and informal economy, the social economy and nature).

Cobbling together the theoretical insights of regulation theorists and political ecologists, it is possible to construct an image of the global market place as structured by an interlocking matrix of SAPs, market-liberalisation initiatives and free-trade regimes but also by ecological imperatives such as preservation programmes, improved environmental performance and the whole plethora of EM strategies. As discussed before, underlying the prevalent conceptualisation of EM is the notion of 'differential sustainability', that is the possibility of preserving the environmental sustainability of part of the world – implying both part of the world's society and part of the earth's territory – at the expense of other parts of the world or specific groups in society. This notion allows for the expansion of the ecological limits to capitalist accumulation by adjusting thresholds to meet the needs and wants of certain privileged social groups and territories. The latest generation of environmental policy instruments are a testimony to this search for differential sustainability and the field of fisheries management is no exemption. Individual trading quotas applied to fisheries, forests or carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions alike facilitate the differential appropriation of the global ecospheric sustainability through pre-specified property and use rights through market mechanisms. In this context, the transnationalisation of the economy and the devaluation of the political autonomy of national states appear as essential conditions in facilitating an environmental governance regime that seeks to work within the global carrying capacity of the earth while inevitably deepening the unequal geography of capital accumulation.

From this perspective, a crucial task for environmental science and policy making becomes that of 'maximising risk', deeply ingrained as an irresistible historic and cultural tendency of contemporary capitalism. According to Luhman (1992), capitalists bet at maintaining the growth rate of the economy at the expense of increasing risk in the decision-making process. This risk perspective aims at optimising the best use of opportunities through the application

of methods and models that should indicate the maximum thresholds for catastrophes or irreversible transformations to occur. This has resulted in remedial rather than preventive measures, or in fact a remedial definition of what prevention is. Thus, preventing does not necessarily mean, for instance, to avoid building in an area subject to seismic risk but to moderate the risk by reinforcing the structure of the building, securing economic insurance for the eventual harm of people and property, investing in civil defence organisations and the like. The hegemonic concept of sustainability could be seen then as one of the ultimate products of a project that aims at improving the scientific calculation of sustainability thresholds or 'risk ceilings'. Through risk maximisation and other similar strategies, the expansion of capitalism in the late 20th century has dramatically changed the relations between the core and the periphery and between workers, capitalists, the state and nature. The freedom of some to buy labour and to appropriate and exploit nature in distant elsewhere has effectively been expanded to the whole world.

To start with, transnational corporations (TNCs) have been liberated to pursue resource extraction through much of the developing world. The expansion of TNCs' control of developing world resources has not only fuelled deforestation, overfishing and other forms of environmental degradation, but extended to a pervasive revalorisation of common pool resources, through the combined propagation of new mechanisms for their privatisation and preservation under planned surplus techniques. Medium- and small-scale producers, by contrast, have been forced in one of three directions: intensifying resource extraction as a means of competing within the global market place; withdrawing from natural resource-based livelihoods altogether; or retreating to marginal lands and resources while making full use of their own environmental knowledge to sustain the marginal ecological productivity of the resource base on which they depend. Meanwhile, the urban proletariat has been pushed into a corner in the renewed capitalist contract. Through widely adopted labour flexibilisation and subcontracting strategies, workers have been increasingly forced to internalise firms' externalities, though paradoxically, this has brought concerns over environmental sustainability and subsistence closer to each other than ever before.

Developing countries' governments for their part have been either forced or incentivised to reduce environmental regulations. While the emphasis of SAPs on debt stabilisation and administrative cost-cutting has encouraged the decommissioning of environmental regulatory agencies, the desire to attract footloose capital has led to a widespread reduction of protective labour and environmental standards as an essential means to cut the costs of production. Completing the cycle, developed world governments and economic trading blocks such as the

European Union (EU), have actively supported the geographical relocation of regional economic conglomerates by linking trade conditionalities with control over 'under-exploited' resources outside their own jurisdictions. In this sense, the self-greening of business proclaimed by ecological modernisers is unlikely, not only because of the individual logic of capitalist enterprise but also because of the enabling environment propagated by international donor agencies and international economic regimes.

Simultaneously, governments and firms in the global south have been motivated to adhere and comply with EM practices, for instance, by facilitating the adoption of international environmental management systems (EMS). The propagation of eco-efficiency through mechanisms such as the voluntary International Organization for Standardization's (ISO) 14,000 standards, exemplifies one of the pillars of EM: the possibility for businesses worldwide to voluntarily adopt self-regulation EMS to improve their performance and trading opportunities. However, looking at trade-facilitation impacts among certified countries, Boys and Grant (2010: 14)³⁹ found that, while increased rates of certification appear to contribute to increased trade among developed countries, "[t]his trade facilitation benefit, however, does not extend to developing countries or LDCs who wish to export to developed nations". Similarly, ISO certification does not seem to improve market access for developing countries seeking south-south trading. This study suggests that however you look at the trading equation, environmental certification only expands the trading opportunities of firms in developed countries without extending such opportunities across 'good environmental performers' in the global south.

The above picture suggests that contemporary capitalism cannot be understood without exploring the role that nature plays in regulating the system, this is why I advocate the need to move from the analysis of social regulation to the analysis of socio-environmental regulation. This enterprise demands a detailed examination of the historical forms and productive material practices imposed upon diverse ecosystems, but also the discursive analysis of how environmental change shapes and reshapes capitalist regulation, of how the notions of

³⁹ The results of their study show that Europe and the Far East concentrate the largest number of adopters of ISO 14000, with a relatively low absolute number of certified firms in North America, Latin America, Africa, Australia and New Zealand, although Latin America shows in recent years a relatively fast increase in the number of compliant firms. Looking at the distribution of certified firms across 15 aggregate sectors, most EMS adopters appear to be overwhelmingly concentrated in the plastics and chemical sectors and worryingly very few in the petroleum and 'other manufactured' sectors such as nuclear fuel. Similarly a relatively small number of firms in the food, textile, wood and non-metallic mineral sectors are ISO certified.

sustainability, scarcity and so on enter the regulation 'boardroom', simultaneously exploring what definitions and narratives are included and excluded and why.

In the light of the previous discussion, it could be argued that PE is not 'too political' in comparison with other lines of interrogation on socio-environmental change, but rather more explicit about the political content and implications of such change. As contended by Robbins (2004: 11): "political ecological accounts and research efforts... share a common premise, that environmental change and ecological conditions are the product of political process". In doing so, political ecologists do not simply offer a thorough critique of the root causes of environmental degradation and injustice but also overtly engage with a discussion of the normative principles and assumptions underpinning their research. Thus, the relationship between environmental sustainability and social justice for instance is not taken for granted as unproblematic. Neither are 'traditional' discursive and material practices in the appropriation of nature simply romanticised. As argued by Peet and Watts (1996: 11, cited in Robbins, 2004: 13), PE's emphasis on exploring local understandings and practices of socio-ecological processes "is not simply a salvage operation – recovering disappearing knowledges and management practices – but rather a better understanding both of the regulatory systems in which they inhere... and the conditions under which such knowledges and practices become part of alternative development strategies". Furthermore, PE researchers not only contribute a critical re-evaluation of the prognosis offered by hegemonic accounts on socio-environmental change – such as eco-scarcity/limits to growth and EM – but rather reveal "how those accounts themselves are instrumental in political and ecological change" (Robbins, 2004: 12).

Both the limits to growth and EM accounts are silent about the environmental injustice of the processes they describe as 'inevitable' (eco-scarcity) or 'desirable' (green capitalism). The notion of a constraining environmental crisis of universal scale fails to unpack the political dimension of the changes required, favouring instead a piecemeal approach through which certain emissions are condemned, certain resources protected, and certain externalities internalised. By contrast, political ecologists scrutinise experiences and interpretations of socio-environmental change from the perspective of those marginalised by such change, aiming at denaturalising their relative position within social relations and in relation to nature, through an explicit consideration of power. In this sense, both structuralist and post-structuralist PE approaches offer in my view complementary lines of interrogation and explanation. The former constitutes a solid platform to explore how conditions of socio-environmental inequality and injustice are reproduced at different scales, nested within one another, through a historical materialist analysis – based on the reformulation of key Marxist

notions such as those of use and surplus value in the production of nature. The latter offers a comprehensive attempt to deconstruct socio-environmental change and conflict, revealing the role that power, knowledge, culture and discourse play in both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic accounts and alternatives to the current state of affairs.

2.2 Towards a dialectic understanding of socio-environmental conflict and change

The discussion throughout this and the previous chapter has highlighted a number of ways in which PE and regulation theory share a key intellectual objective concerned with offering a materialist explanation of the limits and contradictions of contemporary capitalist accumulation. But surprisingly, there is almost no cross-reference between these schools of thought, let alone a systematic attempt to articulate their theses and analytical frameworks. The central purpose of this section is to examine how these perspectives could be bridged and how such a bridge could be used as a powerful analytical framework to interrogate the reconfiguration of socio-environmental regulation under the latest phase in the treadmill of production, across the macro, meso and micro levels.

2.2.1 From social regulation to socio-environmental regulation

Beyond the explicit concern of Alan Lipietz in the 1990s to search for a viable alternative to the Fordist crisis through PE, surprisingly, there have been limited attempts to explore how regulation theory and PE could be fruitfully linked. Even in his *Green Hopes. The Future of Political Ecology*, Lipietz (1995)⁴⁰ – one of the most prominent parents of French regulation theory – skips this task. Instead, he adheres to PE as an emerging paradigm or project for political change, “comparable in structure to the Red one. It [PE] is doing so by basing itself solidly on a material reality, by being against an ‘existing state of affairs’ (productivism and so on) which it tries to analyse in order to put up a better fight against it; and its has a value system (solidarity, autonomy, ecological responsibility, democracy) which expresses the hope of oppressed people” (ibid.: xiii)

Among the few scholars who have explored the potential articulation between regulation theory and PE are Joachim Becker, Werner Raza and Johannes Jäger. Becker and Raza (1999) address this task by arguing that “the theory of regulation lacks a systematic treatment of social relations with regards to the interaction between society and nature, while concepts of

⁴⁰ First published in French in 1993 as *Vert espérance: L’avenir de l’écologie politique*, Paris: La découverte.

political ecology – notably that of Alan Lipietz – lack a critical analysis of political economy”. While I agree with their first observation, in the sense that nature shines for its absence in the work of most regulation scholars, I find their second statement more problematic, as PE expands beyond Lipietz definition and explicitly aims at ‘completing’ the political economy critique through the systematic articulation of material conditions (nature) into the inherent contradictions of capitalist accumulation.

Jäger and Raza (2001: 1) further elaborate the reasons that justify the exercise of exploring a useful link between PE and regulation theory: “Political ecology has recently focussed upon the study of ecological distributional conflicts, thereby mainly analysing North-South issues. A problem of this strand of work, however, relates to the absence of a theory of capitalist development. For, without a proper understanding of the dynamics of capitalist development during distinct phases, how could we account for the resulting impacts on nature?”. Although PE scholars can hardly be blamed for not delving deeply into the understanding of key Marxist notions, it is true that rarely has any work been dedicated to explore how capitalism’s social regulation deals with nature. In other words, so far there has been little explicit cross-fertilisation between PE and regulation theory. Just taking a look at the literature produced from either field is illuminating in this respect. It is very rare to find a reference to regulation theory in the most comprehensive work produced by political ecologists, in the same way that PE contributions and scholars rarely feature in regulation theory analyses.

Following the critical examination of these two perspectives, in my view, their insights could be enhanced through the cross-fertilisation of both theoretical approaches for the following reasons. First, regulation theory offers a solid theorisation of capitalist regimes of accumulation and in particular a well-established distinction between the long-term modes of regulation of Fordism and post-Fordism. Second, through its focus on the labour process it reveals how human labour is harnessed in the creation of products not just for human need but for the creation of surplus and how labour is not just a production factor but a product of the social relationship between owners of the means of production and their workforce. Third, through the notion of modes of social regulation, regulation theory denaturalises capitalist regimes, interrogating the historical articulation of social relations and contract between capitalists, workers and the state, or, in other words, the institutionalised fix that holds together a collective compromise to support capitalist accumulation.

Alternatively, PE brings nature to the fore through a detailed understanding of ecosystemic processes. Second, PE reveals how nature is commodified through the process of producing

surplus value rather than use value. Third, PE completes the historical materialist examination of capitalist inherent contradictions, by revealing capitalism's tendency to erode the conditions of production on which accumulation depends. Furthermore, PE articulates the material production of nature, through technological transformation, to its social construction. Last but not least, whilst regulation theory has mainly developed powerful explanations at the macro level, PE provides useful insights to explore how regulation works at the meso and micro levels. These three scales are essential for the analysis of socio-environmental regulation because, as argued by Harvey (1996: 53), "[p]rocesses do not operate in but actively construct space and time and in so doing define distinctive scales for their development".

At the macro level it is possible to link regulation theory and PE insights through the analysis of chains of explanation as meta-narratives. A meta-narrative is a story *about* a story, encompassing and explaining other narratives within totalising schemes or explanations (Patterson and Monroe, 1998). Both regulation theory and PE are about the production of political economy meta-narratives. The former seeks a totalising explanation of how capitalist accumulation transforms the world through periodical crisis in which new modes of regulation emerge to stabilise the system. PE – at least in its earliest expressions – also seeks to articulate wider explanations of change driven by capitalist accumulation, although in contrast with regulation theory, its core focus is on socio-environmental change. PE's 'chains of explanation' could be therefore interpreted as meta-narratives, an example of which is the meta-narrative on land degradation through which Blaikie and Brookfields (1987) explore the multiple causes of degradation operating at different scales. Another way of conceptualising the way in which regulation theory and PE typically construct meta-narratives of change is by looking at their methods. While regulation theory often applies a deductive approach, drawing chains of explanation from the theorisation of accumulation to specific and contextualised situations, PE is primarily inductive in the sense that chains of explanation are typically constructed outwards, from the scale 'where the plough meets the earth' (Walker, 2005: 9) to regional, national and global political, social and economic relations.

Despite the fact that there is an increasing tendency to question the value of meta-narratives, it could be argued that they constitute a valuable method to avoid the fragmentation of multiple singular narratives that might not otherwise talk to each other. This is not to assume that a meta-narrative is 'written in stone', over- and pre-determining the outcomes of any research but to make explicit the 'genre' from which we venture to build further accounts of material and discursive reality. The above discussion refers in short to the need to retain some sort of coherent (even if provisional) explanation within which to explore commonalities and

distinctiveness across specific narratives (first and third world, industrialised and non-industrialised), as well as a basis to articulate local-scale to large-scale processes. The post-structuralist insights discussed in the previous section offer a solid basis for avoiding the trap of simply replacing old meta-narratives by new ones.

Following the above considerations, one novel contribution of this thesis is that the distinction between the Fordist and post-Fordist meta-narratives is not used as a totalising framework to examine how the case study under analysis fits but rather as a departing point to explore the *hybrid* forms that capitalist accumulation assumed throughout the rise, consolidation and change of the Argentine fisheries sector in Mar del Plata city, which from its emergence at the end of the 19th century until the 1980s was the undisputed 'national' epicentre of the activity.

2.2.2 Regulation at the meso level: The 'business environment'

Albeit using a different terminology, ecological modernisers purport that socio-environmental regulation is likely to happen through networks operating at the meso level. These networks operate within three spheres: the first concerns the policy networks through which governments and businesses interact; the second refers to the economic networks through which economic interactions are regulated by specific rules in and around each industrial sector; and the third corresponds to the societal networks that shape the relationships between civil society and economic agents. For Mol (1995) each of these networks has the scope to bring about significant 'environmentally-induced institutional transformations' (Pellow et al., 1999). However, networks can operate either inducing or resisting 'positive' environmental outcomes. In addition, networks are rarely a neat configuration of single issues and values (the environment, workers, gender, and so on) and even if it is only possible to identify diverse agents as part of a network under the umbrella of a jointly championed concern (e.g. environmental justice or gender equality) such networks need to be interrogated not just for what they claim but for what they don't as well. For instance a network championing the EM of production might do so at the expense of issues of social justice. This means that networks need to be examined in the light of the diversity of agents that constitute them, in relation to their claims, ideological affiliations and diversity of social values and environmental knowledges on which they draw. In short, networks offer an entry point to explore the materialisation of regulation at the meso level or 'business environment' in which concrete agents (large businesses, small firms, cooperatives, formal and informal workers, women and men) operate.

In an article entitled 'Ecological Eldorado: Eliminating Excess over Nature', Ketola (1997) proposes a schematic framework to capture the main features of the so-called 'business environment'. Like many ecological modernisers, she argues for the urgent 'need' to reshape businesses performance and decision-making towards an 'Ecological Eldorado', a far-fetched "future world where there are great ecological riches and fabulous ecological opportunities [presumably for business]... [in which] human activities do not exceed the carrying capacity of the ecosystem. Instead, humans are one with nature. Different species live in an interdependent harmony. The Earth's life-support is carefully looked after. Biodiversity is conserved and enhanced" (ibid.: 100).

The above scenario is paradigmatic of the EM vision. There are ecological limits to economic growth but it is possible and feasible for business (conflated throughout the argument with 'humans') to rise to the challenge and to benefit from the new awaiting opportunities for sustained economic growth in harmony with nature, if only they could internalise an ecosystemic understanding of the world. The call for change is made in the name of nature – or more precisely 'ecosystems' that include 'humans' along with roses and ants – and for the universal benefit of all. In Ketola's view, the reason why businesses do not yet take this road is because the 'business environment' in which they operate does not always produce the right signals for companies to fully integrate ecological considerations into their profit and loss accounts – full costing and economic valuation of currently free or cheap resources therefore being the key to the Eldorado gateway.

Where her argumentation becomes interesting in my view, is when Ketola starts exploring in more concrete terms the path to her 'Eldorado' vision. Figures 2.1 and 2.2 summarise the three building blocks and sets of interrelationships that according to Ketola can help us to schematically visualise four possible scenarios ranging from the 'ideal' situation to three possible versions of how excess over ecological limits might take place.

In Figure 2.1, the three building blocs represent respectively the 'ecosystem', the 'business environment' and the 'company'. The 'ecosystem' consists of the natural resources and services on which companies depend and impact upon, whose limits are defined by 'ecological factors' encompassing "geographical, biological, physical and chemical limits that restrict company operations" (Ketola, 1997: 102). Exceeding such limits leads to sudden environmental shocks and/or gradually built environmental stresses, which are human- – or more precisely – business-induced. The second block is characterised as the 'business environment', which encompasses political, economic, socio-cultural and technological (PEST) factors regulating

companies' excesses over nature. The PEST factors are commonly viewed as constraints but potentially also as opportunities. Here, Ketola makes an important distinction between the notions of 'society' and 'business environment': "Apart from being a subsystem of society in a geographical sense, a business environment also represents an elite group picked up from a society by a company. The weak and poor do not usually belong to a company's business environment" (ibid.: 105). Finally, the third block represents the company, its limitations and resources concerning their 'vision', goals and strategies, organisational culture and structure, human and financial resources and physical facilities.

Figure 2.1 The building blocks

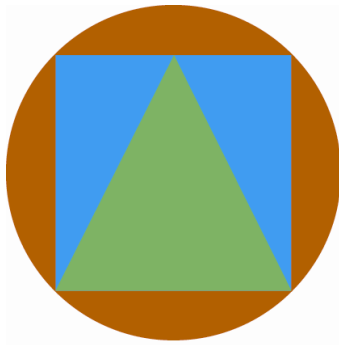


Source: Adapted from Ketola (1997: 102). Redrawn by the author.

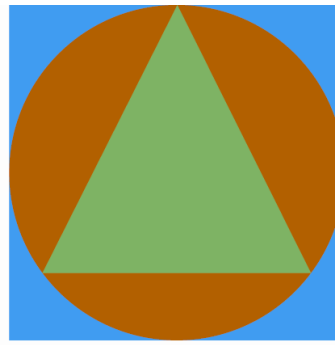
Figure 2.2 suggests that, under a first or ideal scenario, companies frame their operations within the business environment, which sets their limits within the ecosystem's limits. The second, third and fourth scenarios all represent situations where firms' practices are environmentally unsustainable, albeit for different reasons. In the second scenario, companies are ahead of their business environment in terms of vision and practices, while the latter exceed the ecosystem's limits.

Under the third 'business as usual' scenario, companies exceed the ecosystem limits while staying within the limits defined by their business environment. In other words, they can pollute or overexploit natural resources and services as well as destroy indigenous livelihoods because such practices are acceptable within their business environment. The fourth scenario in which companies surpass both the limits of their business environment and the ecosystem is characterised by Ketola as 'suicidal', as "the business environment would not allow any company to exceed its limits for long" (ibid.; 133). For Ketola, the two scenarios worth focusing upon are the second and the third ones, as they are shaped by either the agency of companies (green champions) or pressure groups within the business environment.

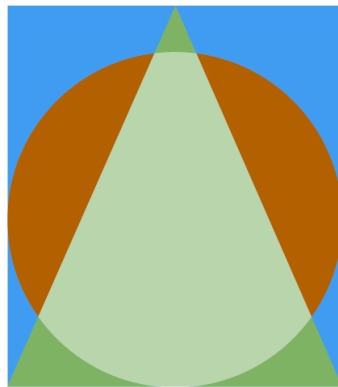
Figure 2.2 Relations between the ecosystem, the business environment and firms



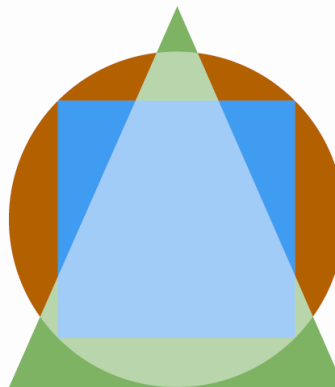
A: Company operations staying within the limits of business environment and ecology



B: Company operations staying within the limits of ecology while **business environment exceeds them**



C: **Company operations and business environment exceeding** the limits of ecology



D: **Company operations exceeding the limits of business environment and ecology**

Source: Adapted from Ketola (1997: 103). Redrawn by the author.

Although mechanistic, what is interesting about this framework is that it ‘resonates’ the way in which companies, workers, policy-makers and public opinion at large tend to perceive/frame the so-called ‘business environment’ as a set of opportunities and constraints to change firms’ performance. It could be argued that this is due to the hegemonic dominance of modernisation and EM views across capitalist agents. Although Ketola in my view puts too much emphasis on the agency of companies and pressure groups to modify unsustainable practices or ‘behaviour’, her framework could be further problematised as a means to explore: (a) the ‘constructs’ (or imaginariums) of the business environment, as perceived and defined by firms, workers and pressure groups – in other words, the boundaries of what is perceived as doable or not doable, acceptable or unacceptable within the specific time and space conditions of a given socio-environmental conflict; and (b) the embeddedness of this environment within the social regulation of production and wider discursive constructions of scarcity, crisis, sustainability, justice and so on.

I therefore propose to problematise Ketola’s framework along three lines. First, by adopting a dialectical perspective on the way in which PEST factors are defined and changed, not just by

'an elite group picked up from a society by a company' but by the dynamic configuration of diverse agents and also inscribed within structural conditions or permanences. Second, by examining the material and discursive interaction of firms, workers and other 'pressure groups', as they challenge or endorse the configuration of the business environment through specific economic, political and societal networks. Third by adopting a discourse-analysis approach to examine the way in which through the claim-making process, different claims interact, clash or forge alliances either to preserve or subvert the status quo. Acknowledging that 'political' pressures can in fact be exerted through any of the PEST factors, I redefined the 'P' in Ketola's framework to encompass the 'policies' adopted by the state to regulate the activity, understanding 'policy' in a wide sense to include all statutory measures. Adapting Ketola's model to the purpose of this study, the intention is to use it as a framework to map changes in the 'business environment', as a means to understand changes in the societal framework or governance conditions that regulate the relation between production and nature under specific geographical and historical conditions.

2.2.3 Regulation at the micro level: Workers' and firms' material and discursive strategies

Regulation theory provides a solid theorisation of how stability within capitalist economies is achieved by means of social and institutional relations. However in their analysis of the institutional regulation of capitalist accumulation, regulationists have traditionally focused on abstract macro-explanations, neglecting somehow processes operating at the level of micro-societies. Dunford (1990: 304), among others, argues that "the theories of the regulation school need to be developed further as concerns size related problems of accumulation of microsocieties and conjunctural analyses of political struggles concerning generation, reproduction and transformation of modes of regulation". Peck and Tickell (1992, 1994) engage in a similar critique, arguing that emerging regulation-accumulation post-Fordist couplings need to be examined not only at the national level but also at the local level. Furthermore, they engage with this project by exploring the emergence of localised modes of social regulation during the crisis of Thatcherism. In this context, Broomhill (2001: 120) puts forward a crucial question: if we agree that "[f]rom a regulationist perspective, a coherent post-Fordist state structure has yet to emerge or stabilise" then "what does a regulation approach have to offer for an analysis of the impact of neoliberalism and restructuring on local states and regions?". In response, it could be argued that by extending the regulationist problematic to the micro level, we confront not only questions concerning the local state but furthermore the way in which political and socio-environmental struggles are shaped through the interaction between local governments, capitalists and workers.

The relationship among local, national and transnational stakeholders is usually portrayed in terms of 'local Davids' versus 'corporate Goliaths'. This invariably conjures up a series of simplified assumptions about local citizen workers either passively submissive to transnational capital or fighting it in defence of their local environment. However, conflicts emerging from contradictions between production and nature often show a much more complex alignment of actors organised along ambivalent values and interests. Several authors have noted that local citizens and workers are often divided by emerging environmental conflicts between present and tangible fears that threaten their livelihoods and concerns about the liveability of their environment and the long-term preservation of their local natural resource base.⁴¹ Similarly, firms are often portrayed as a somewhat monolithic sector in terms of interests and values and also as bearing a central responsibility in changing practices towards environmentally sustainable production. However, the process of industrial restructuring has brought up a much more complex reality, with firms ranging from transnational companies to domestic units operating outside the formal economy; while all operate in the same locality, their connectivity to the national and global arenas of capital accumulation and regulation differs greatly, presenting new challenges that can only be disentangled through a multi-spatial analysis. In the same way, the state both at the national and local level is ambivalently committed to the acceleration of environmental depletion and degradation.

National states in the global south appear to be increasingly allured by or trapped between, on the one hand, the need to meet international demands, attract foreign investments and support the expansion and opening up of their economies and, on the other hand, the need to deliver social welfare benefits, protect national capital and sustain their natural endowments. Meanwhile local governments are more concretely faced with the challenge of dealing with the effects of uneven development. Thus, their legitimacy is also trapped in the attempt to respond to different constituencies, which can be crudely defined as those who direct and manage productive firms, those who are workers or dependent of these firms and local citizens at large, who might be concerned with the local economic, social and environmental conditions or with the sovereignty and sustainability of the local natural endowment.

All in all, it is at the local level and in concrete places where the effects of uneven development (both socially and geographically) deepened by neoliberal regimes of flexible accumulation manifest in their full magnitude and where the battle for stabilising the accumulation process is fought. It is also at the micro level where the cross-cutting identity of workers' struggles can be fully explored, allowing the exploration of workers' experiences, expectations, interests,

⁴¹ Brown and Mikkelsen (1990); Gould (1993) and Gould et al. (1996), among others.

values and responses to capitalist accumulation not as a homogeneous class but as a provisional category that needs to be further cross-referred in the light of gender, ethnicity, age and ability. Thus, 'workers' have differential positions within a hegemonic mode of social regulation both in relation to their multiple identities but also to their specific historical and contingent insertion in the social relation of production and in the production of nature.

Williams (1989) argues that contrary to the traditional socialist argument that the proletariat has no country whilst property owning classes do, the advent of faceless and footloose capitalism and its effects on local communities has made evident that place is becoming increasingly "a crucial element in the bonding process – more so perhaps for the working class than the capital-owning classes... When capital has moved on, the importance of place is [even] more clearly revealed" (ibid.: 242). And yet, as argued by Harvey (1996: 29), acknowledgement of the wide footprint of capital in transforming places – and the urban condition – in an almost undifferentiated fashion across the planet has perhaps obscured the role that place plays in embedding political action by the working class. Thus, working class political action and engagement is heavily embedded in the local (material) experience of change acquired through work, dwelling, play and social interaction. Of course, this is not to deny that many processes of socio-environmental change are not directly accessible to local experience but the dislocation (or abstraction) between 'change' and 'experience' could also help to understand why collective action against uneven development emerges or not, when and how. Neither do I presume here that the consciousness of workers is simply bounded by the local experience of change in the environment in which they live, work and socialise. Rather, I want to emphasise the need to re-embed collective action (daily political practices) into the materiality of place (space, city and the environment) and its transformations at various nested scales. As argued by Harvey (1996: 44), "[t]ransformation of space, place and environment are neither neutral nor innocent with respect to practices of domination and control. Indeed, they are fundamental framing decisions – replete with multiple possibilities – that govern the conditions (often oppressive) over how lives can be lived".

As argued before, political ecologists are well aware of the importance of place in exploring socio-environmental conflicts and their emphasis on rooting wider chains of explanation in local struggles is evidence of this, yet, the bulk of the PE literature favours the rural rather than urban context. This is a surprising bias, addressed in recent years by several PE scholars,⁴² who agree that under neoliberal capitalism cities are playing an increasing role in mediating the

⁴² Notably Keil (1995); Keil et al. (1996); Swyngedouw (1999, 2004); Gandy (2002); Luke (2003); Heynen and Perkins (2005); McCarthy and Prudham (2004); Heynen and Robbins (2005); and Heynen et al. (2006), among few others.

relationship between production and nature, becoming theatres for the production, exchange, and consumption of their environments as commodities. As contended by Heynen et al. (2006) a more explicit examination of the links between capitalist processes and urban environmental injustices from a PE perspective remains a pending task. Following the above discussion, my contention is that such links can be best understood by examining the material and discursive practices displayed through specific urban socio-environmental conflicts, which in turn constitute the arenas where control and resistance to capitalist regulation confront and transform each other. I embrace this task by exploring the experiences, perceptions and responses of firms and workers in the local fishing industry of Mar del Plata during the neoliberal restructuring of the sector and through the conflicts that emerged in its aftermath and persist even today, originally labelled by the media as the 'Fisheries War'.

The analysis is based on two main elements of the fieldwork, explained in detail under methodological Appendix A. First from the data gathered through a survey of all firms operating in the sector and in-depth semi-structured interviews with the line managers of a wide spectrum of manufacturing units, ranging from large firms to workers' cooperatives. Through the latter, I explore the interviewees' own definitions and evaluations of the restructuring process and its outcomes, examining in particular their understandings of the PEST factors shaping their 'business environment' and the strategies adopted by the manufacturing units to both influence this business environment and respond to it. Second, I draw on the systematic collection of local and national press news documenting the restructuring process and the 'Fisheries War'. I analyse this socio-environmental conflict as a claim-making process, identifying the self-defined identities of claim-makers and the alliances and clashes that emerged throughout the process together with their contentions (or claims). The analysis of the claim-making process through the media is complemented with in-depth interviews with a wide range of actors, many of whom became throughout the conflict the voice of larger collectives (women labourers, informal cooperatives, trade unionists, local NGOs, local and provincial officials, scientists and so on). Through these two mechanisms, the intention is to understand and contrast the individual and collective 'voices' of workers and capitalists, both through their material practices and tactics at the workplace and through their discursive practices in supporting or confronting the restructuring process through successive waves of covert and overt conflict. I interrogate these practices as combined sources for what they have to say about the transformation of social values and environmental knowledges throughout the restructuring process.

2.2.4 Neoliberal socio-environmental regulation as a *dispositif*

According to regulation theory, an accumulation regime might face two different types of crises, one of which can be handled within the existing mode of social regulation (a 'crisis within regulation') and the other of which deeply alters the stabilising political power of the regulatory structure, what Lipietz (1985) terms an 'open crisis' or 'crisis of regulation'. In a situation of open crisis, "[s]ocial actors are forced to abandon established norms of behaviour and to develop new strategies for dealing with the crisis. Their strategies reflect different interests, different visions of the roots of the crisis and thus, different options about the 'correct' way to deal with the crisis. Therefore strategies might clash quite manifestly" (Jäger and Raza, 2001: 3). But as argued throughout this and the previous chapter, change and conflict in the treadmill of production should be defined not just for their social but rather socio-environmental content. Thus, crises in the regulation of capitalist production are not just driven by socio-economic instability but also by the way in which the conditions of production are eroded to a point where the possibility of capitalist accumulation under a given set of strategies becomes unviable or threatened.

In this context, O'Connor's (1998) thesis on the second contradiction of capitalism is highly relevant to the scope of this thesis, as it grasps the inherent tendency of capitalism to further undermine the conditions of production through periods of open crises. O'Connor elaborates this argument by making a distinction between the expanding and contracting phases of capitalism. During the former, the pressure on nature to serve external markets increases as fast as allowed by the available technology and the state and civil society, thus firms rarely conceive the limits to growth as 'nature's limits' – or as the resilience limits of the exploited ecosystems to withstand an increased rate of exploitation. By contrast during a contracting phase, firms' chances to stay within the treadmill of production become increasingly threatened, prompting a plethora of responses, such as technological changes, production diversification, and reduction of fix costs to cope with pronounced instability in the supply-demand chain, and so on. As we see in the case study of the Argentinean fisheries sector, contracting phases are not just dictated by market demands but also by the overexploitation of the natural resource base on which accumulation ultimately depends. Thus, contracting phases manifest at points in terms of 'ecological scarcity' – where scarcity refers to an essential condition of production expressed, in the case of the fisheries sector, by the depletion of the main commercial species. This in turn prompts a new plethora of responses by firms, many built upon the same responses deployed during expanding phases, though the regard for nature and the need for some form of regulation to sustain the ecological conditions of production become in these cases more explicit.

So far, I have presented an analytical framework that explores how socio-environmental change and conflict materialise at three distinctive but articulated levels. I purported that at the macro level it is possible to capture the transition to a new phase in the treadmill of production. This transformation can be read as a discontinuity in the Great Compromise that held capitalist social relations together, noticeable in the passage from a Fordist to a post-Fordist regime. Although these two regimes are likely to differ in their content in the context of a peripheral economy such as Argentina's – as opposed to the way in which this transition manifests in advanced capitalist economies – my argument is that the passage from one regime to another inevitably needs to be examined in the light of contemporary transnational and national trends. Thus, under the macro level, I intend to examine how the passage to a neoliberal regime of accumulation has been defined internationally and nationally not only through structural adjustment policies but through a discourse that challenged the tenets of Fordist accumulation, constituting a new meta-narrative around the notions of free trade, the articulation of transnational and national capital, labour flexibilisation, the enabling state and the rational utilisation of under-exploited natural resources.

At the meso level, my intention is to analyse how the macro changes described above are simultaneously structuring and being structured through the 'business environment' in which firms and workers in the fishing industry of Mar del Plata operate. In that sense, the business environment could be reinterpreted as the governance framework that catalyses the actions and values of political, economic and societal networks. This framework is not simply governed by labour, industrial and fisheries policies or by domestic and foreign markets but by a wider mesh of PEST pressures. Through a historical perspective, it is possible to see how this framework goes through stages of stability and instability, in which the definition of what is acceptable and non-acceptable, doable and non-doable changes. Thus, the governance framework regulating the activity is neither static, nor the simple product of conditions emerging at the macro level, but rather a contested arena, where issues of social justice, economic profitability and environmental sustainability are constantly negotiated.

At the micro level, the analysis is set to zoom into the reality of the work place, the arena where workers and capitalists meet on a daily basis and through a variety of practices, both material and discursive. A first task at this level, is to capture the diversity of the agents engaged from the sea to the factory: fishermen, formal and informal manufacturing workers, women and men, workers agglutinated under trade unions and disenfranchised from them; capitalists in small, medium and large firms, with different positions within the production value chain and characterised by differing degrees of control over the means of production,

and over the natural resource base. It is also at the micro level where socio-environmental conflicts become more tangible and perhaps where the complexity of social values and environmental knowledges can be better grasped.

Analysing changes in the regulation system across the macro, meso and micro levels offers in my view an opportunity to overcome stereotypes between 'local Davids' versus 'corporate Goliaths', as historical and newly emerging hybrid forms of control and resistance are displayed, aiming at consolidating or challenging attempts to re-stabilise socio-environmental regulation. A question emerging from the above framework is then: how does socio-environmental regulation transverse across the macro, meso and micro level? In other words, how does the above framework hold together? Becker and Raza (1999) argue that in the context of an open crisis, attempts to re-stabilise a mode of regulation might be subject to contingent historical processes. To Jäger and Raza (2001: 3) this implies that "no social force is able to push through a solution to the crisis, so as to re-establish a stable mode of development, with the consequence that the crisis situation will be prolonged over longer time periods". Becker, and also Jäger and Raza therefore suggest that, in the context of post-Fordism – where there is no obvious equivalent to the Fordist Great Compromise – it makes sense to replace the notion of 'mode of regulation' by '*dispositif* of regulation'. I endorse this decision for three reasons.

First, this notion appears to be better suited to capture not only the temporal but also spatial contingency of a system of relations working to normalise social affairs. In the contemporary treadmill of production, both phases of expansion and contraction succeed each other in very short periods of time, thus making any attempts to re-stabilise the system of accumulation more difficult. This is particularly the case for peripheral economies forced or co-opted to adopt neoliberal principles 'overnight'. In situations like this, as the state becomes more and more aligned with the instrumental logic of capitalist accumulation at any cost, its capacity and legitimacy to re-stabilise the system during periods of open crisis are increasingly undermined. Furthermore, as neoliberal reforms deeply impact on previous social contracts between the state, capitalists and workers, the capacity of these agents to re-stabilise the system under periods of crisis also becomes increasingly eroded. Given that phases of expansion-contraction and of stability-instability take place at great speed, attempts to re-establish some form of social control are not necessarily forged over long historical periods but have a contingency nature that can be better grasped under *dispositif* analysis.

Second, the notion of *dispositif* of regulation also appears to be more appropriate to capture the contingency of socio-environmental regulation across a spatial multi-level analysis. Typically the regulation literature focuses on the analysis of processes of economic, social and political transformation at the nation-state level, paying far less attention to sub-national and supra-national scales of social regulation. Raising this deficit almost two decades ago, Peck and Tickell (1992: 348) argued that “[i]n contrast to its contributions to our understanding of the historical development of capitalism, regulation theory has no more than a tenuous purchase of processes of spatially uneven development. The theory is articulated at the level of the national social formation (Smith, 1984), requiring elaboration if it is to be able to account for uneven development at either the international or sub-national scales”.

Although a number of scholars have addressed this task since then, work exploring the spatiality of regulation theory and in particular the relationship between regulation systems at different scales and uneven development is still rare. When found, the analysis explicitly borrows outside regulation theory to address its spatial analytical deficit, as in the work of Jäger and Raza (2001: 1) who do so by using land rent theory to examine “how particular institutional configurations of economic actors, civil society and the state (local, national, supranational) have (re)structured the socio-spatial patterns” of Vienna and Montevideo. Furthermore, I find Foucault’s *dispositif* analysis appropriate to address the role of space (in particular of ‘the urban’ as ‘second nature’) in regulation processes because space, like power and knowledge, is transversed by this analytical approach. Assuming that space is produced through the social and the social through space, it is possible to find spatialised patterns and elements of control within a regulating *dispositif* (borders, zones, ghettos, etc.). Thus, by focusing on the industrial restructuring process of the Argentinean fisheries sector in Mar del Plata city, my intention is not just to ground the restructuring process at the urban level but to understand how struggles over urban-based production and urban space are regulated at multiple scales as well as the role played by spatial configurations (the workplace, the harbour, the sea) in regulating change and mediating conflicts.

Third, *dispositif* analysis grasps the diversity of elements and relations articulated through a normalising process beyond the analytical categories often deployed to study a mode of social regulation (e.g. social relations, technological change, government). In this sense, a *dispositif* is defined by Foucault (1980: 194) as: “a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid”. Furthermore, a *dispositif* can be defined as ‘a disciplinarian

ensemble' of social, spatial and discursive normalisation forces and practices (Foucault, 1980, 1984). This ensemble is not merely a functional device managed through intentional targets and tactics defined within a field of planned interventions (e.g. urban planning, industrial development, fisheries management and so on) or political projects (e.g. neoliberalism). But, in Deleuze's words (1992: 161) a *dispositif* is 'structuring light'; a generative device that connects "meaning-stimulating forces which produce 'truth', 'objectivity', 'the normal'... *Dispositifs* are concrete, situational ensembles of forces of becoming" (Pløger, 2008: 59).

Following the above considerations, I set out to examine how neoliberal restructuring – understood as a *dispositif* of socio-environmental regulation – operates and becomes institutionalised as a collective system of signification, giving 'structured coherence' to the capitalist appropriation and valorisation of labour and nature under a peripheral accumulation regime of flexible production or post-Fordism.⁴³ I argue that this *dispositif* is not only defined by the capitalist imperative of accumulation – making money from an initial endowment of capital – but dialectically mediated through multiple material and discursive practices by international organisations, capitalists, trade unions, workers, the state at multiple scales (national, provincial and local) and society at large. The focus of the analysis is therefore not just on how socio-environmental regulation facilitates or inhibits capitalist accumulation but on how it transforms (normalises) the conditions of production.

In the same way in which the restructuring of the social welfare state has been defined in the framework of governmentality studies as 'the economisation of the social' (Rose, 2000; Bührmann, 2005) and 'of politics' (Morgan, 2003), it could be argued that through the treadmill of production we assist the economisation of the social, of politics and of nature. In this context, neoliberal industrial restructuring can be interrogated as a generative *dispositif* of socio-environmental regulation, in which laws, policies, trade agreements, technological innovations, changes in the organisation of the work space and of the work force and so on, are only connected by serving a common end. In other words, neoliberal industrial restructuring can be understood as an ensemble of both intended and unintended regulatory mechanisms to enable sustained capitalist control over the conditions of production.⁴⁴

⁴³ By 'structured coherence' I refer to Harvey's notion, defined as follows: "[a]t the heart of [this] coherence lies a particular technological fix – understood not simply as hardware but also as organisational forms – and a dominant set of social relations [which together] define models of consumption as well as the labour process" (Harvey, 1985: 140, cited in Peck and Tickell, 1992: 352).

⁴⁴ Such conditions comprise not just discrete natural resources and ecosystemic processes but also subaltern subjects (such as workers and the poor) and social relations (such as those operating within the formal, the informal and the social economies).

However, the notion of *dispositif* of regulation could be interpreted as a way of diluting or dispersing rather than helping to unveil the multiple loci of change. Thus, I believe it is important to highlight that while I challenge the notion that single components – such as the role of the state or the relationship between capitalists and workers alone – can explain what drives socio-environmental change, this is not to deny or downplay the important role played by regulatory mechanisms as understood under regulation theory. On the contrary, my intention is to deepen our understanding by exploring control and resistance as historically and geographically, materially and discursively moulded processes. Control in and resistance to hegemonic forms of accumulation are not isolated subjects (located exclusively in capitalist workers' struggles), they operate through a wider web (defined here as a *dispositif* of regulation) that connects the flow of social processes (change) throughout a number of 'nodes'. Such nodes could be parallel with what Harvey (1996) defines as 'the six distinctive moments' in a cognitive map of the social process. Although his framework was originally developed with the aim of navigating the dense contemporary map of discourses on socio-environmental change, I find it brings together all the key elements (or 'moments' in Harvey's terminology) that should be taken into account for understanding not just discourses but socio-environmental change itself.

According to Harvey, the six moments are, in no particular order: discourse, power, social relations, material practices, institutions and beliefs/values/desires. Discourses embody what is said about the material world, articulated worldviews of people, production and nature and also normative prescriptions of how to pursue change. The moment of beliefs/values/desires makes reference to the culturally embodied ways in which we make sense of the world, in which through our experiences and expectations, environmental knowledges and social values become articulated. Institutions reify specific structures and mechanisms with the legitimacy to manage collective affairs. Material practices include the whole spectrum of non-discursive ways (technological and spatial) in which women and men, workers and capitalists engage individually and collectively in changing the world. Social relations and power transverse the other moments in this web by establishing relationships of authority, dependency and subalternity and by delimiting the 'normal' from the 'abnormal'.

Harvey (1996: 80) argues that "[e]rrors arise when examination of one 'moment' is held sufficient to understand the totality of the social process... Internal relations are shaped through an activity of *translation* from one moment to another". Such translation is defined by Harvey as the metamorphosis of internalised forces, "rather than an exact replica or perfect mimesis" (ibid.: 80). Thus, although Harvey's six moments are likely to be present in one way

or another in regulation analysis, by exploring them in the form of a web knitted through a *dispositif* of neoliberal restructuring, the intention is to suspend any *a priori* causative link attribution or over-determining power of one moment over another. This is not to suggest that certain causal relations do not appear at points, crystallising change more than others, but to interrogate such crystallisations or permanences and the way in which they materialise hegemonic ways of seeking socio-environmental change over others, in order to unveil not only how control works but also how resistance works.

Chapter 3 Rise and change of the Argentine fisheries sector

Applying the analytical framework presented in Section 2.2, this chapter examines the main changes that took place in the business environment within which the national fisheries sector operated from its origins until the turn of the 20th century. As previously argued, the so-called 'business environment' can be reinterpreted in a wider sense, as the environmental governance framework that holds together different types of pressures: policy, economic, socio-cultural and technological (PEST). This framework helps to represent in a simplified but holistic manner, a complex body of values, norms and instruments that either increases or reduces the pressure exerted on firms to keep their actions within the carrying capacity of the natural system. Previous studies have typically focused on the fisheries sector by looking at its economic performance, characterising its cycles of expansion and crisis through its economic outputs. However, deep transformations cannot be grasped in abstraction from the historical conditions through which capitalists, workers and the state came to be, to relate to each other, to nature and to the social economy. Thus, the historical approach adopted here focuses on examining the continuities and discontinuities of the underlying principles and values governing the activity, aiming to explain the resilience of the power relations embodied in this governance framework to resist or prompt further change.

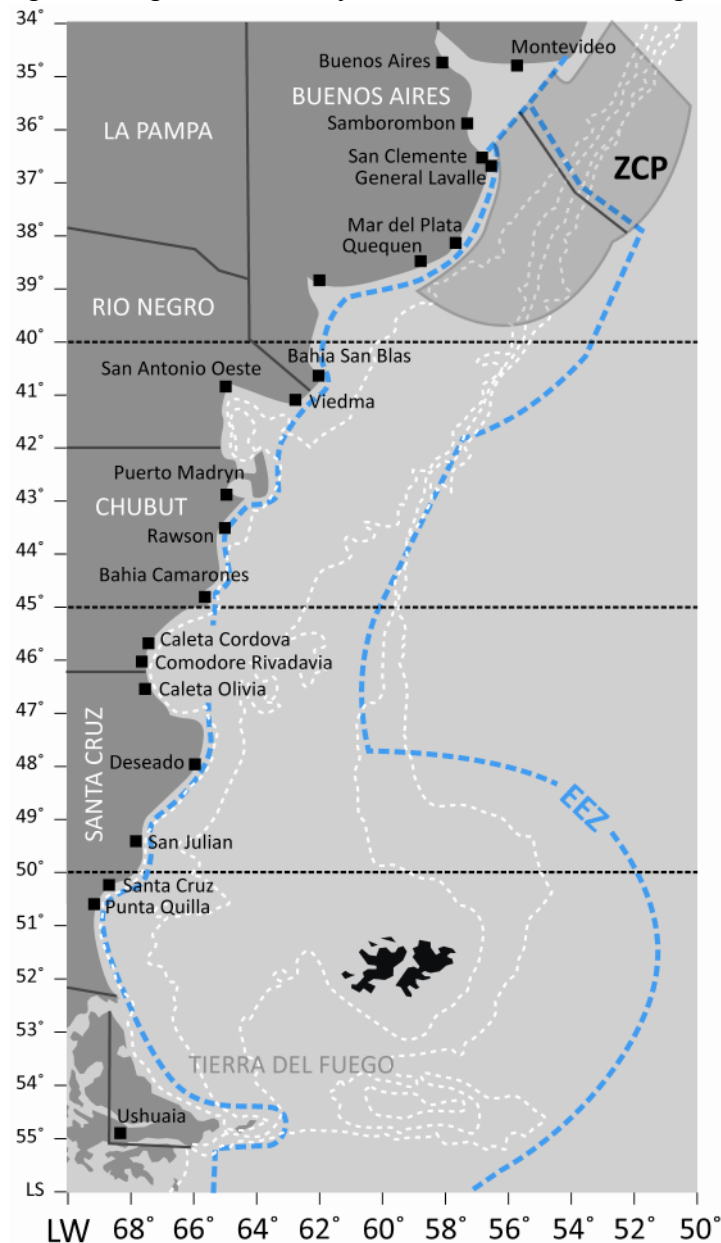
The first section of this chapter offers an overview of the main hegemonic accumulation and regulation systems throughout the history of Argentina. This is done with the aim of constructing a provisional periodisation of the main meta-narratives that characterise different phases in the development of the country as a 'modern' nation. Section 3.2 uses this periodisation as a backdrop to explore the rise and consolidation of the fisheries sector from its origins up to the mid-1970s. Section 3.3 examines the changes introduced during the neoliberal reform initiated in the mid-1970s and covers three sub-periods: the breakdown of ISI between 1976 and 1982; the return to democracy during the 'loss decade of the 1980s' and the deepening of the neoliberal turn, since the adoption of the NEM in 1991. Throughout this and the following chapters the first two phases of the restructuring process will be referred to as the 'lead-to-NEM period' (1976-1990), whilst the third phase and main focus of the analysis will be labelled as the 'NEM period' (1991-2002).

The last section identifies the main changes in the business environment regulating the activity prior and after the neoliberal turn. It then examines these changes in the light of a wider historical perspective, exploring how three main processes hypothesised as 'gears' and a

number of 'cogs' gave motion to the neoliberal *dispositif* machinery, which in turn transformed the meso-level business environment in which capitalists and workers operated within the industrial fisheries sector throughout the last quarter of the 20th century.

For ease of reference, Figure 3.1 shows the main Argentine fishing centres along the South Atlantic coast and the national fisheries jurisdictions. The latter includes the Argentine Platform or Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and the Argentine-Uruguayan Common Fisheries Zone.⁴⁵

Figure 3.1 Argentine fisheries jurisdictions and coastal fishing centres



Source: Elaborated on the basis of UNEP (2002: 108)

⁴⁵ Zona Común de Pesca Argentino-Uruguaya (ZCP).

3.1 Capitalist accumulation and regulation in Argentina: A historical overview

Broadly, three main periods can be identified in the development of Argentina as a 'modern' nation. The international crisis of the 1930s marks a key turning point between the hegemony of an agro-export system between 1880 and 1929 and a dramatic subsequent shift, first to a semi-closed ISI system (1945-1975) and later to a model of economic openness and the adjustment and restructuring of the national economy (1976-2002). While this periodisation accurately describes periods of continuity in the prevailing accumulation systems of the country, from the viewpoint of the accompanying regulation systems, it is useful to distinguish a number of political periods. Under the ISI model, the first period corresponds to the emergence of '*Justicialismo*', a popular social and political movement led by Juan Domingo Perón, who ruled the country through two consecutive periods between 1945 and 1955. The second ISI political regime, known as *desarrollismo* or 'developmentalism', extends from 1958 until 1966. The 1966-1975 decade marks the gradual erosion of the faith in the ISI regime and a period of political upheaval that culminated in 1976 with a *coup d'état* by a brutal military regime and also the beginning of the neoliberal turn.

Between that point and the turn of the 20th century, Argentina experienced a dramatic shift to a new accumulation system inspired by the so-called neoliberal Washington Consensus, labelled in the 1990s as the NEM. The NEM was both firmly imported and exported. On the importing side was an elite of US-trained Latin American economists – known as the 'Chicago Boys' – part of a global epistemic community indoctrinated in the Washington Consensus, who rose to positions of power in the national bureaucracy. In the early 1990s, Argentina became internationally known as the 'model pupil' of neoliberalism but, as pointed by Naomi Klein (2007: 166): "Argentina was not unique... By 1999 the Chicago School international alumni included more than twenty five government ministers and more than a dozen central bank presidents from Israel to Costa Rica... the Chicago Boys formed a kind of ideological pincer around the elected government, one group squeezing from within, another exerting its pressure from Washington". On the exporting side were the same international financial institutions that have spearheaded neoliberal reforms since the mid-1970s: the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), though at this stage the NEM was not just pursued through macro-economic policies but became increasingly engaged in prescribing institutional reforms and a radical downsizing of the state's regulatory capacity.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Argentina was during this period under an intensive adjustment regime, with a record of 30 adjustment loans from the IMF and World Bank between 1980 and 1999.

In political terms, three main phases can be differentiated within the neoliberal turn. The first two phases were instituted through two highly different political regimes. Between 1976 and 1982, the first refers to the process triggered by the military junta, self-labelled as a 'National Reorganisation Process', commonly referred to as 'El Proceso'. This was by no means an overstatement, backed up by an alliance with segments of transnational capital and highly concentrated national capital, the military enforced its brutal discipline over social, economic and political relations.⁴⁷ In economic terms, high domestic interest rates favoured a massive inflow of short-term external capital, feeding a massive process of financial speculation (Canitrot, 1994). Under these conditions, the viability of the national industrial sector became seriously undermined by three simultaneous processes: (1) low domestic and export demand of locally produced goods; (2) reduced industrial credit; and (3) high interest rates favouring short-term financial games over production (Kosacoff, 2000: 46). The impacts on the national industry were dramatic: the GDP manufacturing share declined from 29 to 22 percent between 1975 and 1981, industrial employment decreased by more than 36 percent and industrial production as a whole went down by 17 percent during the same period (Smith, 1992; Cooney, 2005).⁴⁸ Many national industrial firms closed down because of the high level of indebtedness acquired through the payment of heavy loan-servicing charges.

The second phase (1983-1990) comprises the so-called 'lost decade of the 1980s', a period of adjustment in democracy, led through two consecutive administrations by Raúl Alfonsín – the leader of the Radical party at the time. The task faced by the Alfonsín government was daunting on all fronts. In political terms, it involved dealing with the deep fracture left by the previous military government between an overwhelming popular rejection of the repressive regime implemented by the junta and the elite groups who supported this regime. In economic terms, Alfonsín inherited the worst crisis in the country's history. When he assumed office in 1983, gross domestic product (GDP) was lower than in 1974 and the public deficit and unemployment

⁴⁷ As a result of state-sponsored repression, the number of people who were killed or 'disappeared' amounted to 30,000, including trade unionists, students, journalists, Marxists and Peronist guerrilla members, general left-wing sympathisers and even civilians without any explicit political affiliation. The regime was fully backed by the US. In addition to the assistance provided by the US government to 'Operation Condor' – a campaign of political repression implemented in 1975 by the right-wing dictatorships of the Southern Cone of South America – immediately after the *coup d'état*, US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and high-ranking officials gave their full support to the Argentine junta and urged them to speed up the 'dirty war' before uncomfortable questions were raised. International support did not stop there; while the IMF would not agree to grant a loan to the president deposed by the junta to ease the economic crisis of the country at the beginning of 1976, only one week after the *coup d'état*, it granted over USD 100 million to the military regime. Five months after, this was followed by the largest IMF loan ever paid to a Latin American country until that point, worth USD 260 million (Schvarzer, 1986).

⁴⁸ In the last years of the military regime, this situation was partially reversed as new restrictions on imports were adopted and private business debts were nationalised, which partly explains the further increase of the massive foreign debt accumulated throughout this period.

rate were significantly higher than in the post-World War II period. Thus, political instability during his two consecutive administrations was not just restricted to the human rights battle but extended to other socio-economic struggles.⁴⁹ In this context, Alfonsín had to manoeuvre under an intensive adjustment process⁵⁰ through the demands of the labour unions, the military and industrialists, while addressing the expectations of a shrinking middle class, the backbone constituency of the Radical Party. His commitment to pursue a public investigation of the crimes perpetrated during the 'dirty war' was commendable and unprecedented in the Latin American context. He succeeded in routing democratic principles firmly within Argentine society, though this came at the cost of a series of *coup d'état* attempts to overthrow his government. His administration was however less successful in dealing with the socio-economic crisis. Throughout this decade, per capita income decreased dramatically and per capita investment levels fell by 70 percent. Between the end of World War II and 1974, inflation had averaged an annual 27 percent, but from 1975 until 1988 the annual average totalled 227 percent and up to 1991 there were two hyperinflationary surges (Acuña, 1994; López Murphy, 1996; Kydland, 2002).

The third phase within the neoliberal turn corresponds to the implantation and consolidation of the NEM. By the end of the 1980s, worsening economic conditions swung the balance of power back to the Peronist party. Under the fear of a new *coup d'état* attempt, in 1989 Alfonsín transferred the presidential office to Carlos Menem before finishing his turn. The newly elected president was about to surprise all sectors, following a populist low-substance campaign, he embraced the neoliberal model more decidedly than any of the preceding regimes, particularly with the adoption of the Convertibility Plan in 1991. Also known as the 'Cavallo Plan', after the economy minister Domingo Cavallo, the Convertibility Plan pegged the peso to the dollar; although initially devised as a temporary measure, its implementation continued until 2001.⁵¹ In addition to this stabilisation component, the cornerstones of the NEM were: the opening up of the economy (with special regimes for certain industries),⁵² flexibilisation of the labour market,

⁴⁹ On the one hand, these were led by the National Industrialists' Union (UIA), demanding more protection for the industrial sector. On the other hand, labour unions called for higher wages and better working conditions subjecting Alfonsín's administration to intense pressure; 13 national strikes paralysed the country between 1984 and 1989.

⁵⁰ This 'treatment' was prompted by three World Bank stabilisation/adjustment loans (1986, 1987, 1989) and five IMF loans (1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987).

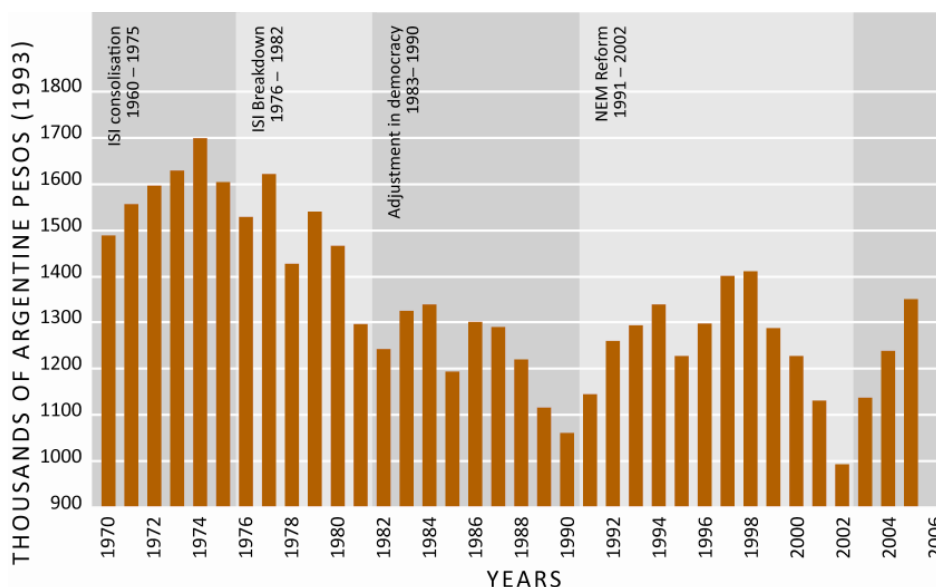
⁵¹ The Convertibility Plan fast stabilised the economy, bringing inflation down from over 1,300 percent in 1990 to less than 20 percent in 1992 and nearly zero during the rest of the 1990s. It also improved the labour market situation until 1993, when employment stagnated first and then fell sharply. As labour demand rose and inflation fell, real incomes improved initially but regressed again from 1994 onwards.

⁵² The Industrial Specialisation Regime introduced in 1992 a differential tariff on imports encouraging firms to increase their exports through specialisation.

the reform of the state, through decentralisation and privatisation policies, the reform of the tax regime and the social security system⁵³ and the restructuring of the external and domestic debt.

The macro-economic achievements of the Convertibility Plan were initially highly effective in deactivating any resistance to the neoliberal reforms. The country as a whole was still deeply traumatised by the hyperinflation, food shortage and supermarket looting episodes that had taken place at the end of Alfonsín's administration. In the early 1990s, stability and trade liberalisation turned Argentina into one of the principal recipients of capital inflows amongst developing countries (only surpassed by China and Mexico). Between 1991 and 1994, Argentina received nearly USD 40 billion in FDI; the relation between capital inflows and the domestic account deficit was favourable and allowed the accumulation of reserves, turning the Convertibility Plan into a long-term strategy.⁵⁴ However, behind the initial signs of economic recovery, there was a significant current-account accumulated deficit, amounting to USD 21.4 billion in 1991-1993 and to almost USD 85 billion in the 1992-2002 period (O'Connell, 2002). In addition, trade liberalisation affected the national industrial sector dramatically, boasting a second wave of deindustrialisation even more intense than the one experienced during the dictatorship. Between 1989 and 1998 the GDP share of manufacturing declined from 30.9 percent to 17.1 percent (Rapoport, 2000). Figure 3.2 shows the regressive evolution of industrial GDP per capita between 1970 and the turn of the 21st century.

Figure 3.2 Evolution of industrial GDP per capita, 1970-2005 (Argentine pesos)⁵⁵



Source: Elaborated on the basis of Kosacoff and Ramos (2006: 12).

⁵³ In order to reduce production costs, in 1994 the government implemented a discount system on social security payroll contributions by employers.

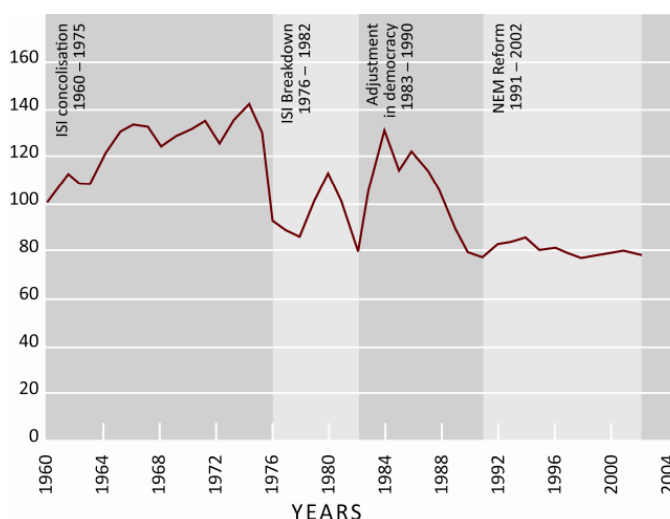
⁵⁴ For a detailed discussion see: Rapoport (2000); Damill et al (2004) and Lindenboim et al (2005).

⁵⁵ 1,000 Argentine peso roughly = USD 1,000.

As previously argued, the consolidation of the industrial sector promoted during the ISI period started to decline during the military dictatorship. The decline continued and deepened throughout the 1980s, hitting the rocks in 1991 and oscillating again throughout the rest of that decade. However, even in the context of increased macro-economic stability, industrial GDP per capita never regained the levels experienced during the ISI period. By 2004, national per capita industrial added value was 40 percent lower than 30 years before (Kosacoff and Ramos, 2006).

Beyond fluctuations in the overall weight of industrial production in economic growth, there were several significant transformations in the structure of the national industrial sector. Throughout the restructuring process, the manufacturing sector experienced a dramatic reduction of the number of plants.⁵⁶ Considering the longer historical ISI-NEM period, between 1974 and 2001, the manufacturing sector lost half of its jobs, which decreased from over 1.5 million in 1974 to about 763,000 jobs in 2001 (Cooney, 2005). This dramatic loss of manufacturing jobs, together with the impact of the reforms introduced during the 1990s to bring more ‘flexibility’ to the labour market, resulted in a significant deterioration of working conditions and the increasing informalisation of industrial labour. The latter translated into noticeable decreases in industrial wages throughout the whole restructuring process, with sustained low levels during Menem’s administration (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3 Industrial real wages 1960-2002 (1960=100)



Source: Based on Carrera (2002, in Cooney, 2005: 20)

The increased openness of the industrial sector to the foreign market also resulted in “a smaller, more concentrated industrial sector, characterised by high transnationalisation and an organisational model of production of goods that [was] very different to that of the period of the

⁵⁶ Between 1991 and 2001, the manufacturing employment shrunk almost 34 percent, experiencing a loss of over 369,000 jobs (Cooney, 2005).

semi-closed economy” (Kosacoff and Ramos, 2006: 13). While a few large firms benefited from the pro-market reforms of the 1990s, the weight of SMEs suffered a clear retraction. The performance of the industrial sector presented highly contrasting trends, not only in terms of firms’ size but also between industrial activities. For instance, metal mechanic production activities – which had been the most dynamic industrial branch during the ISI period – suffered a dramatic contraction, while the natural resource sector with low levels of added value expanded considerably, accounting for a sizeable proportion of export profits. However, even within the latter – which includes the fisheries sector – there was a high degree of internal heterogeneity, also characterised by the transnationalisation of firms, a higher concentration of production and commercialisation in the hands of a few, a significant reduction in the employment generated and the deteriorating quality of jobs retained or created, as well as an increasing orientation to exports at the expense of the domestic market.

Not only the physiognomy of the national industrial sector was dramatically changed throughout the restructuring process but the skills, knowledge, capacity and entrepreneurial base accumulated during four ISI decades became largely redundant. As argued by Kosacoff and Ramos (2006: 13): “[f]rom 1975 onward, the Argentine industrial sector lost its capacity for productive dynamism, for employment generation, and for leadership in the investment process that had characterised it in the past”. Furthermore, the regression of industrial production did not just have negative economic consequences, but extended to a deep reorganisation of the relationship between the state, capitalists and workers.

By the end of the 1990s, the crisis accumulated throughout the NEM became more overt, quickly spilling over from the economic to the social and political spheres. As the basic reassurance of macro-economic stability faded away, it became evident that the regressive socio-economic impacts of the neoliberal reform were structural rather than temporary. Additionally, Menem was increasingly criticised for taking Argentina’s democracy backwards; a claim substantiated on the basis of his presidential pardon to the 1976-1983 military junta; his autocratic style of governing, alienating the judiciary and legislative powers; and also by an escalating number of corruption charges against him, his closer collaborators and family members. While in 1992, *Times Magazine* celebrated Argentina’s recovery as ‘Menem’s economic miracle’, by the end of the 1990s, the international media was referring to ‘Menem’s mirage’.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ *The Economist* (15/07/1999: page unknown) reported at the time: “The main legacy of Mr Menem’s economic ‘miracle’ is a string of abandoned factories. Many companies have moved to Brazil, which has lower costs and a bigger market. Others were simply unready and unprotected when the Menem government threw open Argentina’s markets to foreign competition”. [online] [<http://www.economist.com/node/223058>] [Last accessed: 12/06/2010].

Between 1999 and 2002, Argentina experienced a corollary of economic and political crises that marked the demise of the neoliberal model. In December 1999, a multi-party coalition – the ‘Alliance for Work, Justice and Education’, popularly known as the Alianza – took over the leadership of the country with the support of over 48 percent of the electorate. Alianza’s president, Fernando de la Rúa initially tried to maintain the neoliberal orientation established by Menem and in early 2001 he brought Cavallo back as national economy minister. By the end of that year, Argentina had experienced a three-year period of devastating economic recession, reserves continued to decline and the foreign debt hit USD 141 billion, more than double the 1993 debt and an astronomic increase from the below USD 10 billion debt of 1975. In 2002, the spiralling crisis led Argentina to the largest debt default ever experienced by any country.

In December 2001, popular dissatisfaction with all political parties was expressed under the popular slogan: “throw them all out!”⁵⁸ De la Rúa was forced to leave the government and was briefly followed by a number of interim presidents. In January 2002, Peronist Eduardo Duhalde was appointed by the national congress to lead an interim government. Duhalde managed to manoeuvre through an extremely difficult crisis, bringing inflation and social unrest under relative control. In 2003 he called for national elections, which soon after brought Néstor Kirchner, the left-of-centre Peronist governor of Santa Cruz Province, to power. From that point onwards the NEM was explicitly abandoned, Argentina engaged in a process of debt restructuring and the economy of the country started slowly to bounce back, though, as discussed in Chapter 7 and the Conclusion, the regressive social, political and environmental NEM legacy may take much longer to reverse. The following two sections examine the correlation of the above periodisation with the main phases in the emergence and development of the fisheries sector.

3.2 The shift from an artisanal to a Fordist structure

Between 1880 and 1930, the development of the national economy encompassed two directions. On the one hand, Argentina became a dynamic exporter of grains and meat, a role moulded and hegemonised by British capital. On the other hand, the country started an incipient process of artisanal and industrial production geared towards the domestic market, particularly in the food and textile sectors. In this context, the fisheries sector was only able to benefit partially from the social, economic, cultural and demographic changes that characterised the agro-export period. It was not until the adoption of the ISI model that the

⁵⁸ In Spanish: *Que se vayan todos!*

sector was consolidated as an industrial activity, with its national home in Mar del Plata city. The analysis of the shift from its artisanal origin to its consolidation throughout the ISI period is important to contextualise the specific conditions under which the fisheries sector emerged, including: the hegemonic role of Mar del Plata; the family-base organisation that became the basis for the further development of the industry; and the context in which the first associations of workers and entrepreneurs materialised.

3.2.1 Born in the margins

The specific stimuli conditions supporting the emergence of the sector towards the turn of the 20th century included: a vast maritime platform with diverse and abundant fish species; a flow of European immigrants with skills in the trade, who were also fish consumers; and the rapid and sustained growth of the domestic market, with its epicentre in the city of Buenos Aires. However, Argentina's fisheries sector was, during the agro-export period, both a marginal and marginalised activity. Unlike Peru and Chile, indigenous fishing practices were not promoted either during or after colonial rule. Throughout the independence process, the leather, salted beef and ovine flock industries turned red meat into the main source of animal protein consumed in the country.⁵⁹

Within the agro-export regime the state was closely aligned with the interests of national landowners and foreign capital in the pursuit of an open economy. Thus, in the first decades of the republic, state policies supported the insertion and specialisation of Argentina in the world economy as a peripheral producer of primary goods (meat and grains) but were passive about the fisheries sector. Beyond the three-mile national jurisdiction over the Argentine Sea established by the country's 1883 Constitution and Civil Code, very few policy measures were enacted during this period to shape commercial fishing. The territorial organisation of the country and the development of infrastructure and transport clearly expressed the hegemonic role of agro-production and its concentration around Buenos Aires city and the main export harbours of Buenos Aires province. Thus, it is not surprising that the sector developed outside the will and support of the main economic groups, or that its development was promoted by Italian immigrants, who entered the country as economic and in some cases political refugees, gathering around economic activities outside the hegemonic agro-export model.

Throughout this period, Mar del Plata entered the map of the elite through a paradoxical relationship. On the one hand, it became an exclusive resort where the national oligarchy

⁵⁹ Although among an observant Catholic population, religious interdictions for meat consumption offered considerable scope for the domestic commercialisation of fish (Mateo, 2003).

recreated its European ethno-cultural project. On the other hand, it was also a niche for impoverished Italian fishermen, whose livelihoods depended of the dietary demands of the elite. The latent conflict between these two projects was to become evident throughout the successive displacements of the fishermen and their community further away from the chosen spaces of the elite, with aesthetic considerations ruling over local development.

The high concentration of Italian immigrants in the local fisheries sector was not incidental but a reflection of a process by which the newcomers crowded around particular localities and economic niches, to be followed over the years by their relatives and *paisanos*. Together with their skills and manpower, these immigrants also brought with them a rich ideological background. However, their past political affiliation with anarchism, socialism and communism was not immediately and fully transferred to their new home and working places. Although at the national level, the emergence of associative political life and workers' organisations was influenced by the political baggage of the newcomers, their ideologies had a higher impact when they became labourers under large landholdings and factories. By contrast, in the fisheries sector, Italian immigrants were at the same time bosses and workers, who operated under a shared-profits regime, bounded together by their origin and socio-cultural background and by their exclusion from the agro-export model. Fishermen (both labourers and boat owners) became united at the beginning of the 20th century, not to formalise their contractual relations but to give some political leverage to their claims. For instance, to confront the speculation of *porteño*⁶⁰ middlemen men, who controlled the commercialisation of their production, and to demand better freight conditions from the South Railway company and public land for their relocation, as fishing was displaced from its initial location.

Firth (1974), often regarded as the father of maritime anthropological studies, established a useful parallelism between fishermen and peasants, arguing that the development of productive forces in the fisheries sector through its gradual demand for more capital investments undermines in turn the peasantry nature of the activity, marginalising the 'farmers of the sea'. However, as argued by Mateo (2003) the similarities between farmers and artisanal fishermen are limited to a number of common characteristics. Both operate with limited capital, rely on the labour force supplied by the family unit, their accumulation capacity is almost null (beside those who are fortunate enough to own their production means and can replace them), and both might alternate periods of selling and buying labour force throughout their lifecycle. Fishermen by contrast are more dependent of the commercialisation process

⁶⁰ Spanish term generally used to refer to someone who is from or lives in a port city. Since the end of the 19th century the term has become applied to the port city of Buenos Aires.

and also often forced to engage their domestic units in multiple livelihoods and subsistence activities to avoid the market to satisfy for instance their food needs. The role played by the domestic unit as the main labour source supporting the artisanal development of the activity should not be mistaken as a pre-capitalist or pre-industrial strategy but as a functional strategy for capitalist accumulation, elements of which were to persist even in the later phases of technification of the sector.

Further specific characteristics of the fisheries sector in its artisanal phase, included: its reliance on a common pool resource, which freed fishermen from paying a rent to the state or private capitalist agents; the high level of ecological uncertainty in which fishermen operated and were required in the long-term to master an understanding of diverse species and seasonal and climatic changes; and tight family and community links through which 'trade secrets' were learned at an early age and transmitted orally across generations. These characteristics nurtured a system in which bosses and workers shared risks and profits and labour recruitment typically took place within the family unit and an extended family-community space.

For several decades the expansion of the activity, both in terms of harvesting and manufacturing, was constrained by economic policies that favoured fish imports. These measures, together with a series of technological factors, kept the marine fisheries sector as a relatively modest activity (in terms of its economic outputs), exclusively focused on the domestic market and predominantly localised in the harbour of Mar del Plata. Thus, the governance framework during the agro-export period can be characterised as being well within the limits of nature. While regulatory, economic and technological pressures during this period limited the full development of typical capitalistic relations, the sector was sheltered by a closed socio-cultural contract within the fishing community.

3.2.2 Harboured industrialisation

From the 1930s onwards, the agro-export model was gradually replaced by an incipient process of industrialisation consolidated in later decades under the ISI model. Through this process the state started to harbour a more complex structure of capitalist accumulation within the fisheries sector and fostered the emergence of a new tripartite organisation of 'cooperative regulation' with associative labour and capitalist organisations.

The economic measures adopted during the first years of the so-called 'Infamous Decade'⁶¹ were mostly reactive but a significant policy reorientation started in 1933 towards increased state intervention and the gradual closing down of the economy. This period was subsequently characterised by a tightened control of the financial sector, including the establishment of the National Central Bank in 1935, responsible for regulating the cyclical fluctuations of the monetary stock and for controlling the activities of private banks. Other innovations included the creation of the National Grains and Meat Board with the purpose of guaranteeing a minimum price for rural producers while controlling food prices. Although the policy shift was initially prompted by a particular economic juncture, over time it consolidated a new role for the state and a new business environment. The closedown of the economy and the scarcity of foreign currency stimulated an incipient ISI strategy, particularly in those sectors where domestic production did not require high technological capacities and investments.

In the fisheries sector, the main changes started to take place towards the 1940s and were accelerated by World War II. In 1939 European fish imports were discontinued and Europe became instead a potential market to be supplied by the national fisheries sector. In this context, the production of manufactured sea products found favourable external and domestic conditions for its expansion and the harbour of Mar del Plata became the national leading fishing centre. Despite the changing immigration policies adopted during this period, the local fisheries sector continued attracting an influx of Italian newcomers.⁶² Mar del Plata's position as a supplier of the domestic market was boosted by a series of infrastructural and transport developments funded by the public sector, which included the completion of the harbour infrastructure with a deep-sea dock and a mooring platform and the construction of a highway connecting the city with Buenos Aires in 1938.⁶³

By 1942 Mar del Plata's canned fish industry led the domestic market, thanks to the protectionist policies that displaced canned imports (Engelbeen, 1955). Traditional processing activities such as salted anchovy also gained a new impulse, whilst new activities emerged, such

⁶¹ Term commonly used in reference to the military regime that ruled the country throughout the 1930s.

⁶² According to the 1947 census, 40 percent of the local foreign population was from Italy, while the records of the local Italian Association reveal that between 1954 and 1960 almost 57 percent of its associates worked in the fisheries sector (Favero, 2003).

⁶³ Simultaneously, Mar del Plata, previously known as the '*porteños* country town' and the 'Argentine Biarritz' became the 'Pearl of the Atlantic' shifting away from its historical role as the resort of the national oligarchy. This shift was promoted by the local and provincial governments and under Perón's first and second presidencies, the city became the national centre of mass tourism and an icon of the new rights and status of the popular sectors (Pastoriza, 2003).

as the production of shark oil.⁶⁴ By 1954 the production of canned fish became the most important manufactured product until it was displaced in the 1960s by frozen fish. Although the fisheries sector remained a marginal activity within the national economy, it became highly significant for the locality of Mar del Plata and a number of other coastal settlements in the south of Buenos Aires Province.

Since its inception, the fisheries sector had developed on its own impulse and without much explicit support from the state, but the 1960s marked a significant change in the role of the state in relation to the development of the activity. First through a number of scattered regulations and later through more comprehensive although still fragmented policies, commercial fishing became organised under unrestricted fishing rights for the national fleet and a regulatory approach that combined direct and indirect controls, such as the specification of catch techniques, the prohibition of certain fishing methods and the restriction of access to certain zones. The emphasis of the first systematic scientific campaigns introduced in the 1960s, was on exploring the potential to diversify harvesting and manufacturing rather than on conservation and regulatory enforcement. Instead, self-regulation was based on local information and knowledge, and socio-cultural factors still played a predominant role in the governance framework ruling the activity. As recalled by one of the interviews:

At the time, the local fisheries sector acted as a close community, with strong links and communication among its members. Everybody knew who was who. Fishermen and manufacturing workers knew immediately if fishing efforts were too high, because of the size of fish was too small or harvesting trips took longer. These observations were enough to raise the alert among the community and to trigger the necessary changes and adjustments (Fieldwork interview with J.A.B., shipowner and leader of the Coastal Fishermen Association,⁶⁵ 28/08/2000).⁶⁶

Until the late 1950s, the Italian fishing community of Mar del Plata continued to harbour new immigrants. By then, coastal fishermen created a cooperative that allowed them to develop collective cold storage infrastructure and also organisational and administrative innovations that improved their control over the commercialisation process. Whilst the coastal fleet integrated harvesting, processing and commercialisation activities in the domestic market, some of the original families of Italian immigrants expanded their business through the incorporation of offshore vessels and the development of onshore factories dedicated to a

⁶⁴ The latter arose as a response to the European demand for products rich in vitamin A during the War and had a significant impact on the expansion and modernisation of the local fishing fleet. However, in the 1950s the local industrialisation of shark oil declined partly due to competition from other harbours on the southeast coast of Buenos Aires province but mainly because of the introduction and commercialisation of synthetic vitamin A by the Swiss firm Roche (Malaret, 1968).

⁶⁵ Asociación de Pesca Costera.

⁶⁶ All fieldwork interviews were conducted in Spanish in Mar del Plata city and translated by the author.

variety of manufactured products commercialised domestically and to a lesser extent in the external market. This dual orientation sheltered the local fishing industry from market shocks and fluctuations in both the international and domestic markets and also led to a significant process of capitalisation. It also marked the beginning of a different organisational structure, in which, on the one hand, the coastal fleet supplied fresh fish to the domestic market and raw materials to the canning industry and, on the other hand, the offshore fleet supplied the hake industry focused on exports.

In the 1960s, the sector underwent an incipient process of technological modernisation, whereas the manufacturing sub-sector rapidly expanded and diversified under the shelter of protectionist national policies (Alomar, 1973). The weight of the hake (or *merlucesa*) industry gradually displaced that of the coastal fleet-canning circuit. Through this process, harvesting and processing activities became more integrated, with many families in the trade acquiring their own fleet and manufacturing processes becoming organised under hybrid forms of Fordism. As discussed in Chapter 1, Fordism, as an ideal type, implies the organisation of the production process in large-scale, highly routinised and specialised factories, under a model of mass production. These principles do not fully represent the structure of the sector during the ISI period. Whilst both the harvesting and processing sub-sectors became modernised and production expanded to meet the domestic and external demands of a larger market, firms were predominantly SMEs in which the organisation of work became more systematised along the production chain but not fully automatised. However the prevailing type of labour-capitalist relationship within this period was close to the Fordist model through the generalisation of waged employment. Workers became 'subjects of rights', with salaries defined through collective negotiation and contracts protected for an unlimited period and a guaranteed minimum wage, while being protected by the incremental growth of indirect salaries. Together with these conditions, trade unions became part of a state-centred matrix (Doyón, 1984), which partly survived the first neoliberalising changes introduced during the military regime.

The articulation of harvesting, manufacturing and commercialisation activities at the local level did not undermine the consolidation of the self-regulatory system that characterised the sector. As the coastal and offshore fleets did not compete over the same species or markets, the local fisheries sector was expanded, diversified and modernised, but still without showing signs of overcapitalisation and overexploitation of the main commercial species. Thus, it is not surprising that formal regulatory mechanisms were not carefully developed during this period. The state played a rather different role, consolidating national and provincial jurisdictions and sovereignty over Argentine waters whilst actively promoting the industrialisation of the

national fisheries sector through subsidies and special benefits. These measures focused both on the promotion of harvesting and manufacturing activities and followed the spirit of the ISI model by protecting national firms to operate both in the domestic and external markets. Argentina's fisheries sector was not isolated from the international market but rather articulated to it under a sheltered regime. At the time and even after the adoption of the EEZ and the Rio de la Plata Treaty, fishing by foreign vessels was a frequent problem. This led to the introduction of a limited number of cash-for-fish licenses, granted to foreign fleets on an experimental basis, for short-term periods and allowing harvesting exclusively in areas where the national fleet did not operate.

Probably one of the most important characteristics of the ISI period relates to the political organisation and regulation of the relationship between labour and capital in which the state played a pivotal role. One of the main legacies of Perón's first and second presidencies was the development of a very particular ideological and material insertion of Argentine workers in the development process. As highlighted by Rainis (1995: 20), "[w]hat Perón offered was not the individual consciousness of the unreconstructed liberal, nor the class consciousness that he identified with foreign and alien alternatives, but a unified, communitarian, social consciousness that would assuage class warfare, avoid the contamination of international socialism, and organize society to transcend the old liberal conceptions of the state".

In short, Perón rendered the class struggle irrelevant but at the same time acknowledged the need to regulate the excesses and injustices of capitalism by promoting the organisation of workers under the guidance of the state and by establishing an "unbreakable bond on common interests and sentiments" (ibid.: 20) between the working class and the middle class. The high social mobility that characterised Argentine society for many decades played a key role in building up and sustaining this bond. In this context, workers could (and effectively did) become property owners and aspire to see their children educated at the secondary and tertiary levels. This led to a more complex, fluid and even contradictory position of workers than the one encapsulated in the Marxist concept of class consciousness, which could be defined instead by the idea of 'class collaboration' (or collaboration between capital and labour) under the guidance of the state. It is within this context that workers' organisations proliferated throughout this period, representing every single activity within the fisheries sector from fishing to manufacturing. These organisations were soon consolidated as officially recognised trade unions affiliated to the national confederation of workers. Trade unions operated as 'interested working class representatives', in other words, rather than confronting capitalism, they engaged with it but focused on the processes that "might alter and modify the

nature of that same capitalism” (ibid.: 27). This ideological position resonated with the Italian community of immigrants who, despite having been previously exposed to alternative left ideologies, were not concerned with overthrowing or subverting existing structures but with becoming part of them (Thompson, 1984).

Under Perón’s first and second presidency, trade unions became an effective vehicle for collective bargaining and delivered tangible results. As Mar del Plata became the national centre of mass tourism, it also became a symbol of the ascending status of the working class, reinforcing popular belief in Perón propositions. Thus, it is not surprising that local trade unions in the fisheries sector were hegemonically run by Peronist leaders beyond the turn of the 21st century. Whilst in the artisanal coastal fisheries sub-sector, share-profit agreements continued to be the norm, working conditions in the industry as a whole were significantly improved, as labourers became wage-earners, sheltered by a large number of rights and benefits. As for the entrepreneurs, it was not until the neoliberal restructuring process that their organisations started to proliferate, crystallising the complex structure of the sector. However, in the tripartite state-capital-workers structure that characterised the ISI period, both entrepreneurs and trade unions had a seat. The balance of this alliance was not unproblematic but was effectively held together by the state, which on the one hand established and enforced an inclusive regime of profits distribution, but on the other hand actively supported the development of national capitalism through subsidies and protectionist measures.

In summary, during the ISI period, the governance framework of the fisheries sector experienced a significant set of changes that led its industrialisation, while reaffirming Mar del Plata’s role as its epicentre. In a context still characterised by the under-exploitation of the fisheries stock, a new tripartite corporate model was consolidated and led by the three main principles introduced by the Peronist doctrine: economic independence, political sovereignty and social justice. These principles in turn permeated the PEST pressures governing the fisheries sector during this period. Although environmental sustainability did not feature as an explicit concern, the sector operated within a relatively closed business environment – at least closed to large foreign and national capitalists’ groups – which somehow successfully kept its expansion within the ‘limits of nature’. As the fisheries sector remained highly localised, local and national interests were almost the same, whilst all PEST factors were organised to restrict the incidence of international stakeholders. Of course, given its marginal role as a fish supplier in the international context, the Argentine fisheries sector was subjected to shocks rooted in the international sphere, but its dual orientation towards the domestic and export markets and

the shelter of the state under the ISI regime made the sector less vulnerable to changes in the international context.

3.3 The neoliberal restructuring process

Throughout the neoliberal turn, the restructuring of the fisheries sector took place in three phases. The first began in 1976 and was characterised by a dualistic approach. While the military junta reaffirmed national industrial interests and rights over the Argentine Sea, it also opened it up to foreign fleets and investments, promoting increased fishing efforts in the national EEZ. The second phase started in 1982 with the British victory over the Malvinas war and ran until 1990. As previously discussed, throughout the 1980s, Alfonsín faced overwhelming economic constraints. Consequently, economic stabilisation, balance of payment controls, debt rescheduling and the promotion of exports were the main goals leading the structural adjustment implemented throughout that decade. But the macro-economic policies adopted during this period failed one after another and the country experienced a spiralling process of economic instability and regressive socio-economic distribution. In the fisheries sector, there was some degree of continuity in the 1980s with the policy approach adopted during El Proceso, though the political motivations behind the policies adopted were different. The third phase corresponds to the structural changes initiated under the Menem administration and pursued since the 1991 Convertibility Plan. This phase was characterised by an aggressive attempt to insert Argentina's exports into a more competitive international economy, the liberalisation of business transactions, and the restructuring of labour relations including the 'flexibilisation' of working terms and conditions. During this period, the opening up of the economy together with a series of changes in the regulations governing the fisheries sector led to a significant transformation of its business environment, which brought a new cadre of actors and power relations.

3.3.1 The breakdown of ISI (1976-1982)

As previously discussed, El Proceso marks one of the most painful phases in the history of Argentina, characterised by brutal repression, the suspension of civilian rights, high inflation and the exponential growth of the external debt. In the fisheries sector, the policies adopted during this period gradually eroded the business environment inherited from the ISI model.

Paradoxically, the sector acquired a new status within the state's bureaucracy with the creation of the Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Food (SAGPyA),⁶⁷ under which a separate under-secretariat dealt with fisheries (SSP).⁶⁸ In the course of 1976, fisheries administration became more closely aligned with economic policies and this under-secretariat was replaced by the Secretariat of Maritime Interests⁶⁹ within the Ministry of Economics (Decree 520/76), though the stated aim of this new organisation was 'to reassert the national sovereignty over the Argentine Sea'. One year later, the government established in Mar del Plata the National Institute for Fisheries Research and Development (INIDEP)⁷⁰, based on the local Institute of Marine Biology created in the 1960s. These institutions became the policy and scientific bodies in charge of regulating and monitoring the national fisheries sector. However, the policies adopted throughout the period were characterised by a schizophrenic approach, led by the often contradictory aims of geopolitical reaffirmation and the opening up of the sector to foreign capital.

Changes in the national fisheries sector during this period were also influenced by the international consolidation of newly established EEZs by other littoral countries, which displaced foreign long-distance factory fleets from their own waters. As a result, the capacity of these fleets became underutilised and the international market undersupplied.⁷¹ The fishing countries of the north then adopted a twofold strategy. On the one hand, they reduced their fleets by dismantling the oldest vessels and selling surplus fishing units. On the other hand, they promoted the formation of joint ventures with companies in the global south to gain access to their patrimonial waters. Seizing this opportunity, a series of new policies and regulations was adopted by the Argentine dictatorship, facilitating the emergence of joint firms of foreign and national capital through specific loans and subsidies. This took place within a broader set of policies aimed at attracting foreign investments.⁷²

With the aim of decentralising fishing from Mar del Plata down to the southern coast of Patagonia,⁷³ special benefits were granted to fishing exports originating from this region. In practice, this became an opportunity for foreign companies to form joint ventures with the Argentine fleet, gaining access to the, until then, 'under-exploited' fishing grounds of the

⁶⁷ Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería, Pesca y Alimentos de la Nación.

⁶⁸ Sub-Secretaría de Pesca.

⁶⁹ Secretaría de Asuntos Marítimos.

⁷⁰ Instituto Nacional de Investigación y Desarrollo Pesquero, created by Law 21.673/77.

⁷¹ In 1976/77 the global volume of catches by the OECD fleets fell by more than 100,000 tonnes of gross volume in comparison to previous years (FAO, 1992).

⁷² Such as Decree 2529/77, Law 21,608 on Industrial Promotion and Law 21,382 on Foreign Investments.

⁷³ The region includes three continental coastal provinces south of Colorado River: Rio Negro, Chubut and Santa Cruz and the island of Tierra del Fuego.

national shelf. Law 21,514 opened to international bidding the exploitation of the fishing grounds south of the 41° parallel on an experimental basis, and the National Investment Bank introduced loans, reimbursements and guarantees for new investments, as well as the renegotiation of existing debts for Argentine firms joining foreign capital. In 1976 the first freezer and factory vessels were incorporated to the national-flagged fleet operating in Patagonia. At this point, the structure of the sector started to change, particularly in the harvesting sector. The centre of gravity of the fleet began to shift towards the south of the country, through the emergence of the first joint ventures and foreign companies operating in the region. The total investments benefiting from these promotional measures between 1976 and 1979 amounted USD 300 million (Bertolotti et al., 2001). A technician specialised in fisheries management who has worked in the local fishing industry of Mar del Plata since 1978 recalls the policy changes introduced during this period as follows:

At the beginning of the military dictatorship, the naval branch of the Armed Forces argued that the best way to defend the national sovereignty over the Argentine Sea was by expanding the national-flagged fleet to the whole EEZ. The National Bank offered new loans to support this objective, most of which were not recuperated by the national treasury but allowed the capitalisation of a limited number of firms. This resulted in a significant concentration of capital, which gradually removed the control of the industry away from the hands of SMEs. Overall there was a closed link between the process of private capitalisation financed by the state and the concentration of the activity in the hands of a few dominant firms (Fieldwork interview with E.C., 19/08/2000).

Another interviewee, whose family enterprise had been founded in 1947 confirms the previous statement and names several cases in which those in charge of executing the above policies were also closely connected to the firms receiving subsidies and loans:

The projects that allowed the capitalisation and concentration of the fisheries sector at the time were created and implemented by the same people in the government who profited from them, through their 'close' relation with the recipient firms. The development of the fisheries sector was often determined by political 'favours' between the military, some politicians and national/transnational economic agglomerates (Fieldwork interview with D.J.C., Shipowner, 10/08/2000).

To a large extent, the above process resembles the relation between the state and capital that characterised the agro-export period. That is to say that the abandonment of the ISI model was implemented by the military regime but firmly supported by an elite of national and transnational economic agglomerates that reaped significant profits from the policies adopted. In this context, organised labour was systematically and brutally expelled from the decision-making sphere. Soon after the 1976 *coup d'état*, trade union activities were banned and their funds and assets frozen. The anti-labour agenda of the junta was far reaching in dismantling previous labour conventions. As highlighted by Rainis (1995: 37), "[t]he right to strike was

abrogated, public employees could be fired without due process, and collective bargaining negotiations would no longer cover wages and salaries'. In addition, the military eradicated employers' contributions to workers' salaries earmarked for retirement and housing benefits.

The pendulum that during previous years had placed the state in close alliance with workers and their trade unions shifted during the dictatorship towards the economic establishment, while the Ministry of Labour was reduced to an institution of social control. In the fisheries sector, the impact of this shift was long lasting and resulted in the effective disarticulation of the sector's trade unions and the political deactivation of workers. After the return to democracy, trade unions fought unsuccessfully for the partial restitution of the 1975 labour conventions but were unable to confront the more structural changes brought about by the NEM, a process further discussed in Chapter 7.

By the end of the 1970s, the strategy adopted to promote the development of the fisheries sector relied primarily on the incorporation of more and 'better' vessels to increase catches. As a result, the fishing capacity of the fleet operating in Argentine waters grew dramatically. Until that point, the national fleet operated with unrestricted fishing licenses, while licenses to foreign companies had only been granted in the 1960s on an experimental basis. By contrast, this mechanism became an important component of the fisheries policies adopted throughout the neoliberal turn, leading to significant changes in the technology and size of the fleets operating in Argentine waters.⁷⁴ Systematic scientific research on the south of the Argentine shelf started in 1978 in correspondence with the increasing presence of fleets from the former Soviet Union, Poland and Japan operating in that zone and was followed by a number of scientific accords that facilitated the operation of more scientific research vessels in the following decade.⁷⁵

The newly expanded fleet faced a serious crisis in 1980 and 1981, due partly to the overvaluation of the national currency. Additionally, national firms were hit by a dramatic internal recession, with local production falling and imports of canned fish rising due to the removal of national protection tariffs that enhanced the competitiveness of foreign products. In this context many SMEs went into bankruptcy and most firms contracted serious debts. In

⁷⁴ In the absence of a general law, Decree 1,533/82 regulated the allocation of fishing licenses to foreign fleets. It was modified four years later under Alfonsín's administration by Decree 945/86, which introduced for the first time the concept of 'restricted' licenses for certain species.

⁷⁵ These included accords signed with Germany in 1978, with Japan (1978, 1979 and 1989) and the former Soviet Union (1988, 1992) among others.

1981, the National Concentration Market (MCN)⁷⁶ was created to regulate food prices, eliminate monopolies and guarantee equal opportunities among trading parties. However, this mechanism alone had little impact in counteracting the dominant bargaining power of foreign investors. The crisis experienced by the national fisheries sector in the early 1980s differed from previous crises, in the sense that it was not fully prompted by changes in the international market or by the poor macro-economic performance of the country, but by the abrupt abandonment of the ISI model and opening up of the system to foreign capital. National firms suddenly found themselves exposed to a highly competitive environment, characterised by the presence of foreign fleets and investments. But whilst national protectionist measures were removed, foreign parties continued to be subsidised both by the Government of Argentina (GoA) and their own governments, a trend that deepened in the following decade.

In order to appreciate the growing interlinkages between north and south fisheries throughout the neoliberal restructuring process, it is worthwhile to examine briefly the transformation undergone by the Spanish fisheries sector during this period. Prior to 1973-1976, Spain was not yet part of the EU and most countries in the global south had not yet claimed sovereignty over their respective EEZs. Back in 1961, under Franco's rule, the Spanish government supported the renewal of its fleet, earmarking the equivalent of €1,350 million in soft loans for the construction of large vessels between 1961 and 1977. The new fleet operated initially in the Atlantic hake fisheries of southern Africa and in just a few years was responsible for a tenfold growth of hake landings in that fishing zone.

However, as coastal countries in the region claimed their EEZ sovereignty, hake catches by the Spanish fleet became restricted and soon fell dramatically. Between 1977 and 1986 the Spanish government adopted new mechanisms to facilitate the shift of its fleet from the North to the South Atlantic, among them, the promotion of 'mixed societies', which in Argentina enjoyed a free imports regime. Between 1977 and 1986, Spain transferred a total of 231 vessels to third countries predominantly in Africa and Latin America, out of which ten long-distance units joined the Argentine flagged fleet (Godelman, 2003). When Spain joined the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1986, this and new mechanisms adopted in the following decade facilitated a significant transference of fishing capacity from Spain and other European countries to the Argentine Sea, a trend examined in Chapter 4.

⁷⁶ Mercado de Concentración Nacional.

3.3.2 The return to democracy (1983-1990)

The 1982 British-Argentinean war over the Malvinas Islands started a new phase in the evolution of the fisheries sector and more widely in the political life of the country. After Argentina's defeat, the details of the war became generally known, triggering massive popular demonstrations against the military regime. These precipitated the return to democracy in 1983, with the election of president Alfonsín, who, as previously highlighted, led an important re-democratisation process but under significant macro and microeconomic constraints.

The two main pillars of the fisheries policies adopted during the military regime were not changed but rather ratified and expanded throughout Alfonsín's administration. The first pillar consisted on the opening up of fishing rights to third countries associated with national firms. The second pillar promoted the development of the fisheries sector in the Patagonian region. The longstanding dispute over the Malvinas Islands had been partly a conflict over the control of the fishing zone adjacent to the islands. Immediately after the war, the British government banned the Argentine fleet from operating in that zone and granted fishing rights to foreign fleets, whilst the Argentine government issued fishing licenses to third countries over the same fishing grounds.⁷⁷ In the meantime several foreign fleets started to operate beyond the 201 miles, particularly of Spanish, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese and Polish origin. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO, 2000) estimates that the catches in the Southwest Atlantic in 1986 declared by foreign vessels (excluding those by the Argentine, Brazilian and Uruguayan fleets) reached 524,565 thousands tonnes, amply surpassing total Argentine catches.

In 1983, the Secretary of Maritime Interests was dissolved and the Under-Secretariat of Fisheries (SSP)⁷⁸ was reinstated under SAGPyA, a change resisted by many. According to an interviewee specialised in fisheries law, this shift further marginalised fisheries administration, as "the fisheries sector became administered by politicians and bureaucrats who were more concern with droughts than tides. In Argentina, livestock first and agriculture in second place monopolised the focus of successive national administrations; creating a false opposition between the sea and the countryside" (Fieldwork interview with C.L., 14/08/2000). Furthermore, SSP regarded the fisheries sector exclusively in relation to harvesting, ignoring its links with urban-based manufacturing. A few years later, the GoA adopted several economic measures that deepened the primary-industrial dichotomy. The fisheries sector continued to be

⁷⁷ About 204 new fishing licenses were granted in 1987 alone by the British government, followed by 145 licenses in 1988, of which 74 licenses were granted to Spain, 33 to Poland, 16 to the UK, 10 to Japan and 9 to Korea, Greece, Portugal and Norway (Lerena, 1989).

⁷⁸ Sub-Secretaría de Pesca.

treated as a primary sector, further marginalising the role of the fishing industry. Beyond the aforementioned changes, there was a high degree of continuity between the policies adopted prior and after the Malvinas war:

[Prior to the war], the national government sought the introduction of fishing quotas to third countries as a means to reinforce its sovereignty claim over the adjacent fishing zone to the islands. Subsequently, several agreements with the European Economic Community (EEC) and with Japan were signed, which allowed the introduction of factory and freezer vessels. These agreements promoted the emergence of joint ventures, through which national firms gave the right to foreign vessels to operate under the national flag. The introduction of larger and technologically more sophisticated vessels than those operated by the national fleet brought a significant growth of fishing effort in Argentine waters and had a negative impact on the main commercial species. This was repeatedly reported by INIDEP but its warnings were ignored by the government. [After the war], the government continued essentially with the same policy, further opening up the Argentine Sea to foreign fleets. In this context, the agreements with the Soviet Union and Bulgaria were advocated not only as economic instruments but as instruments of foreign policy (Fieldwork interview with E.G., professional sailor and leader of SICONARA⁷⁹, 16/08/2000).

The aforementioned agreements, signed in 1986, deserve particular attention. At the time and despite the opposition of various trade unions and entrepreneurial organisations representing the national fisheries sector both in Mar del Plata and in the ports of Patagonia, SSP argued that these bilateral accords would:

... mark the beginning of the effective reactivation of the sector... opening the path towards international cooperation in the conservation and adequate regulation of the resources of the Southwest Atlantic, giving adequate consideration to the sovereign Argentinean rights, and establishing adequate mechanisms to open up the [fisheries] market in benefit of the Argentinean fishing production, the development of national ports and the generation of new and promising sources of employment for the national labour force (SSP Report No 278, 5/9/1986: 24).⁸⁰

According to FAO (2000), the total catches declared in 1986 by the Soviet Union and Bulgaria reached 98,058 tonnes in the Southwest Atlantic and 397,594 tonnes in the Antarctic Atlantic. In return, the GoA received fees amounting to about 3 percent of the value of the total catches; an amount considerably lower than that established at the time by similar agreements all over the world (Lerena, 1989, 2000). Given that all processing was performed onboard, no employment was generated onshore, while less than 10 percent of the personnel employed by the foreign vessels were Argentinean.

The promotion of mixed-capital joint ventures continued throughout this period, whilst the fishing industry of Mar del Plata entered a period of crisis due to increasing competition. In

⁷⁹ Sindicato de Conductores Navales de la República Argentina.

⁸⁰ Original in Spanish. Author's translation.

addition to hake, squid and prawn became the main commercial species and towards the end of the 1980s, total annual catches reached 500,000 tonnes, while fish exports rose to USD 300 million per year. As previously discussed, under the military regime, the intensification of fishing under the 41° parallel was framed as a geopolitical strategy to reclaim national sovereignty over the Argentine Sea. By contrast, during Alfonsín's government, the development of Patagonia was inspired by the ambitious political foundation of the 'Second Republic', a project that encapsulated a break with the power architecture of the 'traditional' Argentina shaped by the 1853 Constitution.⁸¹ The emphasis on attracting foreign investment was then complemented through new incentives promoting the development of the fisheries sector in Patagonia, through a regime of special reimbursements for exports originating in the harbours south of the Colorado River.⁸²

3.3.3 Fisheries development under the NEM (1991-1999)

By 1991, the ISI model had been completely abandoned and the national economy was characterised by three structural problems: macro-economic instability, a high inflationary process and dramatic fiscal and debt crises. The reforms adopted included a fourfold policy package: a stabilisation programme, trade liberalisation, state reform and privatisation of public utilities and the deregulation of market and economic activities. The new set of rules drastically changed the regulation framework inherited from the ISI period. Within the fisheries sector, the government took an active interest in expanding the productivity of the activity by deregulating the sector; eliminating import duties for new and used vessels; reducing export costs; and exploring the viability of new fisheries exploitation programmes.

At the national level, the shift away from the ISI model was characterised after 1976 by a significant transference of income from SMEs to large economic groups and by the exponential growth of the external debt. Both conditions created a favourable environment for the subsequent privatisation of state assets and, more generally, legitimised the need to reform the state's role in regulating capitalist accumulation (Aspiazu, 2002). Although Alfonsín had tried to pursue some of these reforms during the 1980s, he was systematically confronted with trade unions and Peronist opposition at congress. Ironically, these changes mainly took off under Menem's first administration. In early 1989 he introduced two pieces of legislation that paved the road for an ambitious programme: State Reform Law 23,696 and Economic Emergency Law 23,697. These two laws allowed the decentralisation of national bodies and the

⁸¹ This project included a frustrated attempt to transfer the national capital from Buenos Aires city to the south of the country, an attempt that symbolised the foundation of a new truly federal republic away from the *de facto* political and economic weight of Buenos Aires in governing the country.

⁸² Law 23,018/1983.

partial or total privatisation of public assets, including the harbours infrastructure and assets administered by the Port Authority (AGP).⁸³ These changes were justified as ‘indispensable’ to confront “the exaggerated demands from trade unions, the bureaucratic bottlenecks resulting from the various jurisdictions operating in harbour areas, the ruinous state of harbour infrastructure and its inadequacy to perform modern routines... and the high tariffs applied for unloading and storage as a result of corporative regulations” (Cicalese, 1997: 6).⁸⁴

The deregulation programme included the suspension of most of the rights and benefits conquered by workers throughout the ISI period. The ‘Chicago Boys’ argued that rising unemployment was caused by high labour costs and the ‘rigidity’ of national labour legislation. Consequently, new policies focused on facilitating labour flexibilisation and the reduction of employers’ contributions to the social security system. In 1991, Employment Law No. 24,467 introduced a series of measures that liberalised the labour market. Further resolutions set up the rules for short-term contracts, reduced severance payments and, in general terms, lifted the so-called ‘barriers’ to hire and fire labour and limited the weight of collective labour agreements. Nationwide, it is estimated that over 1 million workers employed in SMEs were affected by the flexibilisation programme (Roggi, 2001). The deregulation of labour contracts also had a dramatic impact on the fisheries sector as it facilitated the displacement of a large number of workers from waged employment to informal and precarious contracts under the so-called ‘cooperatives of services’, a process to which I return in Chapter 5.

In overall terms, the fisheries sector was transformed during this period through a large number of executive power (EP) decrees disarticulated from the existing fisheries policy framework and geared towards the principle of opening up the sector – harvesting in particular – to foreign capital. Most of these decrees were born out of the application of neoliberal orthodox principles, but also became profitable avenues for corrupted practices within the government, often in alliance with entrepreneurs and trade union leaders. An example, among many others, is Decree 1,772/91, which allowed Argentine shipowners to flag out their vessels for a period of two years. About 120 national vessels transferred their registration to operate under foreign flags benefiting from fiscal exceptions. This temporary measure was

⁸³ Administración General de Puertos. Emergency Decrees 2,284/91 and 817/92 deregulated the operation of national harbours. The second decree suspended all labour agreements in force and liquidated AGP. It also transferred the administration, management and exploitation of most national harbours to the provincial governments, subsequently mandated to organise private concessions. Only the six larger harbours in the country (Buenos Aires, Quequén, Rosario, Bahía Blanca, Santa Fé and Ushuaia), remained under the national jurisdiction and administered by autonomous parastatal bodies.

⁸⁴ Original in Spanish. Author’s translation.

extended until 2004 through various additional EP decrees and resolutions.⁸⁵ Between 1991 and 2004, the country lost millions due to the sea freight charges evaded through this mechanism. In addition, the crew of these vessels overnight became subject to foreign labour laws, as established by the Sea-Flag Law.

Regarding the regulation of fisheries trade and exports, the reimbursement system introduced in 1983 privileging exports originated in the Patagonian Region, was extended in 1995 until 1999 (Law 24,490). From that point, reimbursements were to be annually reduced by 1 percent until their total extinction. However in 1996, the minister of economics ordered the suspension of all reimbursements to Patagonian fishing harbours, arguing that the Patagonian region extended only to the coast and therefore marine seafood products could not be considered regional products. Furthermore, reimbursements were defined as 'unhealthy subsidies', which distorted free-market competition and contradicted neoliberal orthodoxy. Only five years later, the congress enacted a new piece of legislation asserting that all products south of the Colorado River were indeed regional products, regardless of whether they originated in the sea or the mainland.

Foreign investments were openly promoted under Law 21.382 (introduced in 1976), expanded by Decree 1853/93. Within this framework, the rights and tax regime applied to foreign and national investors were equalised, allowing the former to repatriate capital and utilities; to establish subsidiary branches; and to create joint ventures with either Argentine or foreign firms (Madaria, 1999). The liberalisation of foreign investments brought significant changes to the fisheries sector. The main exponent was an accord signed with the European Union (EU) to promote joint ventures, which, in just a few years, led to a significant overcapitalisation of the national-flagged fleet and the subsequent depletion of the main commercial species, an outcome analysed in detail in Chapter 4.

In 1990, and prior to this agreement, the EEC adopted the so-called 'first generation' agreements to promote joint ventures between European ship-owners and partners from other countries.⁸⁶ Following warnings by INIDEP concerning the impact of rapidly expanding fishing of the main commercial species, the issuing of new licenses for squid and hake fisheries had been closed since 1987 and 1989 respectively. Nevertheless, Menem's administration agreed in 1990

⁸⁵ Decree 2,359/91, Decree 817/92, Resolution 59/93, Decree 2,094/93, Decree 1,255/98, Resolution 18/99 and Decree 1,010/2004.

⁸⁶ Regulation No 3,944/90, European Council, 20 December 1990. Within the EEC structural policy, the objective of these agreements was to facilitate the transference of European fishing capacity to new fishing grounds in order "to promote the balanced exploitation of the internal (fishing) resources in waters of the Community" and "to expand the EEC sources of fishing products supply".

to issue new 'fishing facilities' to European joint ventures. Like in many other sectors, the promotion of international trading overruled other government resolutions. Whilst the first-generation agreements were a short-term mechanism to ensure access rights in exchange for financial compensation, the second-generation agreements introduced a few years later established long-term scientific and economic cooperation to allow the conformation of permanent joint ventures, which could supersede the life of the agreements.

These and later EU agreements signed with Argentina arose from the crisis faced by Europe's main fishing countries (particularly Spain) and aimed at reducing surplus regional fishing capacity and meeting the supply needs of the region's market. It is estimated that the incorporation of Spain and Portugal into the EU in 1986 increased the EU fishing capacity by about 75 percent, whilst only 60 percent of the regional fishing capacity would have been ample at the time to push fishing beyond sustainable limits within the region (Brandt, 1995). These figures alone reveal the structural problem of fishing overcapacity faced by the EU and explain the policy shift from the first- to the second-generation agreements.

In the early 1990s, the legislature had asserted that fishing resources under Argentine maritime jurisdiction were to be exclusively exploited by national-flagged vessels authorised by the competent authority. In 1991, Decree 2,236 established a new framework that, in conjunction with other SAGPyA resolutions, was to regulate the national-flagged fleet within the EEZ. This framework specified two types of fishing licenses: 'unrestricted' and 'restricted', both to be granted by SAGPyA on the basis of individual vessel applications. In principle, their approval depended upon the technical capacity of the applicant and could only be granted within the limits of the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) defined by INIDEP.⁸⁷ Several Resolutions enacted by SAGPyA complemented this Decree establishing the total allowable catch (TAC),⁸⁸ fishing gear specifications and closed seasons as the main mechanisms to preserve fisheries reproduction.⁸⁹ However, in 1992, Decree 1,493 introduced the 'chartering regime', under which Argentine companies were able to hire foreign vessels to harvest squid, subject to government approval and a royalty payment. This regime was put into practice despite INIDEP's warnings about the need to limit further fishing effort in this fishery, already under pressure by 46 foreign squid jiggers operating under the national flag.

⁸⁷ Fishing licenses were to be issued to specific vessels and for unlimited time, although they could be transferred to other vessels of similar fishing capacity. With few exceptions, all catches were to be landed in Argentine harbours and reported to the relevant port authority.

⁸⁸ The TAC is a tonnage ceiling established by the government on an annual basis to define the maximum extraction volume allowed for a particular species to guarantee its regeneration.

⁸⁹ Complementary Resolutions 245/91, 182/92 and 948/92.

The stated objective of the above decrees was to support the incorporation of new vessels through joint ventures, whilst regulating the consequent growth of fishing effort through the number of licenses issued and other associated mechanisms. However, between 1989 and 1996 the fishing effort of the freezer fleet increased fivefold, whilst that of the ice-trawler fleet tripled. The mechanisms adopted to control overfishing were highly ineffective due to two main reasons. On the one hand, the monitoring and enforcement system continued to be weak and unable to control or limit the rapid expansion of the fleet. On the other hand, several companies contested in court the quotas allocated to restricted licenses, succeeding in many cases in transferring the licenses to vessels with larger fishing capacity. The regulatory framework was further weakened by EP Decree 2,265/92, which exempted those vessels operating under the chartering regime from the license system.

Between 1990 and 1994, catches in general experienced a sustained increase and hake catches rapidly reached the TAC. As mentioned before, despite this, in 1993 Argentina signed a second-generation Fisheries Cooperation Agreement with the EU (Law No. 24,315), ratified by the Congress in 1994, facilitating the incorporation of more European vessels into the national-flagged fleet.⁹⁰ The objectives of this agreement were threefold: to promote “access to new fishing possibilities” for the European fleet; to contribute “to the renovation and reconversion of the Argentine fleet and the restructuring of the Community fleets”; and “to promote the rational exploitation of the resources in the long term”.⁹¹ Three mechanisms were established for the incorporation of European vessels in the Argentine EEZ: joint enterprises (SMs)⁹², temporary associations (ATEs)⁹³ and the setting up of new European enterprises, although the last was not applied in practice. In the first two cases, mixed-capital firms were to be established with the purpose of harvesting, and in some cases processing, fish stocks under Argentine waters, whilst giving priority to the supply of the European market. Joint ventures were to be subsidised and €28 million were allocated towards scientific and technical cooperation activities, to be transferred in quotas over the life of the accord. A joint commission created to oversee the accord’s enforcement established an annual TAC of 250,000 tonnes and two types of fishing licenses: ‘non-surplus species’ for the hake fishery and ‘surplus

⁹⁰ The agreement was signed on 6 May 1994 for a five-year period, renewable for two additional years.

⁹¹ Law No. 24,315, Article 5, item 3. The commitments assumed by each party were as follows: “the Community will facilitate the incorporation of European vessels to enterprises already operating or to be constituted in Argentina. To this purpose and in the framework of its policy for the technological renovation of fisheries, Argentina will facilitate the transference of existing fishing licenses and the issuing on new licenses.

⁹² Sociedades mixtas.

⁹³ Asociaciones temporales de empresas.

species' for 'under-exploited' fisheries.⁹⁴ In exchange, the newly formed companies received tax advantages to export their catches to Europe.

A series of measures was adopted to prevent the growth of fishing of non-surplus species. First, Argentine vessels could only be replaced by European units equipped with more advanced technology, but with the same fishing capacity or gross registered tonnage (GRT). However, existing licenses could be transferred to European vessels, provided that the ceding vessel left operation. In the hake fishery, the idea was that for each European vessel incorporated in the Argentine EEZ, national vessels of similar capacity were to be withdrawn from the fishery in order to avoid overfishing. The Agreement explicitly excluded the possibility of transferring licenses from Argentine flagged vessels that had been inactive for more than one year or from vessels owned by bankrupt firms, and established a 10 percent by-catch ceiling, included in the TAC.⁹⁵ Surprisingly, nearly half of the TAC agreed was for the harvesting of hake, by then already showing signs of alarming overexploitation. As a result of these joint ventures, the freezer and factory fleets operating in Argentine waters expanded at a dramatic rate, a process examined in Chapter 4.

From 1995 onwards, avoiding the collapse of hake became the main challenge for the fishery sector and the number of norms attempting to regulate the sector grew at an exponential rate year after year. Most of these were reactive short-term measures, such as closed seasons and area closures and higher penalties for the use of inadequate catching practices and over-fishing infractions. Furthermore, their implementation was resisted by an increasingly complex web of local, national and international stakeholders. In 1997, about 12 different projects were submitted to congress, aiming to define a single body of fisheries policies and norms. The outcome was a Federal Fishing Law (Law 24,922) approved in January 1998, which incorporated a system of individual transferable quotas (ITQs) and created the Federal Fishing Council (CFP)⁹⁶ to regulate the activity. However, this law was not enacted by the EP until July 1999, after a highly conflictive process examined in Chapter 7. Prior to this law, the fisheries sector was regulated by scattered decrees, resolutions and laws introduced in previous decades, when the main concern was not about the conservation of national fisheries but about the sector's economic development and expansion.

⁹⁴ Long-term joint enterprises were promoted over temporary associations through a lower TAC for the latter, fixed at 40,000 and 44,000 tonnes for non-surplus and surplus species respectively.

⁹⁵ The term 'by-catch' refers to discarded catches returned to the sea, either because of their low economic value or because they contravene regulations (e.g. undersize, over-quota).

⁹⁶ Consejo Federal Pesquero.

The need to reorganise the national fishery sector was framed by the GoA and largest capitalist players as a ‘Tragedy of the Commons’ in which more permanent private property rights were advocated as the answer to overfishing. Argentina was just about to experiment with another set of instruments produced by neoliberal thinking. In Chapter 7, I return to this experiment, examining the details and impact of the ITQ system and exploring whether or not it managed to normalise the crisis faced by the sector as expected, by ‘incentivising rational behaviour’.

3.4 Assembling the neoliberal *dispositif*

3.4.1 Changes in fisheries governability

As argued in Chapter 2, the business environment ruling the fisheries sector can be interpreted as the crystallisation of unwilling power struggles between the state, capitalists and workers in the establishment of a prevailing regime of socio-environmental regulation. Thus, the business environment can be read in two ways. On the one hand, as a manifestation of the socio-environmental disciplining *dispositif* established (with more or less success) under different accumulation regimes and specific time-space conditions. On the other hand and using a photographic analogy, this framework can be read through its ‘negative’ image – a total inversion of a positive image, in which light areas appear dark and vice versa – as a means to capture the way in which subaltern subjects within the hegemonic accumulation regime cope, resist or confront capitalist disciplining projects.

Supporting the discussion that follows, Figure 3.4 summarises the main changes crystallised in the business environment of the national fisheries sector from its artisanal origins through its development under the ISI regime and the various phases of the restructuring process. The right-hand side column shows a stylised representation of the changes effected in each phase. The circle represents the ecosystem within which the fisheries sector operates (its scale, resilience and degree of vulnerability); the square depicts the PEST governance framework regulating the harvesting and manufacturing sub-sectors. The direction of the arrows indicates whether PEST pressures tend to increase or decrease the impact of individual firms on the environment, whereas the thickness of the arrows denotes the strength of the pressure. A distinction is made between local/national and international pressures. Although it is not always easy to differentiate them, the diagram depicts the relative position of the key stakeholders and agencies, whose pressures become hegemonic at different times in history.

Figure 3.4 Changes in the governance of the Argentine fisheries sector

Fisheries development phases		PEST Factors	Business environment
Born in the margins industrialisation	Origins under the agro-exports model 1880-1929	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Stimuli conditions but outside the scope of the agro-exports model ↔ Inflow of Italian immigration with knowledge of the trade and fish consumption habits ➔ Artisanal fishing and processing techniques ➔ Family and community-based development with social contracts locally regulated 	
Harboured industrialisation	Incipient industrialisation 1930-1959	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↔ Incipient process of industrial production geared towards the domestic market ↔ Family-based organisation of firms, gradually linking harvesting and manufacturing ➔ Emergence of workers and entrepreneurs collectives ➔ Modest technological capacities and investments 	
	Consolidation and expansion 1960-1975	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↔ Active promotion of industrialisation through subsidies and special benefits ➔ Upwards social mobility through formal wage employment ➔ Tripartite organisation of 'cooperative regulation' ↔ Expansion of capital investments in offshore and onshore infrastructure 	
Neoliberal restructuring	ISI Breakdown 1976-1982	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↔ Breakdown of the Great Compromise ↔ Schizophrenic approach to fisheries management ↔ Political deactivation of workers collectives 	
	Adjustment in democracy 1983-1990	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↔ Macro-economic instability, with policies largely shaped by external conditionalities ↔ Relocation and downsizing of firms ↔ Worsening income and working conditions 	
	NEM Period 1991-2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↔ Active promotion of FDI through fishing rights and transnationalisation of capital ↔ Vertical decentralisation of production ↔ Hegemonic shift to exports at the expense of the previous dual orientation ↔ Labour flexibilisation and structural precarisation of working conditions 	

Note: Arrows pointing outwards indicate pressures negatively expanding the business environment. The style of the arrow corresponds to the scale or source of the driving pressure as follows:

↔ International pressures ↔ National pressures ↔ Local pressures

Source: Elaborated on the basis of Allen (2001: 33)⁹⁷

Policy (P) forces refer to the pressures exerted by statutory political and administrative structures to keep the operation of the fisheries sector within the limits of natural resilience often through the use of command and control instruments. These instruments not only include specific norms such as fishing jurisdictions, fishing gear, closed seasons and fines but also other norms aimed at regulating the economy (e.g. taxes, subsidies and protectionist

⁹⁷ For a slightly updated version published in Spanish see: Allen (2011).

measures) and those norms and practices regulating the relation between state, capitalists, labour and nature that directly or indirectly affect the sector.

Economic (E) forces make reference to the economic pressures (incentives and disincentives) exerted by the market but also by the state through the use of market instruments such as ITQs and financial incentives. Again, these include not only those instruments aimed directly at the fisheries sector but also more general economic instruments that have a direct effect on it. Such instruments are increasingly adopted by governments (often hand in hand with regulatory pressures) but also by other stakeholders. For instance, insurers and financiers might exert pressure on firms to reduce the environmental liability of their actions or to internalise the social impact of market fluctuations on their workers. These pressures might also work on the opposite direction, subverting the values of environmental sustainability and social justice and supporting the externalisation of environmental and social responsibility by firms.

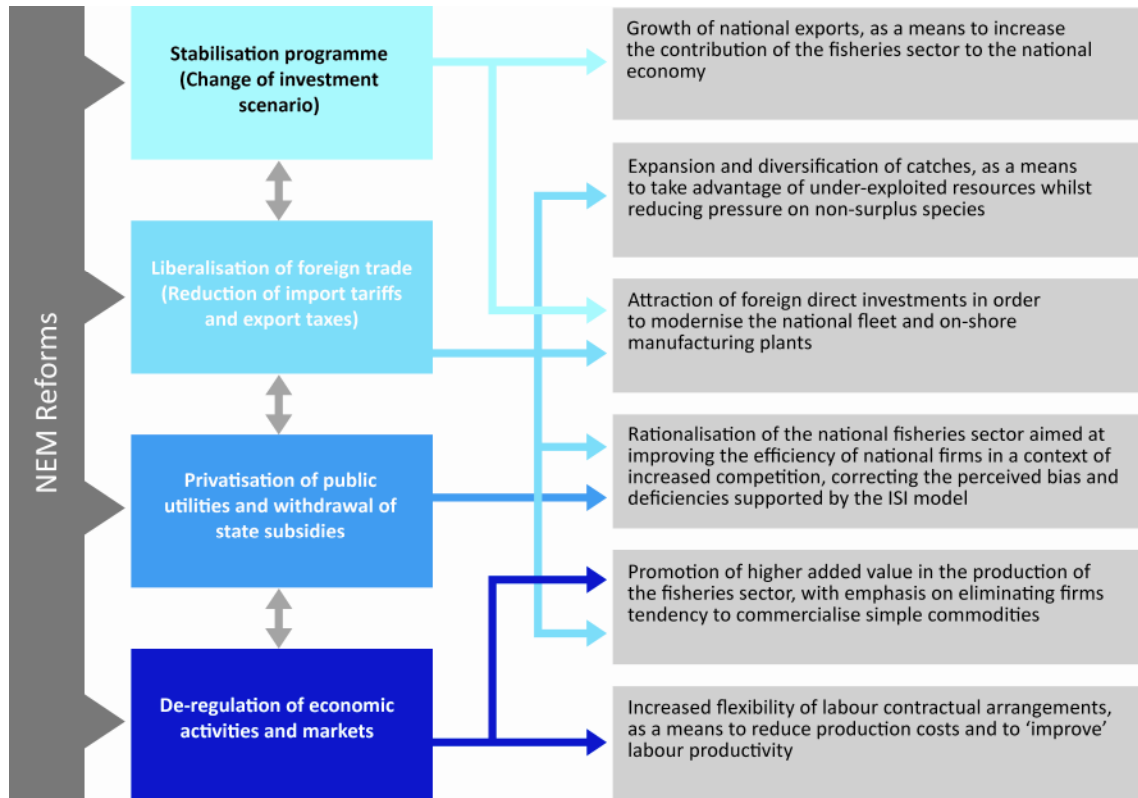
Socio-cultural (S) pressures are often less 'tangible' than regulatory and economic ones, as they are defined by the collective values, social norms and actions of civil-society groups. As such, they include the pressures exerted by NGOs, community and workers organisations alike, through demonstrations, direct action and media campaigning, among other mechanisms. Finally, technological (T) pressures refer to the pressure exerted through changes in the technologies used by firms, which might prompt changes in the type and capacity of fishing vessels, fishing gear and manufacturing processes.

In the fisheries sector, the NEM recognised six specific and interrelated objectives, outlined in Figure 3.5. These objectives were supposed to make the sector not only larger but also more efficient in economic and technological terms. Although social and environmental factors were not included among the specific purposes pursued by the reforms, it was assumed that a modernised and more efficient fisheries sector was eventually going to lead to the generation of more and better employment and higher labour productivity, whilst the adoption of regulatory and economic policy mechanisms was expected to ensure the sustainable management of fishery stocks.

During the lead-to-NEM phases (1976-1990), some of the above objectives were already present in the discourse of the state, but the policies adopted were more ambivalent and included other objectives such as the geopolitical reaffirmation of Argentine sovereignty over the EEZ (particularly during the dictatorship) and the development of Patagonian harbours and geographical de-concentration of the national fisheries sector, during Alfonsín's administration.

While the lead-to NEM period can be characterised by different objectives and a more fragmented and ambivalent approach, since 1991 the NEM marked a clear and consistent shift to a new business environment and the pursuit of the objectives outlined above.

Figure 3.5 Intended effects of the NEM reform as applied to the national fisheries sector



A first significant change that characterises the shift between the ISI and neoliberal scenarios is the increasing role played by extra-local/national stakeholders in shaping the business environment of the Argentine fisheries sector. The various agreements with third countries introduced since 1976 clearly exemplify this. But whilst during the lead-to-NEM phase these agreements were on a relatively discreet basis, after 1991 and particularly with the signing of the 1994 EU-Argentine fisheries accord, the national fisheries sector became increasingly subordinated and opened to absorb the excess fishing capacity of the EU fisheries sector.

A second significant consequence of the changes introduced under the neoliberal shift lies in the intrinsic clash between regulatory and market policy mechanisms. Paradoxically, the policy framework regulating the national fisheries sector appears to have been strengthened throughout the neoliberal turn. Starting with the creation of specific policy and scientific bodies such as SAGPyA and INIDEP in 1976, an increasing number of regulations was adopted

throughout the following two decades.⁹⁸ In political terms, while neoliberal advocates claim that market-oriented policies reduce political corruption, the case of Argentina's fisheries sector appears to refute this thesis. As state decisions became more openly aligned with the economic interests of the elite, corruptive practices spread not only across statutory organisations but also across leading capitalists and workers organisations. Thus, the conditions regulating the sector's business environment became increasingly volatile and less transparent.

Examining the measures adopted to 'regulate' the fisheries sector during the 1990s, two common patterns emerge. On the one hand, policy U-turns were frequently facilitated through executive power decrees – a mechanism used and abused during Menem's administration – often overruling wider policy frameworks and turning short-term measures into long-lasting rules. On the other hand, the changing framework opened numerous legal loops exploited by the private sector to overstep any provisions concerning the protection of workers and conservation of fisheries resources.

Looking at the PEST pressures modelling the business environment of the fisheries sector throughout the neoliberal restructuring process, it is possible to see some significant changes from 1975 onwards that were deepened in the 1990s. During the lead-to-NEM period, regulatory measures started to populate the sector, opening up fishing rights to foreign fleets in certain zones and promoting foreign investments. Since 1991, policy pressures became fully aligned with external economic pressures, expanding the fisheries business environment. Furthermore, under an unprotected economic environment, firms were forced to modernise and export or die. Both domestic and external technological pressures towards the modernisation of the sector worked in the same direction, rapidly expanding the capitalisation of the sector and the fishing effort on the Argentine Sea. Under this environment, the previous ISI structure of a large number of SMEs operating along a diversified chain of harvesting and manufacturing activities and with a dual market orientation became increasingly unviable, favouring instead the emergence of large vertically integrated firms and transnational operators, a trend explored in detail in the following chapters.

Furthermore, throughout the neoliberal turn but particularly in the 1990s, the tripartite state-capital-workers matrix was transformed, displacing the dynamics of social development from the state to the market. These changes took place worldwide but in the case of Argentina they were instrumented through a pro-capitalist state, which negatively affected the labour market,

⁹⁸ Considering the NEM period alone, 34 pieces of legislation (including laws, decrees and resolutions) dealing with the fisheries sector were introduced between 1991 and 1997.

salaries, consumption and the existing means of workers' mobilisation. The new correlation between capital and labour force, clearly biased to the former, implied a new regime of institutional regulation endorsed by the state and the norms institutionalised in this period.

The abandonment of a collective labour agreement that ruled worker-capital relationships during most of the ISI period transformed the previous social distribution of accumulation gains. In this context, economic and technological pressures also endorsed the flexibilisation of labour contracts and the political deactivation of both workers and their trade unions. Thus, social pressures became neutralised and cultural factors deeply undermined, as trust and kinship within a relatively closed system of traditional agents became increasingly eroded and redundant. While collective action for social change had been traditionally associated with trade unions, in the political climate that dominated the NEM, trade union activism was deemed unfashionable, ineffective and furthermore an impediment to economic growth. The dismantling of trade unions through various means of coercion and co-optation left workers disenfranchised and created an impasse in workers' resistance.

The discussion in this chapter points to the shortcomings of viewing the business environment in which firms and workers operate in isolation from the wider political economy in which this environment was restructured. Thus, the dismissal or ideological simplification of the ISI legacy is misleading, as it obscures the specific political environment upon which neoliberal reforms were introduced. It hides the degree of relative maturity achieved by the sector under the ISI umbrella and also the positive aspects of the previous regulatory regime and therefore the reasons why its abandonment left national firms (particularly SMEs), workers and fisheries resources in a chaotic business environment.

3.4.2 Tracing the neoliberal restructuring *dispositif* at the macro level

The previous section analysed some of the main continuities and discontinuities in the business environment in which the fisheries sector operated prior to and after the neoliberal shift. The governability of the sector is however immersed in a wider matrix that constitutes what I have defined as the neoliberal *dispositif* of socio-environmental regulation, also articulated through a number of continuities and discontinuities at the macro level. In the rest of this section, I advance a number of arguments with regards to how socio-environmental regulation was transformed throughout the neoliberal shift, outlining the gears and cogs constituting the neoliberal *dispositif*, which in turn are explored in subsequent chapters.

The plundering of nature and labour

A first gear giving motion to the neoliberal *dispositif* was the plundering of nature and the labour force. This was activated by two cogs: the first concerns the reprimarisation of the economy – implying a ‘turn back’ to the primary economy and consequently a shift to a more intensive use of natural resources – the second, growing de-industrialisation with ‘pockets’ of flexible production and market induced self-regulation.

The reprimarisation of the economy was substantiated through the penetration of foreign capital in the domain of natural-resource extraction and the agro-food production chain. Together with de-industrialisation, this process increased the weight of exports from these sectors in the national trade balance, reverting the economy to some of the main features that characterized the agro-industrial period. By 1990, more than 75 percent of the ten largest enterprises – whose sales represented 31.4 percent of the national GDP – were operating in natural-resource-based sectors (Gallopín, 2004; Kosacoff, 2008), a trend further intensified throughout the decade. Through the acquisition of several traditional national food firms by TNCs, economic concentration extended through the whole agro-food chain, from the production to the processing and distribution of food and agricultural commodities. Even if the agro-primary sector contributed by the late 1990s only 5 percent of the national GDP, it had become the dorsal spine of Argentine international trading, accounting for 40 percent of national exports, with oil seeds and cereal products alone accounting for 20 percent of Argentina’s primary exports (Teubal and Rodríguez, 2002). By 2002, the agro-food system as a whole accounted for about 60 percent of Argentine’s exports; out of these, 80 percent of soy exports – the main exported agro-product – were controlled by five corporations, seven firms controlled 60 percent of cereal exports and throughout the 1990s just two firms managed 80 percent of the milk industry market (Teubal and Rodríguez, 2002; Teubal, 2004).

The shift away from manufacturing towards primary exports exposed the national economy to frequent and greater price variations and short cycles of productive boom and crisis.⁹⁹ Trade liberalisation made the economy not only highly sensitive to the cold shocks of the international economy but also more dependent on foreign capital inflows. During the 1990s, Argentina became the third receptor of FDI in Latin America after Mexico and Brazil, accumulating 13 percent of the regional FDI between 1992 and 1998 (Basualdo, 2000, 2001).

⁹⁹ Agricultural exports grew from the early 1990s until 1996, benefiting both from increasing international prices and the overvaluation of the national currency, however, both trends reverted in 1997. Although in the following years agro-exports continued expanding in physical terms, the value of their sales stagnated (Rapoport, 2000). Nevertheless increased dependency on agro-exports revenue created an endemic reluctance on the side of the state to confront the socio-environmental impacts of the process, a trend that persisted throughout the first decade of the 21st century.

However, the full liberalisation of the financial sector led to a fast process of speculation and capital flight; the flow of FDI was highly erratic and rarely channelled towards sustained and sustainable production.

Historically, Argentina had been one of 'breadbaskets of the world' and one of the first and few countries in Latin American to achieve food security. Under the neoliberal regime the national agro-production system entered a new phase of 'agriculture without farmers', and of 'food abundance with hunger'. A phase in which food became to be treated like any other merchandise, to be produced according to the best selling prices and not any longer to satisfy basic needs.¹⁰⁰ The diffusion of globalised food consumption patterns changed commensality rituals dramatically both among the poor and the wealthy, marking yet another dimension of the exclusionary nature of neoliberal capitalism. Through the intensification of agro-production the volume of food increased but at the expense of production and producers' diversity, social equality and the sustainability of the natural-resource base. Profitable export crops high in chemical inputs, such as soy-beans, displaced the production of other annual crops, fruits and vegetables. The main environmental challenges of this type of 'mining' agriculture include the impoverishment of soils and the contamination of underground water resources with biocides. The fast expansion and deepening of nature's capitalization during the neoliberal turn did not just transform the national continental eco-regions but also extended to the Argentine Sea. Until the mid-1970s, the national EEZ was under-exploited, constituting one of the less transformed world fisheries. However, as discussed in Chapter 4, this status changed dramatically in the 1990s.

Concerning the industrial sector, the NEM appears to have eroded the gains made by the ISI regime for the sake of efficiency and export growth. At the national level, the neoliberal restructuring process produced a new and complex industrial landscape with a handful of modernised large firms dominating different production sectors and a vast number of manufacturing units struggling to stay in business. This process led to a massive reduction in the number of SMEs and not only provided less jobs per unit of investment but also excluded unskilled labour. The industrial pattern promoted throughout the NEM was not one of 'strong domestic competitors' as predicted by Portes (1990), but rather one in which a few firms came

¹⁰⁰ Already in the lead-to-NEM phase, popular patterns of food consumption started to change, entailing a quantitative reduction of food intake and qualitative changes through the substitution of 'expensive' food products (proteins) by cheaper and less nutritional ones (rich in carbohydrates, fat and sugar).

to dominate specific niches.¹⁰¹ In this context, another cog propelling the neoliberal *dispositif* consists of the flexibilisation of production, expanding the capacity of large firms and TNCs to contract or expand production costs by subcontracting chains as the market dictates. The lower levels within these subcontracting chains would in turn become the recipients of externalised labour and environmental costs, plundering the labour force and channelling uncertainty and precarity to the weakest links. Looking at the gender dimension of the policy and market-induced changes in the industrial labour market, like in most adjusted countries in Latin America, the gender wage gap in Argentina deepened, with women becoming absorbed in low-wage sectors and female wages suffering the greatest declines (Pok, 2005).

A third cog associated with the plundering of nature and the labour force concerns the framing of socio-environmental regulation along the lines of the EM discourse. Prior to neoliberal restructuring, Argentina had undergone a gradual process of consolidating the state's institutional machinery to regulate the appropriation of nature through command and control means. During the neoliberal turn, key elements of this institutional infrastructure were either dismantled or made increasingly ineffectual.¹⁰²

As conflicts over the exploitation of natural resources intensified, the 1990s saw a new emphasis on self-regulation and the emergence of a number of 'multi-stakeholder platforms', created with the aim of tailoring negotiations over regulation to the interests of specific groups with a stake in the appropriation of particular resources. These platforms inaugurated an interest-group approach to regulation, which often acted as a legitimised channel to resist or delay the state's direct regulation (e.g. closed fishing seasons, limited licenses, etc); to influence public priorities and investments; and to mould the exploitation of nature and labour to the economic needs of large capitalists, rather than addressing social demands or preserving ecological productivity. During the neoliberal restructuring process, environmental and social considerations featured as low priorities for the state *vis-à-vis* the attraction of FDI

¹⁰¹ For instance, looking at the automobile parts industry – often cited as a successful case of neoliberal restructuring – by the late 1990s only 30 firms remained in operation, out of approximately 300 firms active five years earlier (Teubal, 2001). Many other sectors experienced a similar trend of 'consolidation', not only in terms of a reduction in the number of firms who survived the restructuring process but also in the control of a handful of firms (often TNCs) over sizeable portions of their respective markets.

¹⁰² For example, the creation of protected areas has been long established as a measure to prevent negative effects on biodiversity and environmental services. During the neoliberal turn, this mechanism stopped being used to protect the most threatened eco-regions (Izquierdo and Grau, 2009).

and the modernisation of selected branches of the economy.¹⁰³ As a result, trade deregulation offered a *carte blanche* to foreign capital, removing as much as possible any regulatory environmental and social pressures for their operation.¹⁰⁴

While the above characterises the ways in which capitalist accumulation became increasingly [un]regulated in the realm of natural-resource-based activities, in the industrial sector, Argentine neoliberalism endorsed the EM thesis of ‘competitive self-regulation’. This could be described in short as the assumption that market competition among firms would lead to the survival of the fittest: a ‘modern’ industrial sector not just in terms of its technological and organisational approach to production but also in environmental terms. The ‘consolidation’ of modern and competitive firms was expected in turn to raise the standards of environmental performance to international requirements. Little information is available to judge changes in the environmental performance of industrial firms as a consequence of the neoliberal restructuring process, but a number of insights can be drawn from the few studies available in this area. Looking at the determinants explaining the uptake of environmental management activities (EMAs) among firms in Argentina during the 1990s, Chudnovsky et al. (1996, 1997, 2000) argue that progress in the adoption of pollution prevention practices was concentrated in a small group of large, export-oriented firms, many of them TNC subsidiaries. A later study by Chudnovsky et al. (2005: 6)¹⁰⁵ confirms that environmental management improvements were largely confined to large foreign firms while “environmental regulations did not generate improved competitiveness through innovation but rather they reinforced the initial competitiveness conditions of each firm or industry”. As we see in Chapters 5 and 6, good environmental performance by larger firms, however, often disguised the externalisation of environmental costs to subcontracting establishments.

¹⁰³ During the 1980s, the volume of industrial waste was reduced due to the recession of manufacturing activities. However, most of the largest industries promoted throughout the neoliberal reforms introduced in the 1990s had serious deficiencies in treating their own wastes and were responsible for the largest outputs in terms of waste generation (Chisari et al., 1996). For instance, within Buenos Aires province, in the early 1990s the steel industry accounted for the highest level of solid and liquid wastes generation, the chemical, petrochemical and textile industries were in second place in terms of liquid waste generation, and the petroleum industry was the largest producer of semi-solid waste and the second largest main generator of solid wastes; all producing a high level of toxic wastes.

¹⁰⁴ For instance, the national government repeatedly fought against tougher environmental standards within the MERCOSUR agreement, fearing in particular that Brazil’s provisions could become a regional benchmark to the disadvantage of firms located in Argentina (Hochstetler, 2003).

¹⁰⁵ This survey is the first representative sample looking at the environmental practices of manufacturing firms during the analysed period and covers the environmental practices of 716 Argentine formal manufacturing firms between 1998 and 2001. The survey does not however provide any data on pollutants emitted or other indicators of environmental performance and the findings are based instead on the uptaking of environmental activities, among which the most widely adopted were efficiency improvements in the management of water, energy and other resources, effluent treatment and recycling. SMEs include firms with less than 300 employees.

A 'less great compromise'

A second gear motioning the neoliberal *dispositif* concerns the consolidation of a narrow (exclusive and exclusionary) negotiation of the social contract sustaining capitalist accumulation, which in turn resulted in a legacy of widespread socio-economic and political uncertainty. While capitalist accumulation during the ISI period was supported by a wide social contract between the state, national capitalists and workers that pretty much resembled the Fordist 'Great Compromise' adopted in the developed world after World War II, neoliberalism transformed this contract into a 'less great compromise', sealed by a narrow deal between large economic corporations (in many cases TNCs), the 'privileged decile' and the state, from which workers were largely excluded. In a comparative study of Argentina, Chile and Mexico, Teichman (2001: 199) notices that "the most striking similarity among the three case studies is the access of the owners/executives of very powerful conglomerates to the economic policy process – an access and influence unmatched by any other group".¹⁰⁶ Workers exclusion was substantiated by breaking down the path of social integration and upward social mobility of the masses through waged work, by rolling back social security and by disenfranchising the proletariat from having a political voice in the shaping of capitalist regulation.

The exclusionary nature of neoliberal capitalism should not come as a surprise, Portes and Roberts (2005: 62) remind us that "[a]s Polanyi (1957, 1992) demonstrated long ago, free markets are inherently machines for the creation and reproduction of inequality. The growth that they create tends to flow upward, exacerbating pre-existing class differences unless checked by deliberate regulation". Confirming this argument, Argentina experienced both increased poverty, when free markets failed to generate growth, and social exclusion, regardless of growth. Under the neoliberal turn, regulation abandoned its previous function of protecting the conditions of production for capitalist accumulation and was gradually remoulded to contain accumulation crises through the management of differential sustainability.

The structuring of a less great compromise was facilitated by two key cogs in the machinery of the neoliberal *dispositif*. The first refers to the *devaluation of democracy*, the second to the *political deactivation of the working class*. The former can be identified as the emergence of what O'Donnell calls 'delegative democracy', defined as the deployment of authoritarian governing, within a formally democratic framework. O' Donnell (1994: 57) argues that this was one of the deepest transformations at stake during Argentina's neoliberal restructuring, producing a type of democracy that endured, moving neither towards military authoritarianism

¹⁰⁶ This feature of neoliberal regulation has also been discussed in detail by Teubal (2004), Fernández and Hogenboom (2004) and Duménil and Lévy (2006).

nor towards “opening avenues for institutionalised forms of democracy” and decision making.¹⁰⁷ As such, delegative democracy fails to open a wider negotiation of the social contract underpinning capitalist regulation, which in turn undermines its capacity to control accumulation crises.

Looking at the Latin American region as a whole, by the end of the 1970s about 90 percent of all Latin Americans were ruled by authoritarian regimes. By the beginning of the 1990s almost all countries in the region had democratically elected presidents. Argentina was part of this cycle, in less than three decades the country went from a military coup to a ‘market coup’. As argued by Roueay (2006: page unknown)¹⁰⁸ in the 1990s, “[i]t became clear that financial capitalists, rather than the military, were now the ones who could overthrow governments on their own”. This highlights the ambiguous relationship of neoliberal socio-environmental regulation with democratic decision making. Throughout the neoliberal turn, the functioning of its democratic institutions was severely damaged by the authoritarian and emergency governing mode that characterised the 1990s; the main political parties lost the trust of their traditional constituencies and ad-hoc alliances like the one formed towards the end of the period analysed proved ineffective in facing the political crisis and restoring the credibility of representative democracy. Furthermore, it could be argued that neoliberal regulation relied not only on exclusionary mechanisms but also deepened the use of coercive methods of social control. As discussed in Chapters 5 and 7, in the fisheries sector coercion played an important role in creating the necessary social order to introduce and sustain a new accumulation regime both throughout military and democratic forms of authoritarianism.

During Menem’s administration, the depth of the economic crises, the painful memory of recent hyperinflationary processes and the historical association of Peronism with the workers’ cause, all contributed to create an uncritical impasse through which radical measures were taken extensively and fast, dismantling the strongholds of organised labour and of upward mobility across the working and middle classes. Throughout this process, democratic rule was severely impaired through the use of emergency decrees. This resulted in a governing mode that degenerated into a series of institutional emergencies, bypassing the legislative power and redefining democracy in practice by the gradual enlargement of presidential powers, on a contingent crisis-by-crisis basis. Emergency responses eventually became a decision-making style adopted in all areas (economic or otherwise) and circumstances (crisis or no crisis), often

¹⁰⁷ Similarly, Jesús Rodríguez (1998: 13) argues that “one of the political legacies of the economic reform carried out in Argentina has been the devaluation of the very instruments of a fully democratic system”.

¹⁰⁸ [http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/South_America/Kirchner's_Argentina.html] [Last accessed: 03/08/2010].

in open violation of constitutional norms, with the consequence of alienating the political capabilities of congress, political parties and organisations and citizens alike.¹⁰⁹

The devaluation of the democratic system not only engendered alienation and apathy but also fostered corruption, as power to decide became more concentrated in a few hands and therefore more susceptible to influence through bribes. Furthermore, to sustain emergency decision making, the notion that an overruling state of crisis persists constitutes an essential ingredient, which in turn also generates an overall atmosphere of political uncertainty and lack of trust in democratic institutions and politicians.

For a while, faith in the international macro-economic conventional wisdom prevailed, restraining open confrontation. But as neoliberalism became increasingly discredited towards the end of the 1990s, the cracks between bottom-up and top-down political organisation also started to become visible, questioning the legitimacy of formal democracy and bringing to the fore the deeper political, social and environmental challenges, persisting even in the face of relative economic stability. In this context, the December 2001 crisis should not be interpreted as a standalone economic crisis, but rather as a milestone in the longer process of consolidation and disintegration of the neoliberal regime of social regulation, in which collective discontent came to a boil.

The second gear that maintained the neoliberal *dispositif* in motion was the *political deactivation of the working class*. If Peronism was responsible in the 1940s for its activation, in the 1990s it became paradoxically responsible for its oppression and suppression. This was partly made possible through the disarticulation of the ISI system based on social integration through secured waged employment for the vast majority of the population, which in turn, contributed to increased social uncertainty and the inability of the system to meet the basic needs of large sections of the population. Through this process, the working class appears to have lost much of its previous power in cementing a social contract and more generally – as argued by Laclau (1985) – in its meaningfulness to explain the identity of social groups, both as subjects of control and of resistance. In social and cultural terms, most Argentines were painfully reminded that despite their European roots they are part of Latin America and not Europe, shaking their sense of belonging to a hybrid modernity, as discussed in section 2.1.4.

¹⁰⁹ The transformation of democratic governing into undemocratic decision making not only occurred in Argentina but in many other adjusting countries in Latin America. For instance in 1990 alone, Brazilian president Fernando Collor de Mello issued one emergency decree every two days (Rodriguez, 1998).

On a more positive note, widespread demands for the regeneration of democratic politics and for more participatory and less corporate forms of democracy also started to emerge towards the close of the neoliberal turn. In this sense, it could be argued that the extractive and exclusionary model of capitalist accumulation instituted by neoliberalism is hardly sustainable without recourse to further coercion or repression. While open repression is fortunately highly unlikely to be tolerated at the domestic and international level, coercive measures appear to have become increasingly confronted since the turn of the 21st century. For instance, the creation of the Union of Citizen Assemblies (UAC)¹¹⁰ in 2006 is one of many examples through which the claims of indigenous groups, peasants, workers and ordinary citizens became articulated in contesting the neoliberal socio-environmental project. The UAC operates as an open horizontal platform and has been an active channel of social mobilisation throughout a number of heated conflicts concerning mining, forestry, pulp paper mills and agribusiness across the whole country (Giarraca, 2007). In the case of the fisheries sector, conflicts over the legitimacy of the neoliberal restructuring process acquired a national status in 2000 and were widely reported by the media as the ‘Fisheries War’. It remains to be established whether this conflict led to a rupture or simply a readjustment of neoliberal regulation, a discussion resumed in Chapter 7.

The urbanisation of difference

In a relatively short period of time, Argentina’s society shifted from a scenario dominated by extensive wealth distribution and upward social mobility to one where poverty reached large sectors of the populations and where the gap between the rich and the poor was significantly widened. This shift affected not only the material living conditions and future prospects of most Argentines but also resulted in the reconfiguration of class and spatial relations. Throughout the neoliberal turn, the poor and the new poor across the working and middle classes appear to have found that they have more in common than ever in the past, converging towards the end of the period into common forms of direct action and protest. At the same time, as the inequality gap increased, Argentines also started to work, live and socialise in parallel worlds. In this context, a third gear driving the neoliberal *dispositif* concerns the *urbanisation of difference*.

With a population of 37 million inhabitants in 2001, Argentina is highly urbanized – a process consolidated throughout the ISI period.¹¹¹ During the neoliberal period, demographic growth was slow and unlike earlier periods, immigration played a marginal role and was characterized

¹¹⁰ Unión de Asambleas Ciudadanas.

¹¹¹ In 1970 almost 70 percent of the national population lived in urban areas and by 2001 this percentage had increased to 90 percent (Portes and Roberts, 2005).

by small inflows of population for neighbouring countries.¹¹² These demographic trends were a combined consequence of reduced immigration and falling fertility rates in the largest urban agglomerates, but also of the historically unprecedented exodus of professionals and specialised workers, the so-called 'brain drain'.¹¹³ In this context, the ISI socio-spatial organisation underwent two significant changes: the decline of primate urbanisation and an incipient inter-regional redistribution of migration flows towards smaller cities. The former resulted from a combination of the declining economic allure of the primate city and the lower fertility rates than characterised Latin American metropolitan areas in general.¹¹⁴

The new epicentres of demographic growth were medium-sized cities, with a population between 50,000 and 1 million.¹¹⁵ Beyond demographics, many medium-size cities acquired new roles in the geography of neoliberal capitalism, not necessarily as 'theatres of global accumulation' but rather through residual processes associated with the de-industrialisation of larger urban agglomerations and the emergence of economic enclaves linked to the exploitation of natural resources. The increasing connection of these cities to the reprimarisation of the economy during the neoliberal shift has however followed different paths. On the one hand, the growth of medium-sized settlements in the Patagonian and the Northeast regions of the country was linked to special regional promotional regimes that facilitated the creation of specific economic enclaves in the realm of extractive activities (fishing, mining and forest extraction). On the other hand, medium-sized cities such as Mar del Plata shifted away from a diverse pattern of industrial activities consolidated throughout the ISI period, becoming more dependent on the boom and crisis cycles of single extractive activities and associated manufacturing processes.

¹¹² The annual population growth rate decreased from 1.5 percent in 1970-1990, to 1.3 percent in 1990-2001 and to almost 1 percent in the new millennium. The annual urban growth rate also slowed down, from 2.1 percent between 1970 and 1990 to 1.6 percent between 1991 and 2001 (Torrado, 2010).

¹¹³ By 1970 the number of Argentines living abroad was below 150,000, but by 1990 it had almost doubled. While the first wave of emigrating Argentines left the country in the late 1970s seeking political asylum, later waves left mostly for economic reasons. It is estimated that skilled emigration in the 1990s involved the exodus of 3 percent of the country's total population (Pellegrino, 2002).

¹¹⁴ Examining the impact of neoliberalism on the urban systems of six Latin American countries, Portes and Roberts (2005) observe similar trends to the ones described above. Across all case studies primate cities' role in attracting migratory flows declined, with a constellation of smaller cities absorbing migrants instead. The authors put forward two main explanations to these trends. First, "the decline in public employment and in protected ISI industries appear to have been transmitted rather quickly to migratory networks that put an end to their overwhelming concentration in these areas" (ibid.: 53). Second, and despite the fact that neoliberalism was partly associated with the relocation of industries in the periphery of larger metropolitan agglomerations, "there is an evident connection between the emergence of new growth poles associated with export agriculture, export industries, or new tourist ventures and secondary city growth. Whenever large export production zones (EPZs), created under a favourable tax and labour regime, are sited away from the primate cities, they inevitably trigger vigorous labour flows towards them" (ibid.: 54).

¹¹⁵ At the national level, the largest stratum exhibited a relative intercensal variation of 59 percent between 1970 and 2001, with the smallest stratum – between 50,000 and 99,000 inhabitants – recording the highest rates of demographic growth (Marcos, 2010).

In both cases, the output growth of these settlements became increasingly linked to the extraction of natural resources, processed or raw. Agro-alimentary industries were among the most dynamic economic sectors – though with sharp fluctuations – shifting from domestic markets to exportation. However, economic gains in this sector did not always translate into better incomes, due to the lack of growth of formal employment and lack of capital growth per worker in the informal sector. In order to face the difficulties posed by the restructuring process, many SMEs adopted a ‘defensive’ approach, basing their competitiveness on lower labour costs – through employment of low quality and poor stability – and on the externalisation of environmental costs. The latter strategy often involved the subcontracting of informal establishments and even household units to perform part of the manufacturing processes, leading to deteriorating environmental conditions and increasing health risks that remained in most cases officially unrecorded. In this way the impacts of inadequate working and environmental conditions were transferred from formal factories to informal establishments and households, and eventually to the whole urban fabric, a process to which I return in Chapter 5, with specific reference to the fishing industry of Mar del Plata.

The restructuring of the urban system neatly coincided with the deepening of the neoliberal model during Menem’s administration and was closely associated with the de-industrialisation of the larger agglomerations and the reprimarisation of the economy; the latter attracting job seekers to those cities strategically located in relation to the epicentres of extractive activities and agro-food production. Thus, the inter-regional redistribution of the population should not be mistaken with the emergence of a more evenly geographically distributed development pattern but rather be interpreted as a process associated with an archipelago of limited opportunities in a context of declining employment and deteriorating working and living conditions in the main urban centres. In addition, the emergence of sharp intra-urban differences brought about by the passage from the ISI to the neoliberal model was deeply rooted in the transformation of work. During the former period, the urban social structure was anchored in stable industrial work and the protection granted by the Keynesian state. In a context of upward social mobility across the middle and the working classes, the gap between the privileged and the poor was consistently narrowed and even the main Argentine metropolises exhibited a high level of socio-spatial diversity (Germani, 1963).¹¹⁶ The neoliberal regime not only disrupted the previous process of social integration through waged labour but also dismantled previous forms of social protection warranted by the state. In a few decades “Argentina went from being one of the most egalitarian countries in the region to resembling their neighbours’ traditional economic inequality” (Portes

¹¹⁶ At the national level, urban poverty rose from 21 percent in 1993 to 30 percent in 1998, despite the fact that during this period real GDP accumulated a growth of over 21 percent (Beccaria, 2002).

and Roberts, 2005: 63). Through this new regime of urban poverty and inequality, advanced marginality cohabited with advanced material wealth through a process defined by Jonathan Friedman (2000) as the parallel slummification/yuppification effect of neoliberal globalisation.¹¹⁷

In a context of growing poverty and inequality, poor and impoverished urban households were forced to adopt new and more adjusting strategies to secure their re-production. A number of detailed micro-studies on the urban poor under the neoliberal adjustment in Argentina, Ecuador and Mexico (Moser, 1989; Minujín and Kessler, 1995) document similar coping strategies: increase in household size; the incorporation of 'additional workers' into the labour market to avoid a sharper income decline (Lo Vuolo, 1998); significant reductions in food and non-food expenditures and changes in consumption patterns (people ate fewer meals, less protein and fresh vegetables and spent less on health, education, water and shelter); and increased indebtedness as savings deplete.¹¹⁸ These coping strategies were not just adopted by the poor but also by the emerging 'new poor', engrossed by an impoverished middle class as a result of downward social mobility.¹¹⁹

The spatial crystallisation of socio-economic inequality was accompanied by the emergence of new urban enclaves associated to the reprimarisation of the economy and the spatial segregation of the urban poor and the wealthy. The territorial distribution of winners and losers led to the emergence of fast changing and unexpected coalitions but also increasing

¹¹⁷ This process inevitably crystallised into socio-spatial segregation, with contrasting qualities manifested in the mushrooming of the so-called 'architecture of fear' (Ellin, 1997). In the Metropolitan Region of Buenos Aires (RMBA), the new residential aspirations of the privileged and improvements in the system of suburban motorways led to the emergence of a highly profitable real estate business, transforming large areas of marginal land in the flood valleys of the RMBA into gated communities. By 1999, almost 450 new 'closed urbanisations' were built along the lowest areas of the region's plain valleys, comprising about 400 km² (Szajenberg, 2000). These gated communities not only inaugurated an exclusionary model of urbanisation but also had a significant environmental impact, leading to the loss of biodiversity and productive peri-urban activities and to the alteration of the natural drainage system, which in turn resulted into worsening flooding conditions in their poorly urbanised vicinities.

¹¹⁸ In the 1990s, the 'additional worker' was substituted by the 'discouraged worker' (Cariola, 1992), as an increasing number of people stopped looking for employment because of adverse conditions – e.g. transport costs, risky environmental working conditions. As a consequence, urban activity rates fell, particularly among women. According to the Permanent Households Survey, by the mid-1990s, 21 percent of the unemployed urban economically active population stopped seeking employment (INDEC, 1998).

¹¹⁹ Between 1975 and mid-1990s, workers lost approximately 40 percent of the value of their incomes. In the Greater Buenos Aires, the new poor increased by 338 percent, a trend that worsened towards the turn of the new millennium (Lo Vuolo, 1998). For a detailed analysis of the changing face of urban poverty in Argentina during the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s see also: Minujín (1992); Barbeito and Lo Vuolo (1992); Beccaria and López, 1996; Torrado, 1994, 2003). A qualitative study by Minujín and Kessler (1995) reveals that while experiencing living standards under the poverty line, the new poor had a confused perception of their class insertion, which in turn affected their responses, as people often tended to blame themselves, seeking individual coping strategies instead of joining collective demands.

conflicts, pitching some provinces against each other, the formal sector against the informal sector, foreign firms against domestic ones, and workers against trade unions, just to mention a few of the many constellations of aligned and confronted interests that characterise most conflictive episodes during the period analysed. The production of the city became ruled not just by the prominence of the private sector in modelling urban space but also by the alignment of public urban planning and management with market forces, with both resulting in increased intra socio-spatial differences (Pírez, 2002; Libertun, 2007).¹²⁰ In this context, the social containment of difference deepened by market forces was in turn reinforced by the state's 'punitive containment' of social disorder, further discriminating against the poor (Wacquant, 2007).

As argued by McCarthy and Prudham (2004), neoliberal capitalism entails the construction of new scales (such as the 'global') and the creation of complex inter-scale relations where localities might be simultaneously embedded and isolated from other scales in different spheres of life. In other words, the 'local' might be differently reconstituted in economic, ecological, social, cultural and institutional terms. But is this reconstitution necessarily functional to neoliberal accumulation? Or does it reinforce the empowerment of those marginalised by the neoliberal restructuring process? We return to this discussion in Chapter 7, in the light of the so-called 'Fisheries War', with its epicentre in Mar del Plata city.

The above discussion suggests that neoliberalism has been able to facilitate capitalist accumulation but at the expense of environmental sustainability and social equality. Furthermore, it could be hypothesised that the internal contradictions of neoliberal capitalism to preserve social cohesion and to sustain the social and environmental conditions of production on which accumulation ultimately relies have become manifest through a number of cracks in the emerging socio-environmental order, which threaten its sustainability as a hegemonic mode of social regulation. The following chapters examine how the machinery of the neoliberal *dispositif* transformed the fisheries sector.

¹²⁰ Although the urbanisation of difference has been better studied in metropolitan Buenos Aires, several studies reveal that some of the above characteristics were shared by other national metropolitan areas (Svampa, 2001; Thuillier, 2003; Daniele et al., 2005). Portes and Roberts (2005) demonstrate that rising inequality came together with increased access by the privileged to sumptuous consumption habits. As a consequence, neoliberalism also brought increasing crime rates, victimisation and insecurity to most Latin America large cities, leading to the emergence of 'forced entrepreneurship' (Ayes, 1998). In Buenos Aires, crime rates increased 340 percent in the 1990s alone (ibid.: 75), with the highest crime records reported in the wealthier areas. In turn, increased crime fed a vicious circle in which the privileged found a further justification for their 'ghettoisation' within the city.

Chapter 4 Liberalise, modernise and grow? The production and re-production of scarcity and ecological conflict

Until the opening up of the economy, the Argentine Sea was among the few fisheries in the world considered to be under-exploited. However, in less than two decades the national fisheries sector underwent a significant expansion and dramatic transformation. Considering the evolution of marine catches, by 1990, Argentina occupied the 29th position in the world ranking of fisheries countries but by 1998 it had escalated to the 17th place, accounting for over 1.1 million metric tonnes in captures volume. During this decade, the Argentine fisheries sector recorded the most spectacular growth among the main 31 world fishing countries (FIEL, 2000). However, the weight of the sector in the national GDP was rather modest at 0.57 percent and national per capita seafood consumption averaged 6.5 kg, recording almost the same contribution to the national economy as during the ISI period and a modest increase in national consumption of fish, still well below the world average.¹²¹

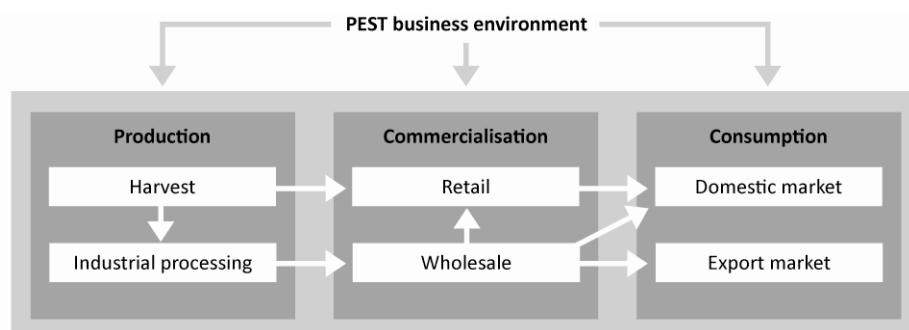
The purpose of this and the following chapter is to examine the intended and unintended outcomes of the neoliberal restructuring of the fisheries sector, *vis-à-vis* the policy objectives discussed in Chapter 3. The discussion scrutinises the changes brought about under the new *dispositif* of socio-environmental regulation assembled throughout the neoliberal shift and the enduring capacity of this *dispositif* to produce and re-produce scarcity and ecological conflict, conditions that persisted well into the first decade of the 21st century. During the NEM period, fisheries policies focused almost entirely on the harvesting sector and were mainly defined in economic terms, while paying lip service to the need to preserve the long-term sustainability of the natural-resource base through a responsible and sustainable approach to fisheries management. In this context, the main objectives pursued throughout the neoliberal restructuring process were to increase fisheries production; to expand the under-exploited fisheries grounds of the Argentine Sea, whilst preserving the main species already under full exploitation; and to promote the diversification of catches away from the mono-exploitation of a few commercial species. Additional objectives pursued during the NEM were the expansion and modernisation of the national fleet; the attraction of foreign investments; and the promotion of increasing exports.

¹²¹ Even during the peak years in terms of catches, Argentine domestic consumption was still relatively low in comparison to the world average of 14.4 kg/capita and 24.3 kg/capita in Western Europe.

Section 4.1 offers an overview of the main ecosystems and fisheries groups in the Argentine Sea, essential to appreciate the state and diversity of the natural-resource base before and after the neoliberal turn. The following section analyses the changing structure of the national fleet, paying particular attention to the mechanisms that facilitated the importing of ‘excess’ fishing capacity from third countries to the national waters. Section 4.3 examines the production of ‘scarcity’, exploring the link between the transnationalisation of fishing rights and the rapid decline of the main commercial species. The analysis then moves to explore the connections between the expansion of harvesting and the commercialisation of fish and seafood products in the domestic and export markets. The chapter concludes by examining how the production and re-production of scarcity and ecological conflict became a paramount feature of the differential sustainability system propelled by the neoliberal *dispositif*.

The economic circuit of the fisheries sector is complex and its performance and development is highly dependant on a series of factors defined by the economic and biological characteristics of the resources under exploitation. For statistical purposes, the circuit is often broken down into three subsystems shown in Figure 4.1, to which I refer throughout this and the following chapter. The production subsystem is constituted by the subsystems of primary production or marine fishing and secondary production or industrial manufacturing; the commercialisation subsystem is integrated by the wholesale and retail subsystems; and the consumption subsystem is constituted by the domestic and external consumption subsystems. The harvesting sub-sector is organised by different types of agents often differentiated according to the type of fleet. Considering the secondary sector, industrial fishing production is classified by types of product and production processes and by sales destinations (domestic market and exports).

Figure 4.1 Economic circuit of the fisheries sector



Source: Elaborated on the basis of Bertolotti et al. (1985).

While this chapter examines the impact of the neoliberal restructuring process upon the national fisheries and across the above three subsystems, Chapter 5 focuses on deconstructing

the impact of this process on Mar del Plata's fisheries sector, focusing on the local hake industry, the backbone of the sector and epicentre of the Fisheries War unleashed towards the turn of the 21st century.

The analysis is based on a large number of statistical sources, which have been triangulated for the consistency of the data presented. It also involves the critical examination of a number of studies elaborated in the late 1990s, commissioned by the GoA and international organisations such as the World Bank, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and FAO and the reports produced by national and international NGOs, such as CEDEPESCA, Greenpeace and the World Fund for the Conservation of Nature (WFCN), as well as insights from a number of key informants interviewed during the fieldwork.

4.1 Unpacking the harvesting sector

4.1.1 The natural-resource base

Within the Southwest Atlantic, the Argentine continental shelf is one of the most extensive and long maritime shelves of the world.¹²² Figure 4.2 shows a profile of the continental shelf of Argentina at latitude 38° S, with an indication of the location of different fish stocks.¹²³ The main commercial species – both coastal and offshore resources – are located within the 200 miles of the Argentine EEZ.

In geopolitical terms two main fishing jurisdictions can be distinguished. The EEZ and the ZCP, which limits fishing by Argentine flagged vessels up to latitude 34°S.¹²⁴ Figure 4.3 shows the five main fisheries bio-geographic regions within the Argentine Shelf and adjacent waters. These regions overlap to a large extent with the ecosystems of the Argentine Sea (Figure 4.4) and allow an appreciation of the ecological characteristics of the main fisheries complexes.¹²⁵

¹²² It covers about 1 million km² and extends along 4,700 km between latitudes 35°S and 55°S, with depths ranging from 50-550 m. The narrowest part of the shelf corresponds to the coast of Buenos Aires province and within it, to Mar del Plata's coast, where it has a width of just 210 km. The maximum width is of 850 km in the area of the Malvinas Islands.

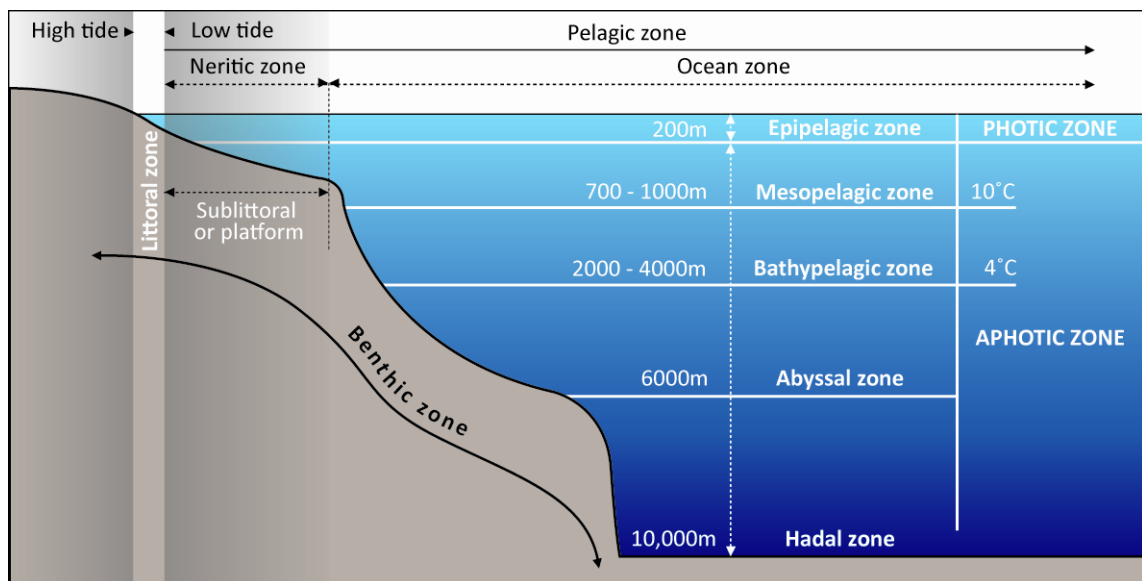
¹²³ A main distinction can be established between neritic and oceanic stocks and demersal/benthonic and pelagic species. *Neritic* species are those largely confined to the continental shelf and upper slope. *Oceanic* stocks are those located in the deep-sea waters beyond the edge of the continental shelf. *Demersal and benthonic* species are those organisms living on the bottom sediments, whilst *pelagic* species are those found in surface waters.

¹²⁴ As noted earlier, since 1982, the 200 miles around Malvinas Islands have been controlled by the UK.

¹²⁵ Most studies and official documents on the Argentine fisheries sector make reference to three main fishing zones: (1) the Argentine-Uruguayan Common Fisheries Zone; (2) the Buenos Aires coastal fishing zone; and (3) the southern fishing zones, covering the greatest area of the continental shelf.

In both cases, geographic limits are not precise, as the main species in each region might vary seasonally or in specific latitudinal and bathymetric zones of the sea, while certain species form part of several bio-geographic regions. Still, the geographic distribution of species is an important variable to understand the nature of fisheries management. In addition, it allows a better appreciation of the impact of the geographical shift resulting from the liberalisation and increased exploitation promoted by the policy reforms introduced since 1976 and deepened under the NEM.

Figure 4.2 Profile of the Argentine continental shelf (latitude 38°S)

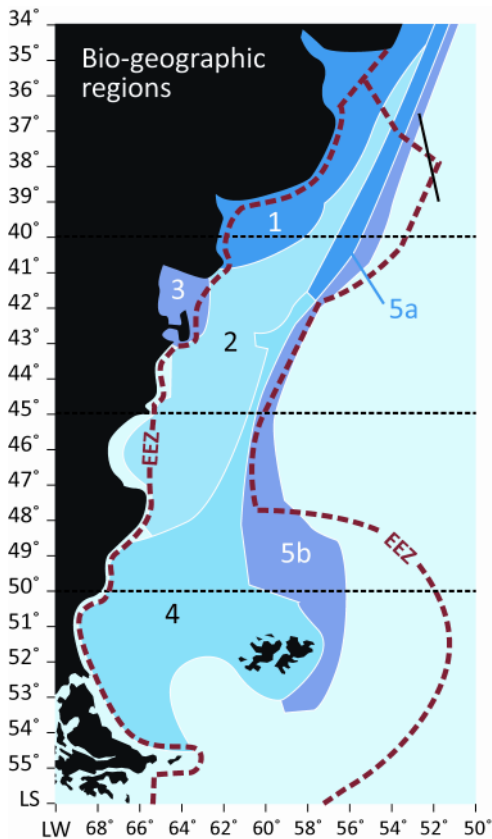


Source: Adapted from Fundación Patagonia Natural (2008: 18). Redrawn by the author.

Bio-geographic region 1 is the habitat of coastal species and comprises two ecosystems. The first covers Rio de la Plata and its area of influence, and is characterised by its high hydrological complexity and low salinity. This zone records the highest volume of polluting substances disposed in the Argentine Sea. From the fisheries viewpoint, this is the winter habitat of anchovy and presents a significant diversity of planktonic species. The second ecosystem within this bio-geographic region corresponds to the coastal ecosystem of the shelf of Buenos Aires province. This is the best-defined ecosystem and coincides with the so-called 'Argentine Province of the Sub-Antarctic Region'. In ecological terms, it is characterised as a regenerative highly stable and diversified ecosystem. Coastal demersal fisheries in this zone comprise approximately 16 species.¹²⁶ The main commercial species is the Argentine hake, followed by other species of lower commercial value such as flounder, silver bream, golden kingclip and dogfish.

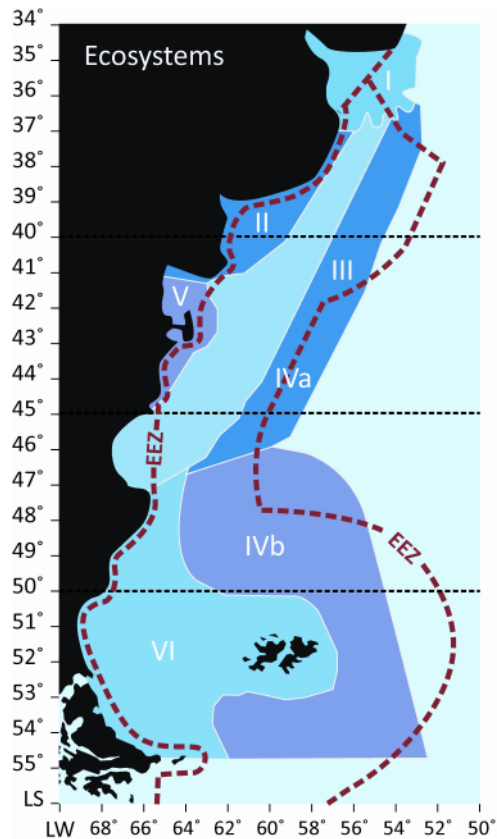
¹²⁶ These include red snapper, croacker, smooth hound, flounder, grouper, sea trout, angel fish and flathead.

Figure 4.3 Fisheries bio-geographic regions



Source: Boschi et al (2001: 14)

Figure 4.4 Ecosystems of the Argentine Sea



Source: Boschi et al (2001: 6)

The second bio-geographic region corresponds to the internal and external shelves of the Buenos Aires and Patagonia regions, runs between latitudes 34°S and 48°S and has an estimated surface of about 500,000 km². This region is the permanent habitat of about 38 species of fish, crustacean and mollusc species.¹²⁷ Among demersal species, Argentine hake is the dominant resource in quantitative terms. An important characteristic of this bio-geographic region is that demersal and pelagic species are associated in the food chain through vertical migration cycles.

Bio-geographic region 3 comprises the north Patagonian sector of the 'Three Gulfs'¹²⁸ between latitudes 41°S and 43°S, with depths ranging from 50-170 m, and a surface of approximately 14,000 km². In general terms, this bioregion has the same composition and community integration of bio-geographic region 2, although there is a lower relative abundance of demersal and pelagic species. In quantitative terms, Argentine hake is also the main species, followed by hoki.

¹²⁷ Most of the species belong to the demersal-benthonic community (68 percent) and to a lesser extent to the demersal-pelagic (21 percent) and pelagic (11 percent) species (Boschi et al, 2001).

¹²⁸ Golfo San Matías, Golfo San José and Golfo Nuevo.

The fourth bio-geographic region corresponds to the austral fishery grounds of the shelves of Patagonia, Tierra del Fuego and the Malvinas Islands and includes the largest area of the Argentine shelf. The zone extends along the external shelf to the north, until parallel 42°S, has a surface of about 285,000 km² and depths of 30-220 m. It has a great variety of species, including southern blue whiting, hoki, Patagonian hake, golden kingclip and Patagonian cod, among those of highest commercial value. The fifth bio-geographic region comprises the deep waters of the continental slope, between latitudes 35°S and 55°S, with depths ranging from 220-2,300 m. The main species in this region correspond to demersal-benthonic communities.

The Argentine shelf is located in a zone of temperate and sub-Antarctic climate. As a result, marine biodiversity is lower than in tropical zones but the shelf enjoys the benefit of more stable species of higher biomass. The total biomass of fishing resources in the Argentine Sea is estimated in 8.5 million tonnes. However, fish stocks within the national EEZ are not extraordinarily rich; it is estimated that marine resources under this zone amounted in the mid-1990s to no more than 1,600,000 tonnes, a figure which is equivalent to the TAC established for all the main commercial species in that year.

The main commercial species are: Argentine hake, Argentine short-fin squid and Argentine red shrimp. The Argentine hake has traditionally been the main commercial species due to its high demand and value in the international market. Its characteristics make it particularly suitable for ice conservation. Table 4.1 characterises the main 26 species exploited in the Argentine Sea in the 1990s.¹²⁹ These species vary in terms of their location, migration cycles and lifespan and are targeted by different economic agents. According to CEDEPESCA (2000), out of these, in 1999 six were overexploited, 12 were fished-up to the maximum advisable levels and only four still showed potential for increased exploitation, whilst the degree of exploitation of the rest varied significantly within the continental shelf.¹³⁰ Considering just the three main commercial species, by the end of the 1990s, the Argentine hake showed signs of severe depletion, whilst the short-fin squid and red shrimp fisheries were fully exploited.¹³¹


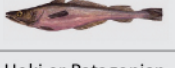







¹²⁹ Elaborated on the basis of data from INIDEP and Lery et al. (1999).

¹³⁰ Only the status of those species for which there is a consistent diagnosis is included in Table 4.1.

¹³¹ The last two species are highly vulnerable, and their availability varies significantly depending of the outcomes of each reproductive season. Due to their short lifecycle, it is impossible to define long-term harvest levels to ensure their regeneration; therefore, the concept of MSY is not really applicable in these two cases. Generally, these fisheries are managed by monitoring each year's recruitment and evolution. On the basis of this information, the TAC is established every year seeking to ensure that there is enough spawner escape to guarantee an adequate re-production in the following year.

Table 4.1 Main Argentine maritime species.




Type of species: Demersal species (OFFSHORE RESOURCES)

Denomination (scientific and Spanish name)	Main location of stocks and seasonal variations	Ecological characteristics and status in 1999	Fishing gear and main landing ports	Products and main markets
Argentine Hake, Whiting (<i>Merluccius hubbsi</i>) (<i>Merluza hubbsi</i> or <i>común</i>) 	All year. Latitude 34° to 46°S; different locations and depth ranging from 50 to 400 metres	Relatively long-lived species. Well defined migration cycle on the shelf with location and depth vary between summer and winter. Status: over-fished	Bottom trawl BsAs: Mar del Plata, Necochea Patagonia: Puerto Madryn, Puerto Deseado, Comodoro Rivadavia	Products: Frozen headed and gutted (H&G), regular fish blocks, interleaved fillets, defatted fillets and IFQ graded fillets breaded portions and sticks Markets: Domestic / Brazil, Spain, Holland, Italy, USA, France, Israel and Germany.
Patagonian Hake or Antarctic Queen (<i>Merluccius australis</i>) (<i>Merluza austral</i>) 	South 36°S, over the continental shelf and to the south of Malvinas	Catches in 1998: 3,126 TAC in 1998: 4,000 Status: over-fished	Bottom trawl and palangre de fondo BsAs: Mar del Plata, Necochea Patagonia: Ushuaia, Puerto Deseado, San Antonio Oeste	Products: Whole, H&G and fillets Markets: Domestic / Japan, USA, Chile and China
Hoki or Patagonian Grenadier (<i>Macruronus magellanicus</i>) (<i>Merluza de cola</i>) 	Shelf and shelf-break zone south of 45°S. Seasonal variations.	Short-lived species (at age three it reaches maturity and half of its maximum length) Status: Feasible to increase exploitation in short/medium term	Bottom trawl BsAs: Mar del Plata Patagonia: Puerto Deseado, Ushuaia, Puerto Madryn	Products: Headed and gutted, skinned interleaved fillets and surimi paste Markets: Domestic / Japan, Holland, Spain and South Korea
Southern Blue Whiting (<i>Micromesistius australis</i>) (<i>Polaca</i>) 	Continental slope and Malvinas islands. Between 37°- 47°S in the shelf-break area during winter and spring and between 42°- 54°S in summer, at depths greater than 130 m.	Relatively long-lived. Important prey species for many Patagonian shelf fisheries (including hake) Status: over-fished	Mid water trawls Patagonia: Ushuaia, Puerto Deseado	Products: Surimi paste, frozen whole, H&G and regular fish blocks Markets: Domestic / Japan, Brazil, France and South Korea
Kingclip or Pink Cusk Eel (<i>Genypterus blacodes</i>) (<i>Abadejo</i>) 	Between 41° and 48°S, at depths ranging between 50 and 350 metres. Winter: latitude 41° to 48°S; summer: latitude 43°S to 48°S, continental shelf and slope	Long-lived, slow growth and low fecundity. Status: Fished up to maximum advisable levels	Bottom trawl and long liners. BsAs: Mar del Plata Patagonia: Comodoro Rivadavia, Puerto Deseado, Puerto Madryn	Products: Frozen H&G, interleaved fillets, graded fillets Markets: Domestic / Spain, Brazil, South Korea and Italy
Croaker or Withemouth Croaker (<i>Micropogonias furnieri</i>) (<i>Corvina rubia</i>) 	Along Argentine and Uruguayan coasts (from Buenos Aires up to San Matias Gulf) between 34° and 41°S. Muddy bottoms up to 60 meters depth All year	Long-lived species Status: over-fished	Bottom trawl BsAs: Mar del Plata	Products: H&G, interleaved fillets and graded fillets Markets: Domestic / China, Brazil, Spain, Israel and South Korea
Patagonian Toothfish or Chilean Sea Bass (<i>Dissostichus eleginoides</i>) (<i>Merluza negra</i>) 	Winter: large concentrations latitude 37°S to 39°S of continental slope and south of Malvinas, latitude 52°S to 54°S S. More dispersed along continental shelf and slope during summer.	Relatively long-lived and slow growth species Status: Fished up to maximum advisable levels	Bottom trawl and long lines Patagonia: Ushuaia, Puerto Deseado, Puerto Madryn, Bahía Blanca	Products: Frozen H&G and fillets Markets: Domestic / Japan, USA, Chile and China
Hawkfish (<i>Cheilodactylus bergi</i>) (<i>Castaneta</i>) 		Status: Fished up to maximum advisable levels	Bottom trawl BsAs: Mar del Plata, Necochea	Products: Whole, H&G and fillets Market: Domestic
Patagonian Cod (<i>Sallota australis</i>) (<i>Bacalao austral</i> or <i>bacalao criollo</i>) 	North and west of Malvinas at depths of 200 metres during the winter. More dispersed along the continental shelf and slope during the summer.	Relatively long-lived and slow growth species Status: Fished up to maximum advisable levels	Trawl BsAs: Mar del Plata, Necochea Patagonia: Deseado, Puerto Madryn	Products: Frozen whole, H&G, salted and dried






Type of species: Demersal species (COASTAL)

Denomination (scientific and Spanish name)	Main location of stocks and seasonal variations	Ecological characteristics (life expectancy, migration cycles, etc) and status in 1999	Fishing gear and main landing ports (Buenos Aires Province & Patagonia)	Products and main markets
<p>Red snapper or red porgy (<i>Pagrus pagrus</i>) (Besugo)</p> 		Status: over-fished	<p>Nasas and bottom trawl</p> <p>BsAs: <i>Mar del Plata</i></p>	<p>Products: <i>Chilled and frozen whole, H&G</i></p> <p>Markets: <i>Domestic / Japan, Spain, France and Italy</i></p>
<p>Argentine Sea Bass, Barfish or Grouper (<i>Acanthistius brasilianus</i>) (<i>Mero</i>)</p> 	<p>Along the coastline with largest concentrations to the north of San Jorge Gulf and Peninsula de Valdez. All year round.</p>	Status: Fished up to maximum advisable levels	<p>Bottom trawl</p> <p>BsAs: <i>Mar del Plata, Necochea</i></p> <p>Patagonia: <i>Comodoro Rivadavia, Puerto Madryn, Rawson</i></p>	<p>Products: <i>H&G, regular fish blocks, interleaved fillets, graded fillets, breaded portions and sticks</i></p> <p>Markets: <i>Domestic / Italy, USA, Spain and China</i></p>
<p>Stripped Weak Fish or Sea Trout (<i>Cynoscion striatus</i>) (<i>Pescadilla de red</i>)</p> 	<p>Along the coast north of parallel 44 S and large concentrations along Buenos Aires coastline, all year.</p>	Status: over-fished	<p>Bottom trawl (con un barco o a la pareja)</p> <p>BsAs: <i>Mar del Plata</i></p>	<p>Products: <i>Chilled and frozen whole and fillets</i></p> <p>Markets: <i>Domestic / USA, Brazil, South Korea and China</i></p>
<p>Patagonian Smoothhound (<i>Mustelus schmitti</i>) (<i>Gatuzo</i>)</p> 	<p>Along the coast north of parallel 46 S.</p>	Status: Fished up to maximum advisable levels	<p>Bottom trawl</p> <p>BsAs: <i>Mar del Plata, Necochea</i></p>	<p>Products: <i>Chilled and frozen whole and fillets</i></p> <p>Markets: <i>Domestic / Brazil, Italy, China and Spain</i></p>
<p>Flounder (<i>Familia paralichthyidae</i>) (<i>Lenguado</i>)</p> 	<p>Benthonic species. All along continental slope between 35 S and 43 S</p> <p>All year.</p>	Status: Fished up to maximum advisable levels	<p>Bottom trawl</p> <p>BsAs: <i>Mar del Plata, Necochea</i></p>	<p>Products: <i>Chilled and frozen whole and fillets</i></p> <p>Market: <i>Only domestic</i></p>
<p>Argentine Angel Shark (<i>Squatina argentina</i>) (<i>Pez angel</i>)</p>	<p>Benthonic species. Between 35 S and 43 S.</p>	Status: Different status in different areas	<p>Bottom trawl</p> <p>BsAs: <i>Mar del Plata, Necochea</i></p>	<p>Products: <i>Chilled and frozen, whole and fish blocks</i></p> <p>Markets: <i>Brazil and China</i></p>
<p>Skate (<i>Familia Rajidae</i>) (<i>Raya</i>)</p> 	<p>Benthonic species, different types along the whole Argentine coast.</p>	Status: Different status in different areas	<p>Bottom trawl, palangre y espineles</p> <p>BsAs: <i>Mar del Plata, Necochea</i></p> <p>Patagonia: <i>Deseado, Puerto Madryn, Ushuaia, San Antonio Oeste, Comodoro Rivadavia</i></p>	<p>Products: <i>Frozen onshore and on-board, whole and in portions</i></p> <p>Markets: <i>Domestic / South Korea; France, Spain and China</i></p>
<p>Sea salmon or Brazilian sandperch (<i>Pseudoperca semifasciata</i>) (<i>Salmón de mar</i>)</p> 	<p>Between 35° and 50°S</p>	Status: Fished up to maximum advisable levels	<p>Bottom trawl, espineles. Inshore and offshore fleets</p> <p>BsAs: <i>Mar del Plata, Necochea</i></p> <p>Patagonia: <i>San Antonio</i></p>	<p>Products: <i>Chilled and frozen onshore, whole, H&G and fillets</i></p> <p>Markets: <i>Only domestic</i></p>
<p>Brazilian flathead (<i>Percophis brasilianus</i>) (<i>Pez palo</i>)</p> 	<p>Along the coast, between 35° and 46°S</p> <p>All year; temperate waters.</p>	<p>Benthonic species. Prey species for squid and other demersal species</p> <p>Status: Fished up to maximum advisable levels</p>	<p>Bottom trawl coastal fleet</p> <p>BsAs: <i>Mar del Plata, Necochea</i></p>	<p>Products: <i>Chilled and frozen on land, whole, H&G and fillets</i></p> <p>Markets: <i>Domestic / Brazil</i></p>

Type of species: Pelagic species (COASTAL RESOURCES)

Denomination (scientific and Spanish name)	Main location of stocks and seasonal variations	Ecological characteristics (life expectancy, migration cycles, etc) and status in 1999	Fishing gear and main landing ports (Buenos Aires Province & Patagonia)	Products and main markets
Argentine Anchovy (<i>Engraulis anchoita</i>) Anchoita 	Between Brazil's coast to latitude 48°S. Two main stocks (Buenos Aires and Patagonian) ranging north and south of latitude 41°S respectively. Seasonal variations	Prey species for many other commercial species (including hake) Status: Feasible to increase exploitation in short/medium term	Hoop nets and mid water trawls BsAs: Mar del Plata, Necochea Patagonia: Puerto Madryn	Products: Salted whole, H&G, canned fillets in oil Markets: Domestic / Spain, Morocco, USA, Brazil, Italy
Chub mackerel (<i>Scomber aponicus</i>) (Caballa) 	Between 35° and 45°S. Two main stocks in the north and south of Buenos Aires coast delimited by latitude 39°S. Concentration near Mar del Plata between December and April concentration.	Status: Feasible to increase exploitation in short/medium term	Lampara-like purse seine and mid water trawls BsAs: Mar del Plata	Products: Whole, H&G, canned in oil or tomato sauce Markets: Domestic / Uruguay, Brazil, Holland and Israel
Atlantic bonito (<i>Sarda sarda</i>) (Bonito) 	Off Buenos Aires coastal shelf	Status: Feasible to increase exploitation in short/medium term	Purse seiners BsAs: Mar del Plata	Products: H&G, canned in oil

Type of species: Crustaceans and molluscan species

Denomination (scientific and Spanish name)	Main location of stocks and seasonal variations	Ecological characteristics (life expectancy, migration cycles, etc) and status in 1999	Fishing gear and main landing ports (Buenos Aires Province & Patagonia)	Products and main markets
Argentine Squid or Shortfin Squid (<i>Illex argentinus</i>) (Calamar) 	Wide distribution, between 38° and 47° S in autumn and winter, and off Puerto Deseado and Golfo Nuevo in summer.	Short life cycle (12-14 months). Difficult to define long term harvest levels to ensure reproduction. Status: Fished up to maximum advisable levels	Automatic jigs and bottom trawls BsAs: Mar del Plata Patagonia: Puerto Madryn, Comodoro Rivadavia, Punta Quilla, Puerto Deseado	Products: Salted whole, H&G, canned fillets in oil Markets: Domestic / Spain, Morocco, USA, Brazil, Italy
Patagonian Scallops (<i>Zigochlamys patagonica</i>) 	From Tierra del Fuego to 35°S at depths ranging from 40 to 200 metres	Distribution areas do not change due to reproductive migrations Status: Fished up to maximum advisable levels	Bottom trawls and scallop dredges BsAs: Mar del Plata, Necochea	Products: Whole, half-shelled and IFQ meat Markets: Domestic / USA, Canada, France, Belgium, Holland
Argentine Red Shrimp (<i>Pleoticus Muelleri</i>) 	High concentrations between 23° and 50°S. June to March Patagonian littoral and Buenos Aires coast. Standing out San Jorge Gulf and Camarones Bay	Relatively short life span (2 years) with highly variable growth rates. No MSY can be established. Status: Fished up to maximum advisable levels	Double rig big trawls and bottom trawls Patagonia: Puerto Madryn, Puerto Deseado, Comodoro Rivadavia	Products: Frozen whole, graded, tails in shell and shelled Markets: Domestic / Spain, Japan, Italy, Holland
King Crab (<i>Lithodes santolla</i>) 	Along the coast between Tierra del Fuego and Gulf San Jorge and offshore up to the south of Brazil. Highest concentrations at 30 to 120 ms depth.	Status: Different status in different areas	Bottom trawls and traps Patagonia	Products: Whole and legs
Fake King crab (<i>Paralomis granulosa</i>) 	Between Malvinas and Tierra del Fuego up to Gulf of San Jorge	Status: Different status in different areas	Trap Patagonia	Products: Frozen whole

The distribution and characteristics of the main commercial species are relevant to understand the structure of the harvesting sector as well as the conflicts and competition among different economic agents. As previously noted, defining boundaries in the case of fisheries is more difficult than in the case of other resources, such as forests. This is because most species follow seasonal migration cycles covering long distances. For example, whilst the main concentration of hake and other commercial species is to be found between latitudes 34°S and 46°S, incidental hake catches in the area of Isla Escondida (one of the main areas of hake spawning) have a high impact on the re-production of this species. Another important consideration is the role played by certain prey species in the food chain. For instance, the Argentine anchovy and the southern blue whiting are not only important in economic terms, but are of significant ecological relevance, since they serve as prey for other species. The former is relevant for the survival of Argentine hake, Southern hake and hoki and the latter is associated with hake, short-fin squid, mackerel and sea trout.

The fisheries sector has two particular characteristics due to the nature of the resources exploited. The first one is that different types of technology condition access to specific fisheries and therefore the focus of different economic agents. For instance, the coastal fleet can only access a much more limited range of species than the long-distance fleet, thus it has less options in terms of the species harvested. Second, the economic and ecological viability of different fleets are highly inter-related. This means that competition between fleets and economic groups not only takes place over specific species but the activities of each fleet have considerable consequences on the regeneration of species harvested by other groups.¹³² Thus, while certain groups might not be apparently linked in economic terms, they might be inter-related in ecological terms.

4.1.2 Fleet structure and composition

The harvesting sub-sector can be grouped into three main categories: coastal or inshore fleet, ice-trawl or offshore fleet, and the large catcher/processors fleet. The industrial fleet operates with ice trawlers, freezer trawlers and factory vessels. The former land chilled fresh fish, which is later processed by offshore establishments. However some degree of processing is done onboard, such as classification by size or the so-called headed and gutted (H&G). The freezer fleet preserves harvested species onboard at temperatures below minus 20°C until landing. Factory vessels operate like 'floating factories' doing all processing onboard. Each fleet can be

¹³² For example, overfishing of anchovy, harvested mainly by coastal boats in the littoral of Buenos Aires province, has serious implications for the existence of the main commercial species harvested by the offshore and freezer fleets.

further broken down into more specific categories according to the size of their units, fishing gear and technology (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Stratification of the fleet by size, fishing gear and target species

Fleet	Classification	Type of vessels and size	Fishing gear and technological characteristics	Main operating ports in 1999	Main target fish species (percentage of landings per species in 1999)
Inshore (coastal or yellow fleet)	Stratum I Artisanal fleet	Small coastal boats (10 to 17 metres in length)	No cooling equipment. Catches are packed in ice Family operated	Mar del Plata (70%)	Mainly anchovy
	Stratum II Coastal fleet	Large coastal boats (17 to 25 metres in length)	Refrigerated holds	Mar del Plata (65%) followed by Rawson (21%)	Diversified catches. Flathead and flounder, angel fish, skate, smooth hound, golden kingclip and porgy. Hake (less than 1%)
Off-shore fleet (red fleet or ice-trawlers)	Stratum I	Small ice trawlers (length between 19 and 28 metres)	Bottom trawl Refrigerated holds. This fleet provides chilled products to processing plants on shore. Harvesting and manufacturing are usually vertically integrated	Primarily Mar del Plata (77% of the fleet), followed by Puerto Madryn and Comodoro Rivadavia in the Patagonian region.	Diverse species - Similar to coastal fleet – Stratum II
	Stratum II	Medium ice trawlers (length between 28 and 39 metres)			Predominantly hake and increasingly species harvested by other fleets and strata
	Stratum III	Large ice trawlers (length between 39 and 65 metres)			
Processing fleet (Freezer and factory vessels)	Stratum I	Small freezer trawlers (ships with lengths between 29 and 58 metres)	Freezer trawlers are outfitted with refrigerating plant and freezing equipment. RSW tanks ensure that peaks in the catches can be used. The holds are insulated and refrigerated	Primarily Mar del Plata	Hake until 1993, gradually replaced by Southern blue whiting and hoki
	Stratum II	Medium freezer and factory trawlers (ships with lengths between 59 and 83 metres)	Processing on board (at least 50% of catches) A large variety of fishing technologies and type of vessels including:	Most of the freezer fleet operates in the Patagonian region: Puerto Madryn (26%), Puerto Deseado (25%), Punta Quilla (24%), and only a small percentage in Mar del Plata (18%) Most of the factory fleet operates from three Patagonian ports: Ushuaia (24%), Puerto Deseado (24%) and Puerto Madryn (19%)	Specialised in hake. Also fish squid and king clip
	Stratum III	Large freezer and factory trawlers (ships between 84 and 110 metres long)	Freezer trawlers; factory trawlers (with fishmeal plants); surimi vessels; scallop vessels; shrimp outrigger trawlers; squid jiggers and longliners		Freezer and longliners: hake and Patagonian toothfish Outrigger trawlers: shrimp, hake, squid Surimi vessels: Southern blue whiting and hoki Jiggers: squid (100%)

The inshore fleet – also known as the ‘yellow fleet’ – consists of artisanal and coastal boats accounting in 1998 for 25 percent and 17 percent respectively of the total national fleet. The artisanal fleet (stratum I) is made up of small wooden boats up to 18 m in length, with an average age of 45 years in 1998. These boats set sail and return in the same day, have an autonomy of 15 miles, limited hold capacity (1 to 14 tonnes) and no cooling equipment. They tend to be family-run and operate with rudimentary technology, catches are mostly packed in ice and there is no processing onboard. By the end of the 1990s, 70 percent of this fleet

operated in Mar del Plata and focused almost entirely on the harvesting of anchovy. The larger coastal boats (stratum II), also known as long-distant coastal boats, are technologically more advanced and have larger refrigerated hold capacity (18-40 tonnes). Legally the coastal fleet can only navigate up to 100 miles away from the coast but in practice they do longer journeys lasting from 1 to 12 days. In 1998, the average age of the coastal fleet was of 28 years and most of these boats operated from the ports of Mar del Plata (65 percent) and Rawson (21 percent). The coastal fleet targets a diversity of species, with hake representing less than 1 per cent of its landings, mainly through incidental catches.

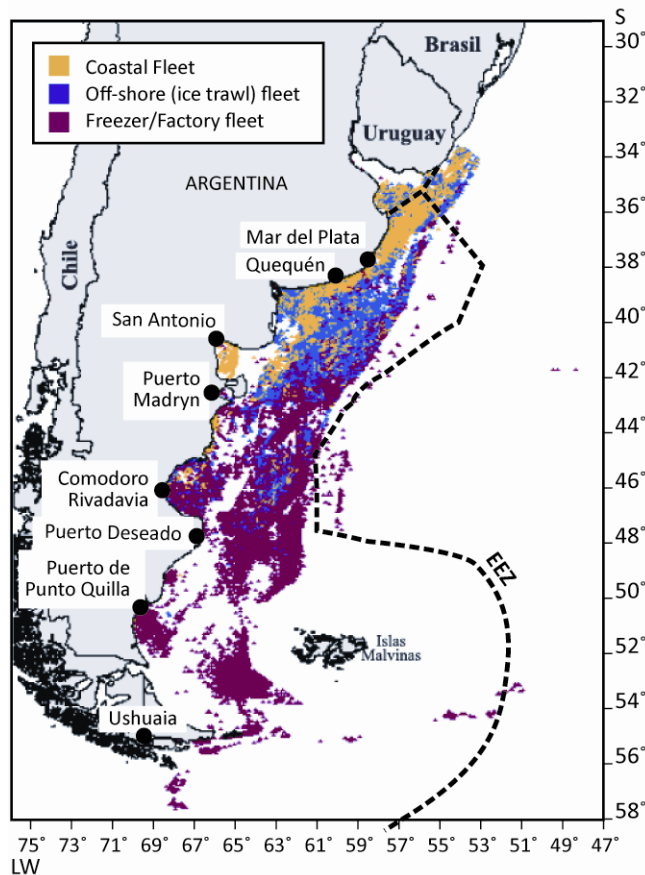
The offshore fleet – known as the ‘red fleet’ after its mandatory colour – consists of ice trawlers averaging 23 years of age in 1998. Ice trawlers have refrigerated holds, where the fish is preserved in ice to be later supplied to onshore processing plants. This fleet is further classified into three strata. The first corresponds to smaller vessels and differs from the other two strata in terms of the composition of catches, which are similar to those of the larger coastal fleet. The larger vessels (strata II and III) are known as the ‘hake fleet’. These two strata were in the 1990s the most vulnerable of all groups due to the overfishing of hake. As hake yield decreased, some vessels shifted partially to other species traditionally caught by stratum I. Strata II and III have been traditionally the main suppliers of hake filleting plants; as a consequence, their vulnerability affects a large part of the fishing industry. Harvesting and processing tend to be vertically integrated, with most vessels owned by firms with onshore plants in Mar del Plata and to a lesser extent in Puerto Madryn and Comodoro Rivadavia.

Finally, the catcher/processor fleet is owned by larger companies and made of large vessels that process what they catch while at sea; with fishing trips lasting up to 60 or 70 days. This fleet includes freezer and factory trawlers, surimi, scallop, shrimp trawlers, jiggers and longliners. The freezer/factory fleet is classified in four strata according to the size and type of fishing gear of the vessels; in 1998 this fleet had an average age of 21 years. Strata I and II correspond to the smaller freezer trawlers whose main target is also the hake. The freezer trawlers incorporated through the agreement with the EU belong to these two categories.

As for the third stratum, hake was the main species in the composition of catches until 1993, replaced afterwards by other pelagic and austral demersal species, particularly hoki. Other vessels within this category include surimi vessels, focused almost exclusively on southern blue whiting and hoki; jiggers focused on squid; and longliners, which seek high-value species including the Patagonian toothfish, southern hake and kingclip. By the late 1990s, about 39 percent of the processing trawlers focused on hake in direct competition with the ice trawler

and coastal fleets. By the end of the 1990s, the factory/freezer fleet operated almost exclusively from Patagonian ports, particularly Ushuaia, Puerto Deseado and Puerto Madryn. In addition, about 18 percent of the freezer fleet operated from Mar del Plata and was owned by the so-called 'integrated' firms, which work both with ice and freezer trawlers and onshore processing plants. Figure 4.5 shows the areas where each fleet operated in 1998.

Figure 4.5 Fishing areas by fleet, 1998



Source: Elaborated on the basis of Bertolotti et al. (2001: 12).

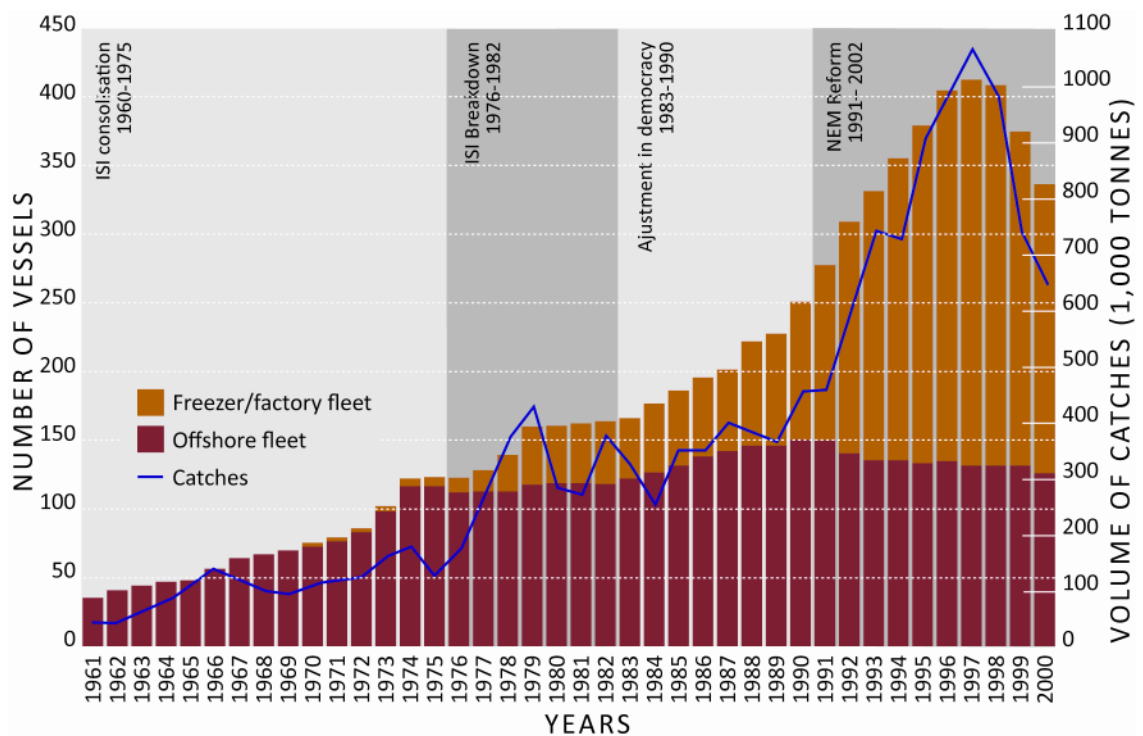
4.2 Technological modernisation or overcapitalisation?

One of the main objectives of the NEM policy reforms in the fisheries sector was to modernise the national fleet. By 'modernisation' the government meant to update the average age of the fleet and to improve its technological equipment with more powerful and selective fishing gear. Enhanced fishing capacity was expected to contribute to the exploitation of underutilised stocks, whilst diminishing pressure on the main commercial species. Before proceeding to analyse the extent to which these policy objectives were effectively achieved, a characterisation of the national-flagged fleet before and after the NEM is in order.

4.2.1 Growing fishing effort

Until 1960, harvesting was mainly performed with coastal boats. The inshore fleet operated primarily from the harbour of Mar del Plata and accounted for about 67 percent of all catches in the 1940s and 58 percent in the 1950s, whilst the rest corresponded to the offshore fleet. By 1963 catches from the latter slightly surpassed those of the inshore fleet and by 1975 ice trawlers accounted for over 62 per cent of total national catches. As noted earlier, the development of the offshore fleet took place in the shelter of ISI policies, first through subsidies that helped develop the national shipbuilding industry and later through reduced import tariffs. Thus, during the 1960s this fleet grew mostly through the incorporation of nationally built units (44) and to lesser extent through imported vessels (17). Throughout the last few years of the ISI period (1970-1975), the offshore fleet continued growing at a similar rate but mostly through imported vessels (74), while the contribution from the national shipbuilding industry (11) started to decline (Figure 4.6). Looking at the number of ice trawlers unlisted between 1960 and 1975, it is possible to see that rather than expanding, the offshore fleet was updated with more modern units replacing the oldest vessels (Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.6 Evolution of number of vessels by fleet and volume of catches, 1960-2000

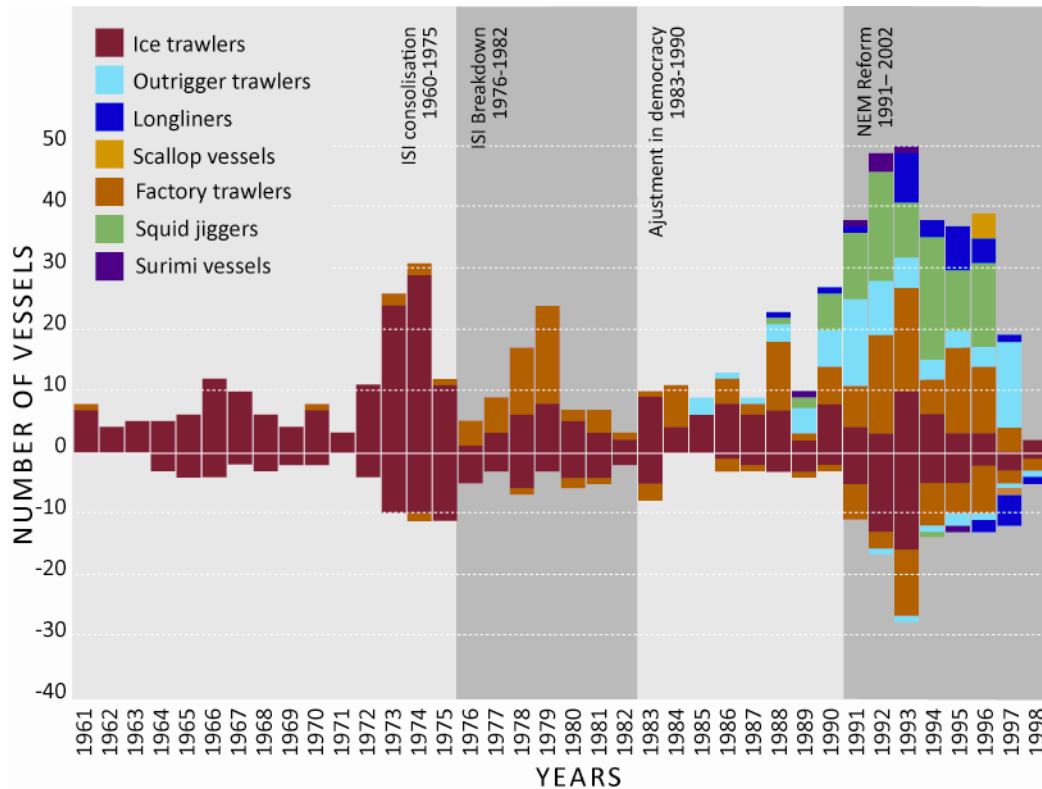


Source: Elaborated on the basis of Bertolotti et al. (2001: 24)

During the first phase of the lead-to-NEM period (1976-1981), the size of the offshore fleet remained almost the same as in 1974, while the number of freezer/factory units imported became more significant. Still, throughout the 1980s, the offshore fleet accounted for the

majority of national landings.¹³³ From 1991 the physiognomy of the harvesting sector started to change more dramatically, with the processing fleet outnumbering the offshore fleet and total catches rocketing in a relative short period of time.

Figure 4.7 Industrial fleet units incorporated and unlisted (in thousand of tonnes), 1961-1998



Source: Elaborated on the basis of Bertolotti et al. (2001: 24)

As shown in Figure 4.7, during the NEM period a large number of fishing units were unlisted. In some cases this is a reflection of offshore vessels going out of business or ceding their licenses to the processing fleet under mixed-capital joint ventures. The registration and unlisting of processing vessels in very short periods of time is more intriguing and difficult to explain. One plausible explanation is that many of these vessels were only incorporated under short-term licenses. According to a researcher from INIDEP interviewed during the fieldwork, some of the variations recorded from 1993 onwards correspond to fraudulent practices, in which processing vessels were registered under the national-flagged fleet and soon unlisted, “disappearing from the records of the national registry and therefore reported landings were not necessarily recorded as harvested from the Argentine Sea” (Fieldwork interview with M.I.B., INIDEP Fisheries Economics Group, 23/08/2000).

¹³³ Between 1986 and 1990 the processing fleet grew at a rate of about three vessels per year but since 1991, on average, almost 21 vessels were incorporated per year to the processing fleet.

Two approaches are usually adopted to assess fishing capacity, focused respectively on fishing inputs (potential productivity) and fishing outputs (actual productivity). Among the most common indicators used to measure the former are the horse power (HP) and gross registered tonnage¹³⁴ (GRT) of vessels, whilst fishing outputs are usually measured in terms of recorded landings and/or catches. Some authors argue that the latter “may be volatile due to both biological and economic factors” (Thorpe et al., 2000: 1694), making input indicators more reliable. In the case under analysis, both indicators show similar trends in the evolution of the national harvesting capacity.

Looking at changes in the GRT of the industrial fishing fleets in Latin America before and after the NEM, Thorpe et al. (1999, 2000) found contrasting trends among the 15 countries analysed in the region (Table 4.3).¹³⁵

Table 4.3 Gross registered tonnage of Latin America’s industrial fishing fleets, 1970-1995

Country	GRT 1970	NEM Date	GRT at NEM date	Current GRT	Average Annual Growth (% p.a.)	
					Pre-	Post-
Chile	16	1975	15.4	168.2	-0.8	12.7
Costa Rica	0	1986	5.2	3.1	N/A	-5.6
Mexico	8.1	1988	288.5	299.6	22	0.5
Venezuela	26.5	1989	88.1	95.5	6.5	1.4
El Salvador	409	1989	3.5	3.6	-1.8	0.5
Peru	61.6	1990	128.6	157	3.8	4.1
Argentina	9.5	1991	128.7	212.6	13.2	13.4
Nicaragua	*	1991	12.1	12.4	N/A	0.6
Colombia	0.1	1991	4.3	14.1	19.6	34.6
Guatemala	0.8	1991	2.9	2.5	6.3	-3.6
Uruguay	1.8	1991	14.4	20.6	10.4	9.4
Honduras	0.8	1992	14.4	14.8	14	0.9
Ecuador	15.7	1992	49.1	52.7	5.3	2.4
Brazil	8	1994	19.2	17.8	3.7	-
Panama	12.1	1995	346.4	-	14.4	-
TOTAL	165	-	-	1400.9	-	-

Note: GRT figures are in thousand tonnes. (*) Signifies less than 100 GRT.
Source: Adapted from Thorpe et al. (2000: 1694).

A first group, including Brazil and Mexico, experienced a decline in fleet growth rates after the NEM. Typically these countries had undergone a process of overcapitalisation and/or over-fishing before the NEM, thus neoliberal reforms added little incentives for new investments.

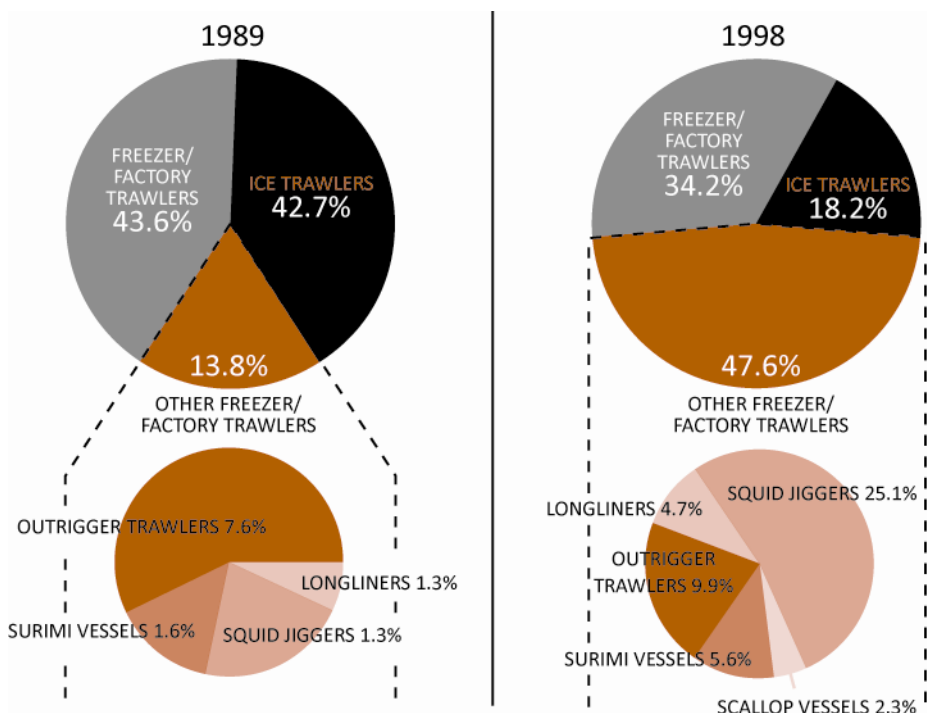
¹³⁴ GRT is the volume of space within the hull and enclosed spaces above the deck of a merchant ship that are available for cargo, stores, fuel, passengers and crew.

¹³⁵ In this study, an economy is deemed to be following NEM policies after it has both implemented a trade liberalization programme *and* stabilized inflation (IDB, 1996: 77).

By contrast, Chile and Colombia recorded a significant annual growth after the adoption of the NEM, whilst Peru – traditionally the main fishing country in the region – experienced moderate growth. In the case of Argentina, GRT was rather modest in 1970 but underwent a sustained annual growth both throughout the lead-to-NEM and NEM periods. By 1970, Argentina occupied the sixth position among all countries analysed. By 1991 the expansion of the Argentine fishing capacity had been spectacular, a trend that continued in the following years, placing Argentina as the third country in the region in 1995 in terms of the GRT of its industrial fishing fleet.

A further look at the composition of the industrial fleet allows a more detail examination of the differences between the lead-to-NEM and the NEM periods. As noticed previously, during the NEM, the offshore fleet decreased while the long-distance fleet grew at great speed. Considering changes in HP, between 1986 and 1990, the ice trawl fleet expanded at an annual rate of 3,520 HP, which decreased between 1991 and 1996 to 2,896 HP. By contrast the processing fleet grew at an annual rate of 2,788 HP during the first period and was higher than 28,000 per year between 1991 and 1995, a rate ten times higher that the growth rate recorded for the ice trawl fleet during the same period. Considering the comparative structure of the two fleets in terms of HP capacity, while in 1989 the offshore fleet accounted for almost 43 percent of the HP of the industrial fleet, by 1998, it had decreased to just over 18 percent (Figure 4.8).

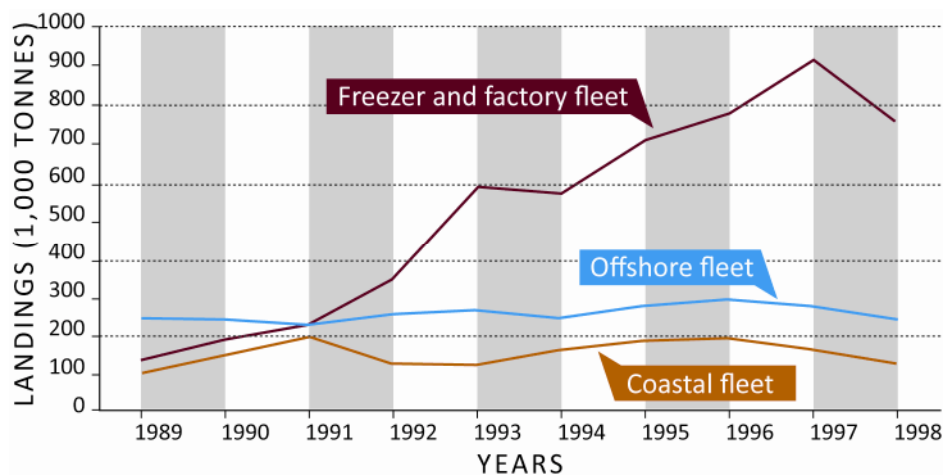
Figure 4.8 Comparative structure of the industrial fleet in 1989 and 1998



Source: Elaborated on the basis of Bertolotti et al. (2001: 31)

The evolution in HP growth shows a close correlation with the evolution of landings by each fleet (Figure 4.9). Between the late 1980s and 1997, the landings by the inshore and ice trawl fleets remained almost the same, but whilst the freezer and factory fleet accounted for only 28 per cent of total landings in 1989, the share of this fleet in 1997 was almost 50 per cent.

Figure 4.9 Landings by fleet type, 1988-2002



Source: Based on data from SAGPyA and CFI Statistical Series.

Thus, different indicators point to the same trend: after 1976 the Argentine marine fleet was subjected to a significant process of expansion and overcapitalisation, a trend that became even more pronounced with the adoption of NEM policies in 1991. The chief of cabinet of the Chilean under-secretary of fisheries at the time characterises the emphasis on the extractive rather than processing potential development of fisheries as a model that emerged in the post-War World II period (Pávez, 1994, cited in Christy, 1996). However, in Argentina (and Chile) this model was characteristic of the neoliberal policy turn, deepened under the NEM. Pávez goes on to distinguish between two approaches in this model: (1) the ‘intensification of production’, pursued through an increase in the number of vessels or improvements in the fishing gear used to fish traditionally exploited stocks; and (2) the ‘extensification of production’, aimed at expanding “the fleet’s area of operation to new fishing grounds, or exploitation of underexploited stocks” (ibid.: 20).

In the case of Argentina, the policies adopted during the lead-to-NEM period corresponded to the second approach described above. In other words, the intention was to increase the economic outputs of the fishery sector through the expansion of the extractive capacity of the fleet over extended-shelf species or South Patagonia species, which explains the take off of the squid and southern blue whiting fisheries, previously untapped. This led to a relative degree of diversification of the main commercial species. During the NEM period both

approaches were combined, at least in theory, although in practice there was no further diversification but rather a significant intensification of the pressure exerted over a few stocks, notably Argentine hake, southern blue whiting and squid. I now turn to examine the mechanisms that underpinned the overcapitalisation of the national-flagged fleet.

4.2.2 'Benign' and 'perverse' subsidies

There is a close link between the rapid overcapitalisation of the fleet operating in Argentine waters and the use of foreign subsidies that made possible the transference of fishing capacity from third countries. The definition of what constitutes a subsidy and the desirability of subsidies are subject to contentious debate. Thus, it is common to find in the literature a distinction between 'positive' or 'benign' and 'negative' or 'perverse' subsidies. From a neoliberal viewpoint subsidies are 'perverse' when they 'distort' the functioning of the market. However, while domestic subsidies applied by developing countries are often regarded as 'negative', foreign subsidies adopted by developed countries to protect the operation of their own firms in the south are often defined as 'positive'.

Whilst in the 1980s and 1990s national subsidies were almost banned from the discourse and practice of countries undergoing SAPs, the use of subsidies by which many developed countries helped their companies to access fisheries in the south were often treated with more benevolence. However, following the alarm raised primarily by FAO (1992) about the use of subsidies to transfer fishing capacity to distant waters and their impact on overcapitalization and over-fishing, throughout the 1990s subsidies in the fisheries sector became subjected to new scrutiny. This led several intergovernmental organisations such as the World Bank, UNEP and World Trade Organization (WTO) to look into this issue. The resulting studies reveal a significant lack of coherence in terms of the definition of what a subsidy exactly constitutes and also a general lack of systematic and updated information on fisheries subsidies. Furthermore, the problem with most subsidy definitions internationally applied is that they have been adopted to identify and assess trade-related economic impacts and not environmental effects. In an influential study commissioned by the World Bank, Milazzo (1997) addresses this shortcoming by distinguishing between two categories of fisheries subsidies: 'effort and capacity-enhancing' and 'effort and capacity-reducing' subsidies. Needless to say, the former have a deleterious environmental impact as they lead to overcapacity and in turn over-fishing.

In the case of the Argentine fisheries sector, only a handful of studies have focused on gathering information about the role of subsidies in the transformation of the national fisheries sector that took place during the NEM period. Most of these studies were developed by CEDEPESCA and focused on the outcomes of the EU-Argentina agreement ratified in 1994 (Godelman et al., 1999). In addition, a study commissioned by UNEP (Onestini, 2001) provides a comprehensive overview of the main subsidies applied to Argentine fisheries throughout the 1990s.¹³⁶ The analysis of these sources complemented by primary research of SAGPyA records confirms that the overcapitalisation of the fleet operating in Argentine waters during the restructuring process was directly linked to the use of foreign 'effort and capacity enhancing' subsidies. In other words, the application of foreign subsidies throughout the neoliberal restructuring process (and particularly during the NEM) promoted more intense fishing effort and added fishing capacity in the Argentine Sea.

Domestic subsidies were also applied during the restructuring period but were in comparison negligible, and perhaps more difficult to unravel, as many government transfers to the fisheries sector were not defined as subsidies but as 'incentives'. Onestini (2001: 16) argues that "[a]lthough the levels of [domestic] subsidies are not nearly as great as those applied in developed countries and are non-actionable under WTO rules due to their characteristics, the fishery industry operating in Argentina with different capital origin has received a series of explicit and implicit subsidies, as well as environmental subsidies in the 1990s". He goes on to identify four main types of fisheries subsidies applied by the GoA: (1) reimbursements for fisheries processed products exported; (2) export reimbursements from Patagonian harbours; (3) fuel-tax subsidy for Patagonian activities (applied to all activities not only fisheries); and (4) environmental subsidies. The first three were used to promote exports and the development of the national fisheries in the Patagonian region and are examined in the next section. According to Porter (1998: 6), 'environmental' or 'natural resource' subsidies take place "when a government permits private business to remove a natural resource from the public domain at little or no cost to the producer". In the absence of this type of subsidies, it is estimated that governments should levy fees for about 15 to 20 percent of the commercial value of catches.

In Argentina, rent-extraction charges for the exploitation of fisheries were practically non-existent and no net revenue was levied from the sector during the restructuring process. According to Schonberger and Agar (2001) in 1996, the national gross fisheries product amounted to an estimated USD 1,500 million. In the same year, the GoA fisheries

¹³⁶ This study was part of a set of six projects undertaken by UNEP to assess the environmental effects of trade liberalisation and other related policies in developing countries. The other five country-projects included China, Senegal, Tanzania, Ecuador and Nigeria (Onestini, 2001).

management budget amounted to about USD 30 million, but only USD 4.3 million was recovered for management purposes, amounting to 0.29 percent of the gross fisheries product generated by the sector. Considering the fisheries management budget spent and recovered throughout the 1990s, the above figures are consistent and show that on average only 14.5 percent of the management budget (control, monitoring, administration and research costs) was recovered by the GoA (Onestini, 2001). This means that contrary to neoliberal orthodoxy, a large volume of implicit 'environmental subsidies' were transferred to the private sector through the rent realised from the appropriation of national fishing stocks.

There is enough evidence at the international level to argue against the benefits of a rent-recovery approach in the exploitation of natural resources and indeed in the fisheries sector (Chapman, 1989; Jones, 2007). Prior to the restructuring process, the GoA resisted the introduction of catch fees, arguing that they constituted a disincentive to the sector. The view at the time corresponds to a context in which national fish stocks were largely underexploited and their extraction was almost exclusively confined to national firms that integrated harvesting and processing, thus generating significant benefits in terms of the generation of employment in a number of localities, and particularly in the harbour of Mar del Plata. However, the government continued to resist the adoption of catch fees even after the abandonment of the ISI model, when fishing rights were opened up to foreign fleets and the capacity of the sector to generate employment decreased, at least in relation to the rent appropriated from expanding harvesting. A significant proportion of the additional fishing capacity incorporated in Argentine waters in the 1990s was in fact associated with the processing fleet, while harvesting and processing became increasingly delinked, with a deleterious effect on the generation of jobs. Catch fees were finally implemented at the beginning of 2001 and the total income from fishing rights in that year was estimated to reach about USD 11 million, with another USD 6.5 million levied in the same year through provincial fees (Onestini, 2001).

During the NEM, the main argument against catch fees was that they were a threat to FDI. This view was backed up by some of the pressure groups representing the interests of the fisheries sector but denounced by others as a concealed form of privatising economic benefits, whilst 'socialising the costs' of overfishing and depletion and raising competition and conflict between the ice trawl and processing fleets, onboard and onshore processing and national and foreign firms, a debate examined in detail in Chapters 5 and 7.

As highlighted before, prior to the restructuring process, fishing licenses were unrestricted and only granted to national firms. Fishing licenses issued to foreign companies were rare and only used on an experimental and temporary basis during the ISI and more widely applied in the lead-to-NEM period. During the NEM the situation changed significantly; in 1991 the government introduced a generalised licensing system, under which companies planning to incorporate new vessels had to submit an investment proposal to SAGPyA. Approved projects received a restricted license that set limitations either in terms of the species and/or the allowed volume of catches. This limited entry regime was complemented by the introduction of a TAC for certain species. During this period, the economic crisis forced a large number of companies out of business, most of them operating with ice trawlers, a trend examined in Chapter 5. However and despite the increasing number of national firms that went into bankruptcy and the introduction of a limited entry regime, catches and fishing effort continued to grow throughout the 1990s.

By 1999 there were about 1,000 fishing licenses categorised in five main groups: (1) unrestricted licenses, (2) restricted licenses by species or fishing zone, (3) special licenses issued to a particular type of vessels (i.e. longline vessels), (4) restricted licenses approved by Resolution 985, and (5) licenses issued by the provincial governments.¹³⁷ Restricted licenses had been introduced in 1994 (prior to the EU Agreement), establishing that every new vessel replacing an existing one was to automatically transform its unrestricted license into a restricted one. These licenses stipulated the target species and quotas that each vessel could harvest annually, the latter to be defined according to the HP of the new vessel. After 1991, SAGPyA approved a large number of licenses, either in response to firm pressures or to meet the conditions established in bilateral agreements. In all cases, licenses were used as an incentive to attract FDI and export revenue rather than to organise the sector. The overlap of different license regimes gave rise not only to numerous conflicts among national and foreign companies but also to a significant number of legal suits pursued by private firms against the state and also between different government jurisdictions, rendering the governability of the fisheries sector increasingly difficult.

4.2.3 Importing 'excess' fishing capacity

The above outcome should be examined in the light of two previous mechanisms used to open up the national EEZ to foreign vessels. The first was the so-called 'chartering regime',

¹³⁷ The latter were precarious licenses granted in open contradiction to the two-mile provincial jurisdiction, by which the governments of the Provinces of Rio Negro and Chubut issued fishing licenses to vessels operating in the EEZ, beyond their coastal jurisdiction.

introduced in the aftermath of the Malvinas war (Decree 1,493/82), through which the GoA reduced tariffs on imported vessels to 4-10 percent of the vessel's value, with the objective of helping "Argentine fishermen take advantage of the large number of relatively modern, but inexpensive used vessels available on international markets" (Weidner and Hall, 1993: 267, cited in Thorpe et al, 2000: 1695). This regime also aimed to regularise the situation of vessels from Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and Spain fishing around the Malvinas Islands but, in the 1990s, it led to a significant incorporation of jigger vessels from Southeast Asian countries and to a dramatic increase in squid catches. This regime was expanded in the early 1990s, when:

[i]nvestment in the sector increased noticeably, encouraged by the exemption of new vessels from trade taxes, simplified procedures for 'naturalising' foreign vessels introduced under the 1992 Fisheries Law, an Executive 1992 Decree that permitted Argentine firms to lease foreign vessels... Exports were further encouraged in September 1993, when EU vessels were granted permission to fish Argentine waters in return for a two-thirds reduction in EU tariffs on Argentine fish products. (Thorpe et al., 1999: 5)

By 1999 there were 106 squid jiggers operating in the national EEZ, almost 54 percent of which were chartered vessels. Out of the nearly 200,000 tonnes of squid catches recorded in 1995, half corresponded to foreign vessels incorporated under this provision. Accidental by-catches by this fleet added pressure on the re-production of hake (Godelman et al., 1999).

The second mechanism refers to the fishing licenses granted to foreign fleets in the framework of bilateral agreements between Argentina and third countries or with the EU block. Both the chartering regime and the bilateral agreements were supported by different types of foreign subsidies, examined below. As discussed earlier, by 1991 and previous to the Fisheries Agreement signed with the EU, the processing fleet had already experienced a significant expansion. This was a direct consequence of a mechanism introduced by the then EEC in 1990 to promote the constitution of joint ventures between European ship-owners and partners from other countries (Regulation No. 3944/90). According to Godelman et al. (1999), 66 European vessels were introduced in Argentina through joint ventures between 1990 and 1995 and the subsidies granted to European companies for this purpose rose to an estimated €82 million (approximately USD 100 million), ranging from €37,000 for vessels of less than 100 GRT and more than 20 years of age to €975,000 for vessels of less than ten years of age and between 100 and 400 GRT (Table 4.4).¹³⁸

¹³⁸ During the life of this resolution, the average exchange rate was €1 = USD 1.2.

Table 4.4 GRT and age of European vessels subsidised through the joint ventures regime

Vessel category by GRT	Age of the vessel	No of vessels	Percentage in each category
Less than 100 GRT	Less than 10 years	-	-
	10-20 years	-	-
	More than 20 years	-	-
Between 100 and 399 GRT	Less than 10 years	21	31.8
	10-20 years	23	34.8
	More than 20 years	3	4.6
Between 400 and less than 3,500 GRT	Less than 10 years	10	15.1
	10-20 years	5	7.6
	More than 20 years	4	6.1
TOTAL		66	100%

Source: Based on data from Goldman et al. (1999: 21-22).

Most of the vessels incorporated through this mechanism were large or very large in GRT terms and over 53 percent were ten or more years old. A total of 21 joint ventures applied to this mechanism and only four of these companies were responsible for 53 percent of the vessels incorporated, which denotes a significant degree of concentration in the firms that capitalised on this opportunity. As discussed earlier, the EU had pursued fisheries agreements with non-EU countries since 1977. These so-called ‘first-generation’ of ‘cash-for-access’ agreements were adopted to facilitate the access of member states’ fleets to distant waters within the EEZ of developing countries, particularly in the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) fisheries (Le Sann, 1998). O’Riordan (2002) argues that although these cash-for-access agreements were initially regarded as a kind of ‘manna from heaven’ feeding the revenue of developing country governments, over time they became a bargaining mechanism that exacerbated these governments’ dependency on foreign access to provide foreign exchange, effectively reducing their fisheries policies to address the crisis faced by the fleets of the developed world.

Over the time, these agreements faced increasing criticism and were replaced by the ‘second-generation’ agreements, of which the accord signed with Argentina is an example. One of their main innovations was that instead of buying temporary fishing rights from southern countries to be used by the EU fleet, they allowed the transference of EU vessels to the register of the partner country, in effect, transferring over-fishing capacity from the EU to other countries on a permanent basis. This strategy had significant consequences for partner countries in the global south, which not simply opened their fishing rights to foreign companies but ‘adopted’ these companies as part of the local/national business environment. This process led to an intricate mix of stakeholders and increasing conflicts, turning the distinction between ‘national’ and ‘foreign’ interests increasingly superfluous.

Looking at the concrete outcomes of the Agreement, in total the EU made an estimated disbursement of €108.5 million, of which €80.5 million (USD 96 million) correspond to subsidies granted to European companies and €28 million (USD 33.6 million) was perceived by the Argentinean government as scientific and technical cooperation. In contrast with previous EU agreements where most of the subsidies were perceived by the government as conceding fishing rights, in this case the bulk of the EU subsidies were directly transferred to European companies. Between 1994 and 1997, the EU-Argentina Joint Commission approved the incorporation of 41 new vessels (Table 4.5). The applications were submitted by 33 Argentine-European associations, most of them constituted as joint ventures (27).¹³⁹

Table 4.5 Vessels and fishing quotas approved within the EU-Argentina Fishery Agreement

Type of association	A. Vessels incorporated with fishing license for non surplus species			
	No of vessels	Initial quota (tonnes)	Hold complement (tonnes)	Total quota (tonnes)
Joint ventures	15	92,347	15,248	107,595
Temporary Association	3	19,151		19,151
Sub total A	18	111,498	15,248	126,746

Type of association	B. Vessels incorporated with fishing license for surplus species			
	No of vessels	Initial quota (tonnes)	Hold complement (tonnes)	Total quota (tonnes)
Joint ventures	13	56,457	24,511	80,968
Temporary Association	-	-	-	-
Sub total B	18	111,498	15,248	126,746

Total A + B	31	167,955	37,759	207,714
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Type of association	C. Vessels approved but not incorporated – both surplus and non surplus fishing licenses			
	No of vessels	Initial quota (tonnes)	Hold complement (tonnes)	Total quota (tonnes)
Joint ventures	6	24,883 (1)	N/A	N/A
Temporary Association	4	38,380 (2)	N/A	N/A
Sub total C	10	63,263	N/A	N/A

Note: (1) Corresponds to surplus species. (2) Out of which 34,880 tonnes correspond to hake or non-surplus species.

Source: Adapted from Godelman et al. (1999)

In open contradiction with the conservationist principles advocated in the EU Agreement, the fishing capacity of the Argentine flagged fleet was significantly expanded. Considering all the new vessels approved, the new fleet was granted a total fishing quota of over 231,000 tonnes per year. Deducting the ten vessels that were initially approved but never effectively incorporated, the initial quota granted was 167,000 tonnes, of which 66.4 percent

¹³⁹ Among the European partners, most companies were Spanish (71 percent of the applications) followed by France, Germany, the United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Greece, Italy and Portugal (with companies from each of these countries presenting between 1 and 3 applications).

corresponded to non-surplus species (i.e. hake). Although the Agreement established that new licenses for non-surplus species could only be obtained by replacing existing vessels, the quotas granted to the new hake fleet were over 35,000 tonnes higher than the capacity of the vessels replaced (Godelman et al., 1999).¹⁴⁰ The situation is even more worrisome if one considers that the HP capacity of the replacement vessels given licenses for non-surplus species was almost 133,000 tonnes. Taking into account the poverty of the Argentine monitoring system at the time, the prospect of the new vessels operating under their real capacity was highly unlikely.

Furthermore, the initial quota was further expanded through applications for extra quotas to complete the full hold capacity of the vessels.¹⁴¹ The approval of joint ventures and temporary associations by the Joint Commission was flawed with irregularities, including the transference of licenses from inactive vessels and vessels from bankrupt firms.¹⁴² Between 1992 and 1997 there was a net growth of declared landings equivalent to 64,000 tonnes. Reassessing these figures in the light of the fishing capacity of the vessels incorporated and discarding levels recorded by INIDEP, the catches effectively made by this fleet were 129 percent higher than those declared (Godelman et al., 1999: 46).

Considering that the average age of the replaced fleet was of 23 years, the modernisation of the fleet was hardly achieved. Figure 4.10 presents a comparison of the age of the deep-sea vessels operating in the national EEZ in 1992 and 1997. This shows that by whilst there were not significant changes in the number and age of the ice trawl fleet, by 1997 over 50 percent of the freezer and factory vessels were more than 15 years old.

In conclusion, the agreement with the EU served the purpose of transferring the fishing capacity of the European fleet to the Argentine Sea, instead of reducing the fishing overcapacity of the former. Considering both Resolution 3944/90 and the 1994 EU Fisheries Agreement, between 1991 and 1997 the EU invested about USD 230 million to transfer about 100 vessels to the Argentine EEZ, quadrupling the landings of the processing fleet operating in

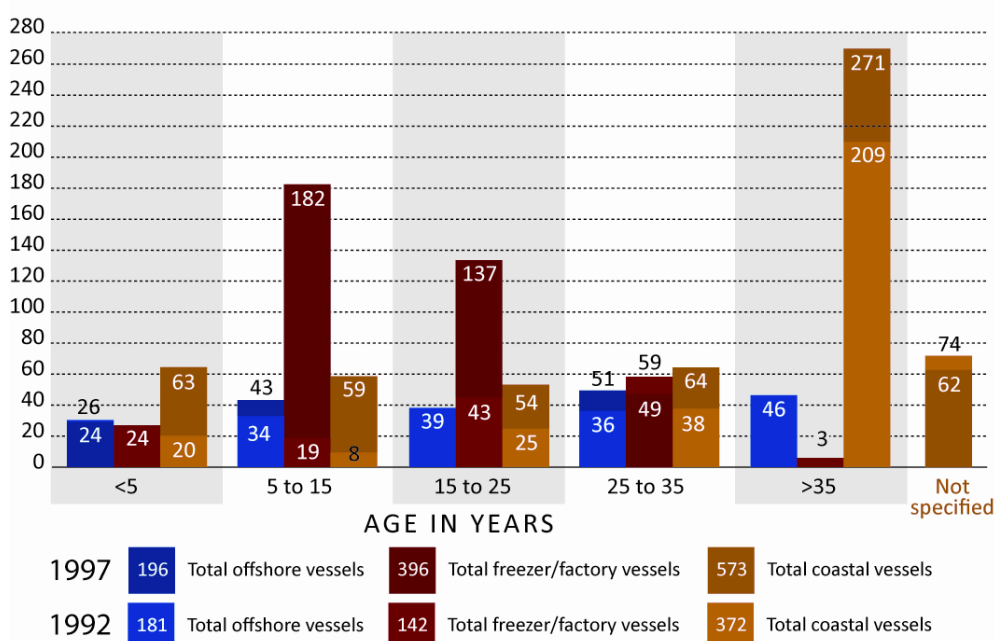
¹⁴⁰ The allocation of individual annual quotas was established by SAGPyA in Resolution 985/94, which specified that in the case of those vessels transferring their fishing licenses to European vessels, the quota of the newly incorporated vessel had to be defined according to the following criteria: a) a formula estimating the fishing capacity of the new vessels according to $(2,25 \times 1,400 \times \text{HP} = \text{annual catch in km})$; and b) the maximum catch obtained by the replaced vessel in the best of the last three years of operation. The quota allocated was to be equivalent to the lowest figure for these criteria.

¹⁴¹ In many cases, the initial application for a surplus-species quota was followed by the application for a hold complement for hake.

¹⁴² Godelman et al. (1999) estimate that at least 16 of the national vessels transferring their licenses continued in operation.

Argentine waters. The EU subsidies described above are ‘explicit’ or ‘budgeted’ subsidies, however other type of foreign subsidies were also used in the restructuring of the Argentine fisheries sector that took place in the 1990s. Among these, Onestini (2001) identifies the use of cross-sectoral subsidies for shipbuilding and infrastructure, including construction subsidies, export credits, tax exemptions or fiscal benefits and subsidies for fishing port construction and maintenance. Although it is difficult to trace these subsidies with precision they can be inferred from OECD data records.

Figure 4.10 Age structure of the deep-sea fleet operating in Argentine waters, 1992 and 1997



Source: Elaborated on the basis of Bertolotti et al (2001).

Table 4.6 shows the government financial transfers to marine fisheries in those OECD countries that operate in Argentine waters, which include Spain, the most significant foreign capital operating in the national fisheries sector; Japan, operating in the surimi fisheries; South Korea, focused on squid fisheries, Norwegian capital (also focused on squid and operating with longlines), the US and China. The EU (particularly Spain) together with Japan and South Korea accounted for 80 percent of all budgeted subsidies allocated to marine fisheries in OECD countries (OECD, 2000). As highlighted by Onestini (2001: 13): “[e]ven if these subsidies are neither perverse nor all underpin intervention in Argentine fisheries, it can be clearly seen that some of the most subsidised fleets operate either directly or indirectly in Argentine water”.

Within the EU, the case of Spain deserves particular attention. As the largest EU fishing fleet, Spain is highly influential in the development of European fisheries policies and is also the greatest recipient of EU fisheries subsidies. Between 1994 and 1999, 46 percent of the EU

financial transfers to the regional fleet went to Spain (UNEP, 2002). In addition, Spain received 90 percent of the EU subsidies allocated to support foreign access agreements, such as the ones signed with Argentina in 1994 (Porter, 2000). During this period, Argentina became the second largest supplier of fish products to Spain, following Morocco (UNEP, 2002).

Table 4.6 Government financial transfers to marine fisheries in selected OECD countries operating in Argentine waters in 1997 (in USD million)

	Country / Trade block			
	EU	Japan	Korea	Spain
Infrastructure	67	216	164	16
Enforcement and enhancement	592	628	73	37
Waters	245	-	-	-
Vessels and licence retirement	288	25	30	196
Investment and modernisation	144	21	-	80
Income support and unemployment insurance	4	-	-	-
Taxation exemptions	3	-	-	-
Other	91	107	72	15
Total	1,434	2,946	342	345

Source: Adapted from OECD (2000), reproduced in UNEP (2002: 37). Redrawn by the author.

The situation is different in the case of Asian countries (Japan, South Korea, China and Taiwan) whose fleets gained access to Argentine waters not through bilateral agreements of the type signed with the EU but through temporary fishing rights focused on squid harvesting. Historically, the markets of these countries have been almost totally closed to Argentine products, yet the GoA capitalised on the cannons paid by Asian fleets to access Argentine waters.¹⁴³ Although it is difficult to establish the exact amount of subsidies received by the Asian fleets to operate in Argentina, it is estimated that the governments of these countries facilitated the access of their fleets to distant waters through further subsidies than those recorded in Table 4.6 (Milazzo, 1997).¹⁴⁴

In summary, the overcapitalisation of the fleet operating in Argentine waters that took place during the restructuring period and particularly since 1991 was the result of a series of measures adopted by the GoA to open up fishing rights to foreign countries and to promote FDI. This policy shift was not simply sized by foreign companies but supported by the structural policies of the OECD countries (in particular the EU) to deal with the problem of

¹⁴³ It is estimated that by the end of the 1990s, the GoA received about USD 10 million per year as fishing right fees (Onestini, 2001).

¹⁴⁴ In the case of Japan, a number of subsidies have been transferred in the form of scientific cooperation funds, either directly via grants from the Japanese state or indirectly via grants from the World Bank and other sources (UNEP, 2002).

overcapitalisation of their fleets through the subsidised transference of their fishing capacity to distant waters. In less than two decades Argentina reached the overexploitation of most of the commercial species harvested in its national continental shelf, which led to a significant crisis of the fisheries sector in economic, social, environmental and political terms.

4.3 Mining the sea

As noted in Chapter 3, Argentina does not have a long-term history as an intensive fishing country. Although commercial marine fisheries exploitation can be traced back to the late 19th century, it was not until the 1960s that offshore fishing took place and national catches reached an average of 100,000 tonnes per year. Until the late 1970s, fishing mainly took place in the northern continental shelf (bio-geographic regions 1 and 2) and the Southwest Atlantic was considered one of the few underexploited fishing areas in the world with great potential for expansion, particularly in the Patagonian shelf. However, after 1976 this picture started to change. By 1979, the volume of marine catches by the Argentine flagged fleet reached almost 550,000 tonnes per year. Although this was a record year, on average between 1976 and 1990 annual catches increased to over 400,000 tonnes. But the intensification of commercial fishing took place mainly during the NEM period, reaching in 1997 a peak of 1.341 million tonnes. Thus, during the first phase of the restructuring process (1976-1990) national catches grew fourfold in comparison to the average figured recorded for the 1960s, whilst during the NEM period (1991-1999) their growth was tenfold. Indeed, it is during this period that a significant shift took place from underutilisation to overexploitation.

4.3.1 From under-exploitation to over-fishing

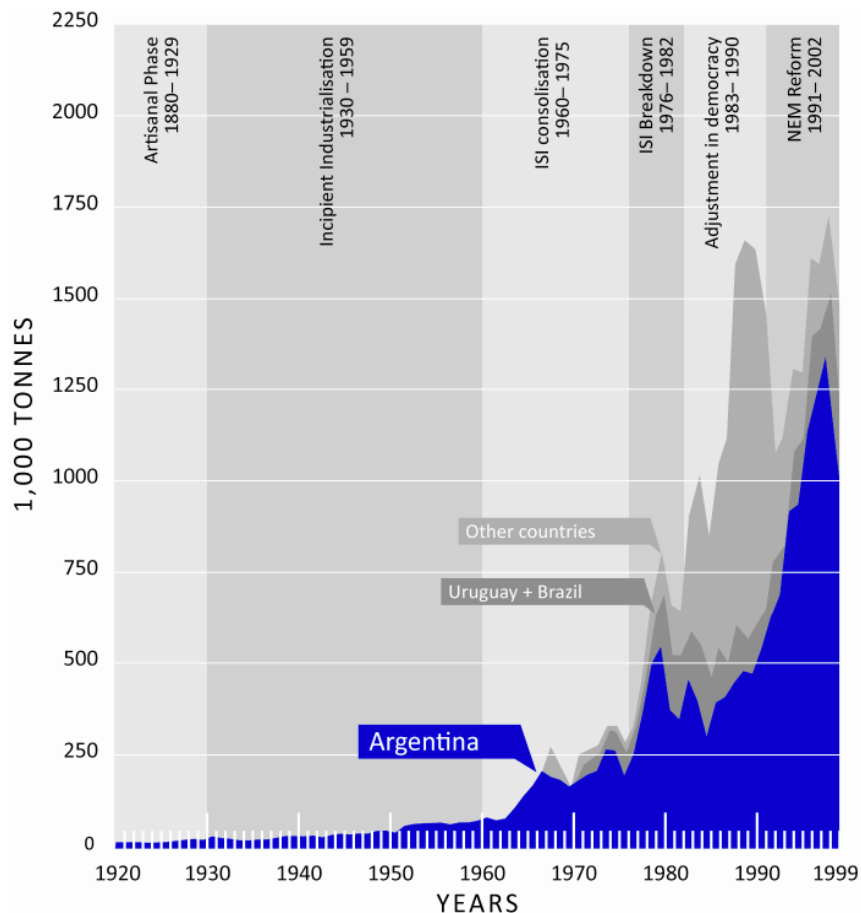
Looking at the historical evolution of catches, although some periods of increased exploitation took place prior to the restructuring process, these were only sporadic.¹⁴⁵ However, as shown in Figure 4.11, after the Malvinas war the situation in the Southwest Atlantic changed dramatically and the presence of foreign fleets grew constantly throughout the 1980s.¹⁴⁶ This was not just a consequence of the fishing agreements signed by Argentina but also of the fishing licenses granted by the UK to the British fleet and several European and Asian countries, in particular, Spain, Poland, Japan and Korea (Sánchez, 1999). In the 1990s, the

¹⁴⁵ For instance, the peaks in catches recorded in the 1960s correspond to an accord signed with the former Soviet Union, which intensified the exploitation of Argentine hake.

¹⁴⁶ As noted before, since 1982, the 200 miles around Malvinas Islands have been controlled by the UK, which issued licenses to foreign vessels that in 1995 amounted to 218,345 tonnes.

volume of catches increased further through the charter agreements signed with Asian countries for the capture of squid. Although in the early 1990s, Argentina allowed the operation of European long-distance vessels in its EEZ, this was done through fishing rights granted to temporary ventures of EU-Argentine capital. From 1994, EU companies came to enjoy the same rights as national firms and indeed became an indistinguishable part of the national fisheries sector.

Figure 4.11 Evolution of catches in the Southwest Atlantic, 1920-1996



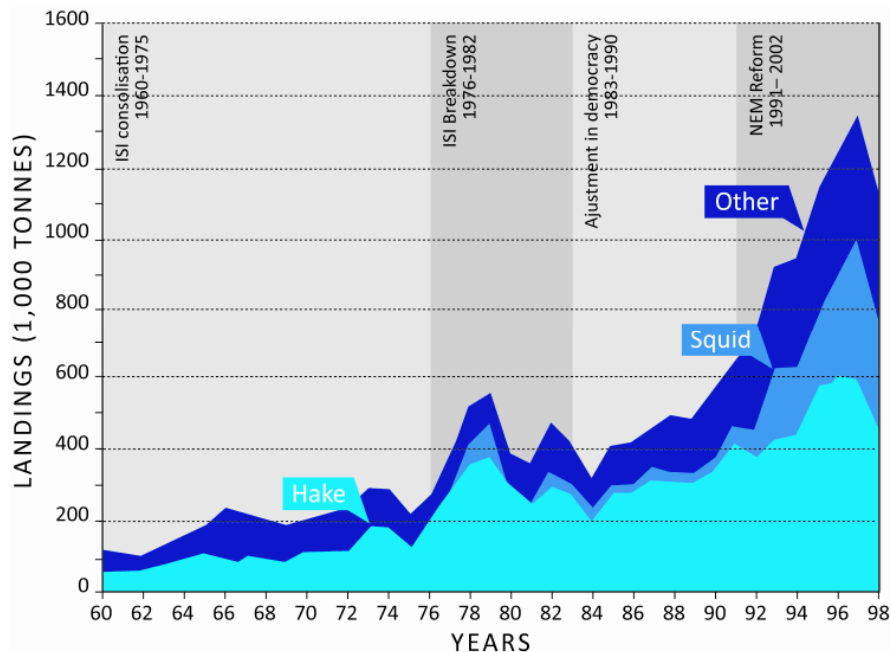
Source: Based on data from SAGPyA and CFI Statistical Series.

The country's fisheries research capacity predates the neoliberal restructuring period and had been expanded throughout the ISI period through a number of international cooperation agreements that supported the development of equipment and staff of high quality standards. From 1978 onwards, the chief purpose of scientific research was to explore the potential to expand the commercial exploitation of new species, squid in particular. Thus, fisheries research became increasingly driven by economic objectives rather than conservationist goals. In fact, in the following years most of the newly researched species were to become severely exploited (e.g. hake, anchovy, squid, southern blue whiting, hoki and several Patagonian demersal fish stocks). Towards the end of the 1980s, fisheries research was left unsupported

and gradually decayed. As highlighted by one of INIDEP’s most senior researchers who became the director of the institution in 2000: “By 1990, field research was fully interrupted and the knowledge of fishery resources became rapidly outdated. Ironically, it was then, that an unprecedented expansion of the Argentine fishery took place” (Fieldwork interview with R.P. S., INIDEP Senior Researcher, 17/12/2000).

Returning to the advocated policy objectives that characterised the restructuring period, the expansion of the national fisheries sector was to be pursued through the diversification of catches, maintaining and/or lowering the exploitation of Argentine hake, which in 1979 accounted for 67.5 percent of all national catches and was the main commercial species utilised by the processing sector and the basis of Mar del Plata’s fishing industry. Therefore, it is pertinent to examine the extent to which the opening up of fishing rights in the Argentine Sea led to a more diversified composition of the targeted commercial species. Hake landings represented about a third of total marine landings in 1960, gained weight gradually throughout the ISI period and accounted for less than two thirds of all landings in 1975 (Figure 4.12).¹⁴⁷ Other landings during this period correspond to a variety of species traditionally harvested by the offshore and coastal fleets in Buenos Aires province.

Figure 4.12 Evolution of Argentine landings by main commercial species, 1960-1998



Source: Elaborated on the basis of data from SAGPyA (1998)

¹⁴⁷ The terms ‘catches’ and ‘landings’ are not synonymous. ‘Catches’ are the total fish captured from an area over some period of time, including fish that are caught but released or discarded instead of being landed. ‘Landings’ refer to the number or poundage of fish unloaded at a dock and reported by each vessel. However, SAGPyA often uses these terms as interchangeable, underestimating the real pressure exerted over a particular species.

The situation changed during the first two phases of the restructuring process (1976-1990) when catches not only grew exponentially but newly exploited commercial fisheries such as squid acquired relevance in the composition of total landings. During the military dictatorship, the fishery of squid expanded mainly due to the chartering accords signed with Asian countries and, during Alfonsín's administration two new species became commercially significant: shrimp and blue whiting. In addition, while hoki catches were marginal up to 1979, they increased significantly in the late 1990s.¹⁴⁸

The number of total species commercially exploited did not change significantly before and after the restructuring process. SAGPyA records reveal that about 50 different species were commercially exploited in the national fishery sector prior to 1976, whilst this number increased to 54 in 1992 and 57 in 1999. This seems to indicate a relatively modest degree of diversification in the composition of catches. Considering the weight of the three main species over total catches, the concentration of catches grew steadily throughout the different phases of the restructuring process to decline slightly in 1999. Thus, instead of facilitating diversification, the restructuring led to the intensified exploitation of a reduced number of species, with just four species (hake, hoki, squid and southern blue whiting) accounting for over 81 percent of all marine catches in 1999. Table 4.7 shows the evolution of these commercial species in selected years.

Table 4.7 Catches by main commercial species in 1988, 1992 and 1999 (tonnes and %)

Catches	1988		1992		1999	
Hake	297,333	62%	368,998	53%	313,890	31%
Southern Blue Whiting	N/A	N/A	85,549	12.4%	55,098	5.5%
Hoki	6,952	1.4%	7,747	1.1%	118,157	12%
Anchovy	49,468	4%	19,290	2.8%	10,659	1.1%
Squid	20,777	4.3%	77,468	11.2%	343,245	34%
Other species		28.3%		19.5		16.4%
Total catches	481,578	100%	692,110	100%	1,008,918	100%
Number of species	52		54		57	
Concentration of three main species over total	0.70		0.77		0.77	

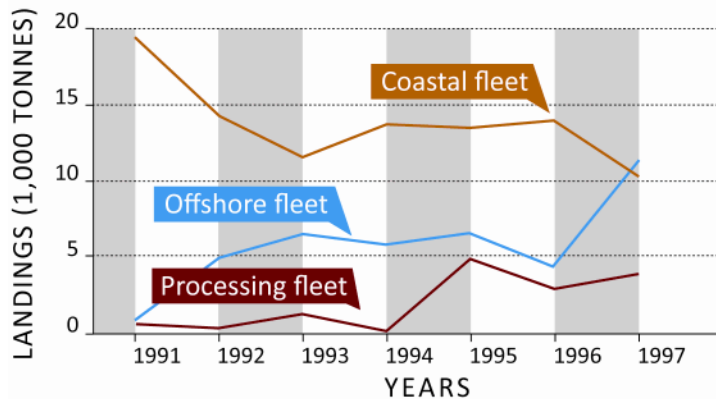
Source: Based on data from SAGPyA and CFI Statistical Series.

The scarcity of hake in the last few years of the 1990s turned many vessels to harvesting other species, in particular many species traditionally targeted by the coastal fleet. Figure 4.13

¹⁴⁸ By 1979 hoki catches were marginal but in 1993 they increased to over 30,000 tonnes, reaching 118,000 tonnes by 1999, representing 4.28 percent of total catches in 1993 and 12 percent in 1999.

shows the increasing pressure exerted by the offshore and processing fleets over anchovy, the main resource traditionally harvested by the coastal fleet. Thus as a secondary effect, the depletion of hake resulted in the over-fishing of numerous species and increasing competition between the long- and short-distance fleets.

Figure 4.13 Anchovy catches by fleet, 1991-1997



Source: Godelman (2003: 10). Redrawn by the author.

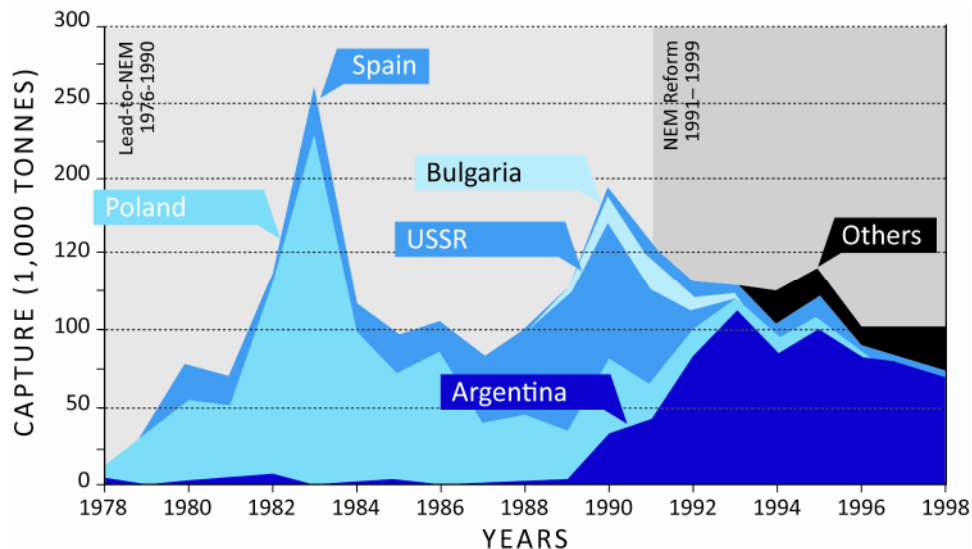
Returning to the top commercial species during the NEM, while by 1999 hake and blue whiting showed severe signs of over-fishing, the exploitation of squid had reached the maximum advisable level to ensure its regeneration. In the case of southern blue whiting and hoki, two species that experienced negligible pressure until the late 1970s, intensified exploitation was associated with the incorporation of *potero* vessels specialised in the onboard production of surimi.¹⁴⁹ Southern blue whiting catches around the Malvinas Islands increased significantly immediately after the war in 1982 due to the accords signed by Argentina with Bulgaria and the former Soviet Union, severely affecting spawning concentrations (Figure 4.14). Argentine catches were almost insignificant prior to the 1990s but expanded thereafter, mainly due to *potero* vessels introduced under two accords with the EU that allowed European vessels to operate under the Argentine flag.

Considering all commercial species, towards the end of the 1990s, decreasing catches were a manifestation of the dramatic decline in the total and reproductive biomass of hake (Cajal and Leszek, 1999). Increasing fishing pressure shifted then to the hoki stock, a substitute species of southern blue whiting in the production of surimi, leading to another case of

¹⁴⁹ In 1997, total hoki catches by Argentine flagged vessels amounted to 41.8 thousand tonnes but only in two years the volume harvested grew 280 percent, reaching two years later 117.6 thousand tonnes.

overexploitation.¹⁵⁰ Divergences between the reports produced by the scientific and administrative fisheries institutions and also between national and international institutions were common throughout this period. For instance, towards the end of the 1980s, INIDEP and FAO differed significantly in their assessment of the potential for the further exploitation of southern blue whiting. For FAO the species was slightly-to-moderately exploited, whilst INIDEP had reported serious signs of overexploitation already in 1983.

Figure 4.14 Evolution of catches of southern blue whiting in the Southwest Atlantic by country, 1978-1998



Source: Based on data from Casal and Prenskey (2000) in UNEP (2002:27). Redrawn by the author.

Increased harvested volumes were even more dramatic among molluscs and crustaceans, particularly in the case of squid, which showed signs of overexploitation already in 1986 but continued to be subjected to intensive harvesting throughout the 1990s.¹⁵¹ The harvesting of Patagonian shrimp also grew dramatically during the second two phases of the restructuring period, from a marginal value in 1979 to almost 23,000 tonnes in 1984. This boom was short lived as catches fell in the three subsequent years to rise again later, although with significant fluctuations, reaching a peak of 79,000 tonnes in 2001. The problem of overfishing within the EEZ was compounded by the increasing pressure of several foreign fleets outside the EEZ as well as in the Malvinas area. This is referred to as the '201 mile problem', characterised by the large-scale harvesting of migratory or straddling stocks. According to FAO, in 1992 a total of

¹⁵⁰ In 1998 the hoki TAC was 79,000 tonnes, whilst INIDEP reported catches 26 percent higher than the permitted capture, although SAGPyA reported a different situation. As in several other cases, there are significant discrepancies between the figures reported by INIDEP and SAGPyA. INIDEP records are more reliable, as their statistics come directly from their own primary research.

¹⁵¹ In the case of Argentine squid, both FAO and INIDEP agreed in their 1986 assessment that this species was close to overexploitation. The total volume of mollusc and crustacean catches in 1999 amounted to almost 373,000 tonnes, while catches of Argentine short-fin squid accounted for 92 percent of all captures within this group and 34 percent of all marine catches (342,700 tonnes).

370,000 tonnes of fish were harvested outside the 200 miles delimiting Argentinean marine sovereignty, followed by significant peaks in the following years.

Another common problem leading to the underestimation of the actual volume of catches in reported landings was the practice of by-catch, by which unwanted fish is discarded in the sea. Historically, the ice trawler fleet focused on hake, discarding other species of low commercial value. The youngest specimens (smaller than 35 cm in length) were also discarded because they were rejected by the onshore plants. The by-catch level of this fleet has been traditionally seasonal and prior to the 1980s it was never higher than 15 percent of the total catch (Pérez Comas et al., 1986).¹⁵² By contrast, a report produced by the INIDEP On-Board Inspectors Project in the mid-1990s revealed that the level of discards was very high within the freezer fleet, in response to variable and unpredictable criteria (Cañete et al., 1996). In general terms, catches were discarded because of their quality and size or for excess of harvested fish in their holds. The study also highlighted that the amount of landings declared were 62 percent lower than the catches effectively made, with the difference corresponding to fish discarded.

4.3.2 Hake under threat

The evolution of hake catches deserves particular attention. As noted earlier, since the early 1960s, this fishery had been developed on the basis of ice trawl vessels that chilled the fish in ice boxes and then landed it to be processed in onshore plants, where it was gutted, headed and filleted before it was sold in the domestic and external markets. Towards the mid-1980s, the ice trawler fleet accounted for most of hake catches and the freezer fleet just for 15 percent. The harbour of Mar del Plata recorded 77 percent of all national landings in 1986, which declined to 31 per cent in 1998 (Madaria, 1999). The lost hegemony of Mar del Plata during the restructuring process was due to the expansion of the long-range fleet of mixed capital and foreign companies established in the Patagonia region, as discussed in Chapter 5.

Examining the evolution of hake between 1966 and 1983, INIDEP reported in 1986 that the exploitation of this fishery was close to the MSY, as a consequence of the overcapitalisation of the hake fleet (Verazay and Otero, 1986). In response to this warning, SAGPyA enacted a new resolution in October 1988 (Resolution No 946) establishing that new fishing licenses should exclude hake. However, this and subsequent resolutions limiting the growth of fishing effort in the hake fishery were ignored, with a dramatic growth in the number of hake vessels and their licenses. At the time, national authorities disclaimed any responsibility for this trend, arguing

¹⁵² The highest level of discard was recorded during the spring and summer, but during autumn and winter this practice was almost non-existent.

that many firms had appealed to the judiciary to uphold the rights acquired through existing fishing licenses and that the judicial system favoured their claims. However, as argued by Godelman et al. (1999: 17):

This argument does not take into account that various professionals leading SSP during the 1990s had formerly worked as solicitors in the office of Dr Corach, Minister of Internal Affairs between 1995 and 1999 and former legal representative of the chamber of firms that holds together the freezer fleet ship-owners. The close relationship between Corach and many members of the national Judicial Power was a matter of recurrent commentary in the press.¹⁵³

In the vespers of the ratification of the EU agreement, INIDEP published an assessment of the impact of fleet growth between 1983 and 1991, warning the GoA that hake mortality had increased by 25 percent in 1991, while high estimated mortality for 1992 and 1993 suggested that this fishery could not be sustainable over a longer period (Bezzi et al., 1994).

During the NEM period the capacity of the freezer factory fleet expanded nine times faster than the ice trawler fleet. Between 1991 and 1997, while offshore and coastal fleet catches remained almost the same, the long-range fleet quadrupled its catches, accounting for almost all hake catch growth in the second half of the decade (Figure 4.15). In 1996, the freezer factory fleet surpassed other fleets in the volume of hake catches, and from 1997 onwards the coastal and ice trawl fleets experienced a sustained decline. The parallelism between the expansion of the freezer factory fleet and total hake catches reveals that almost all of the growth in hake catches during this period corresponded to the dramatic growth of this fleet. As a consequence, since 1993 hake catches consistently surpassed the TAC, established at about 390,000 tonnes for the 1991-1997 period.¹⁵⁴

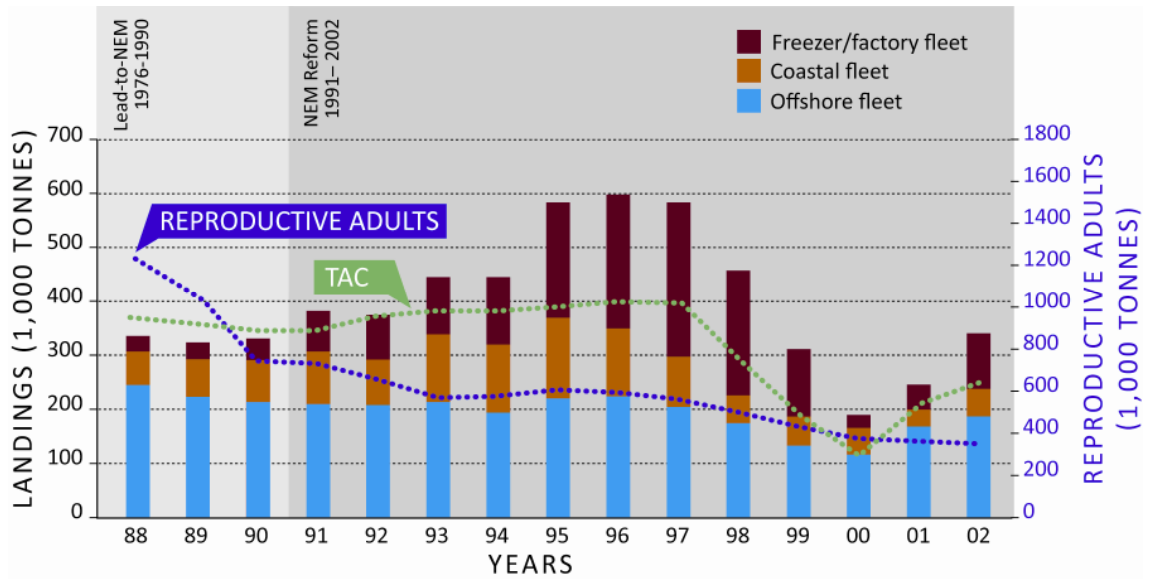
The offshore fleet of Mar del Plata operated in the fishing grounds north of parallel 41°S, while the long-range fleet operated both north and south of latitude 41°. Systematic over-fishing resulted in a significant decline of hake biomass during this period in both fishing zones (Figure 4.16). As a consequence, the fishing effort of the ice trawl fleet (measured in trawling hours) increased about 70 percent between 1991 and 1997, partly due the rising number of trawling hours required to fill in their holds. As the volume of catches remained almost constant, catch per unit of effort (CPUE)¹⁵⁵ for this fleet decreased, reaching in 1997 nearly half the value recorded in 1991 (Godelman et al, 1999).

¹⁵³ Original in Spanish. Author's translation.

¹⁵⁴ In 1998 the TAC was lowered to 280,000 tonnes but the catches surpassed 420,000 tonnes.

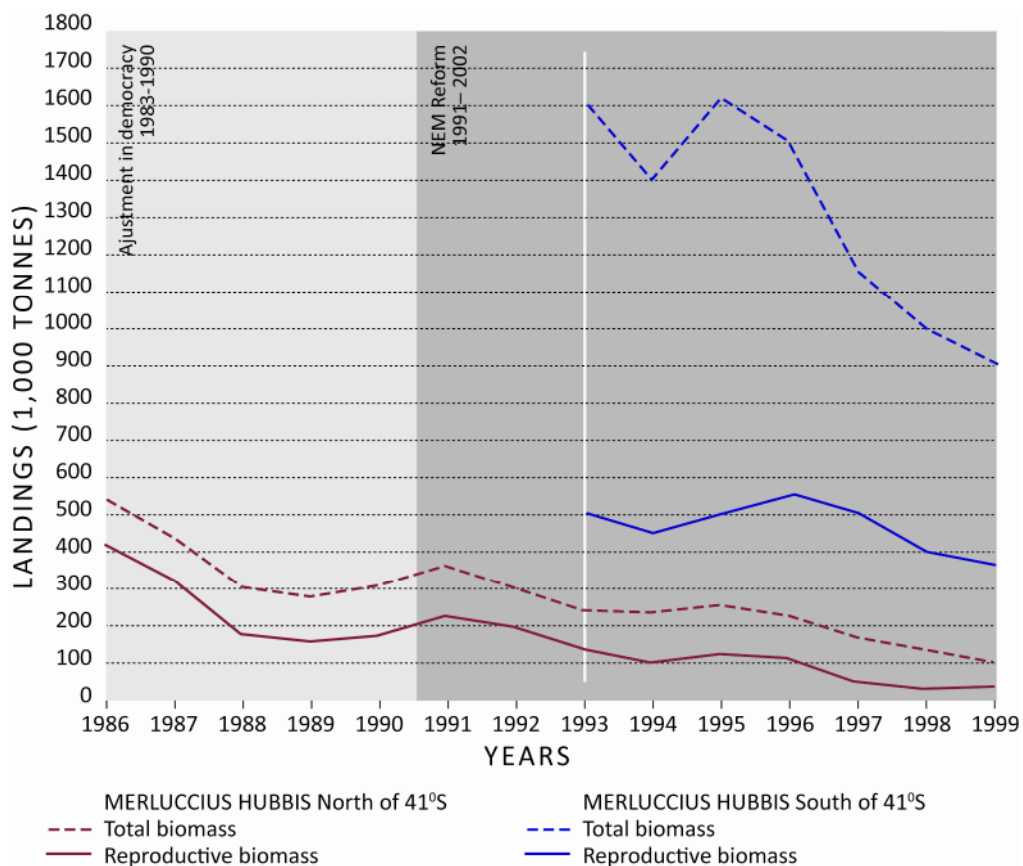
¹⁵⁵ CPUE is an indicator of the effectiveness of fishing and can be also used to assess fish abundance in a certain area. It is expressed in tonnes of catches per hour of trawling.

Figure 4.15 Evolution of hake landings by fleet, TAC and reproductive biomass, 1987-2007



Source: Based on data from Dirección Nacional de Fiscalización Pesquera (DNFP) and Cauhepe (1999).

Figure 4.16 Argentine hake biomass north and south of latitude 41°S, 1986-1999



Source: Elaborated on the basis of data from Casal and Prenski (2000).

The level of reproductive biomass recorded in 1998 was the lowest in history and insufficient to guarantee the level of recruitment needed to sustain the fishery, which explains the dramatic drop in total hake catches from that year onwards, reaching a critical point in 1999

(Cahuepe, 1999).¹⁵⁶ The intensification of harvesting of the main commercial species also points to a shift in the geographical distribution of catches, with the Patagonian region gaining increasing weight throughout the 1990s.

A significant issue to be considered refers to the limitations of scientific research as a method to back up a 'rational' system of fisheries exploitation, particularly when fisheries stocks are subjected to sudden changes and increased harvesting. As noted earlier, national scientific research focused on monitoring different species as they became a commercial target, which means that often the accumulation of systematic knowledge to evaluate the evolution of newly exploited (and researched) species came too late to have any significant impact on forward planning. The squid fishery offers an example of the structural flaws in this approach. When Argentine scientists expressed concern for the high levels of exploitation in 1986, they also admitted that there were significant "knowledge gaps as to the basic fishery biology of the species" (Sánchez, 1999: 3). Given that intensified exploitation is often the result of a process of overcapitalisation of the fleet, measures to limit the operation are hard to implement, particularly considering the monitoring difficulties inherent to the sector. The rapid shift from under-utilisation to overexploitation experienced by the national fisheries sector during the restructuring process, was not spontaneous but the direct result of specific policies promoting its expansion through the overcapitalisation of the national-flagged fleet.

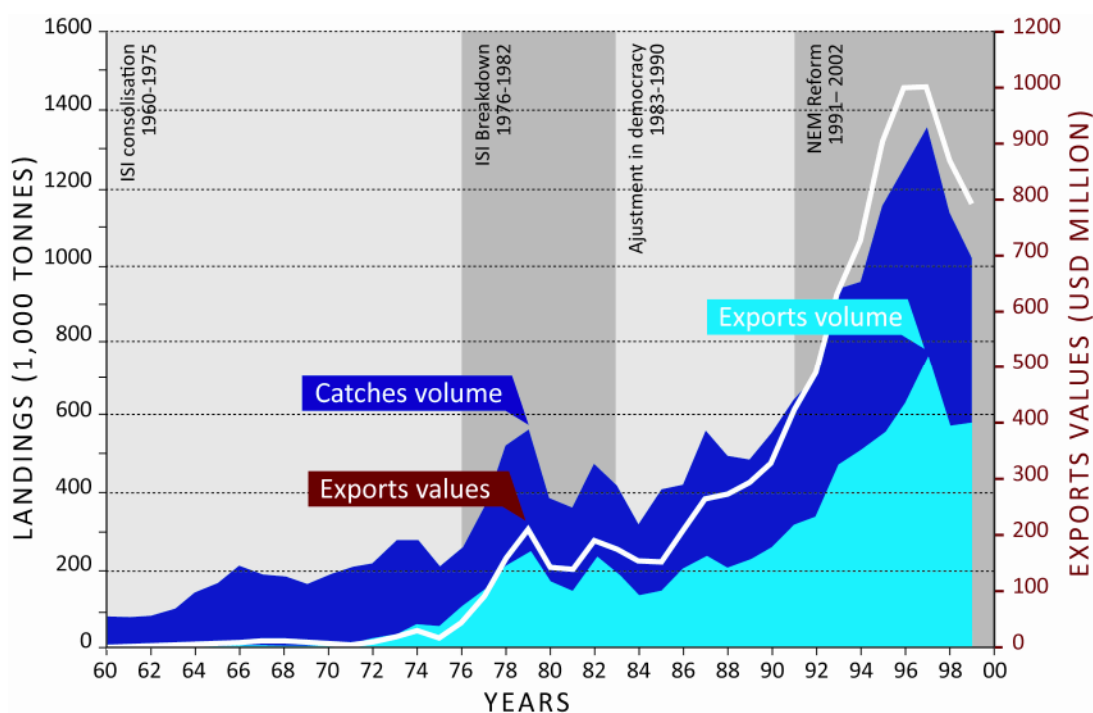
4.3.3 Behind the export boom

Although the national fisheries sector had been oriented towards exports since the 1970s, it was not until the 1990s that exports prevailed over domestic commercialisation. Considering the record export year during the ISI period, in 1974 just over 23 percent of total catches were commercialised in the external market, amounting to USD 33 million in exports revenue. Throughout the lead-to-NEM period, the volume of catches exported averaged 42 percent during the dictatorship and increased to 46.7 percent during Alfonsín's administration. During the NEM period the sector became predominantly geared towards external markets and exports acquired further weight over total catches. Between 1991 and 1997, the harvesting sub-sector exhibited the highest growth rate within the national primary sector; its gross value grew by over 100 percent and the value of exports increased two and a half times. However, export growth did not respond to a significant increase in the value per tonne exported (USD 1,500 in 1996) but to a dramatic increase in volume, which tripled between 1991 and 1996.

¹⁵⁶ Hake biomass started to show signs of recovery only in 2002. Although data series for the subsequent years are unreliable due to the lack of systematic data collection, the age structure continued to be unstable due to the almost complete depletion of the reproductive biomass (Godelman, 2003).

Figure 4.17 shows the close correlation between the evolution of catches and exports and the dramatic increase in both experienced in the 1990s.

Figure 4.17 Evolution of marine catches and exports volume and value, 1960-1999



Source: Based on CFI Statistical Series and FAO Database (1999)

As discussed before, the rise of exports was actively pursued throughout the NEM through a set of interconnected measures: (1) by deregulating and actively promoting the entry of foreign capital in the sector; (2) by eliminating import duties for new and used vessels; (3) by reducing port costs for exporters; and (4) by instigating new fishing exploitation programmes. By the end of 1996, despite clear signs of over-fishing to a point where the sustainability of the main commercial species was threatened, the government advertised the achievements of its fisheries policy as follows:

The long coastline and the extended shallow continental shelf off the coast of the country offer great opportunities for the fisheries sector. Argentina is now a major producer and exporter of seafood, and there is *plenty of room* for the industry to expand. Abundant natural resources and current policies designed to encourage investment and the deregulation of the sector offers room for its further expansion, particularly in value-added products. (SAGPyA, 1996a: 3)¹⁵⁷

The new policies introduced after 1991 brought fast but problematic results. Total landings almost doubled from 575,000 tonnes in 1990 to 1.34 million tonnes in 1997 and the value of exports showed an even sharper increase, from USD 324 million in 1990 to over USD 1 billion in 1996 and 1997. From 1986 onwards, fishing exports grew at a faster rate than sales in the

¹⁵⁷ Original in Spanish. Author's translation; emphasis added.

domestic market. In the peak years in terms of catches (1996-1997), exports revenue from fish products surpassed for the first time in history the revenue generated from exported beef. However, in 1998, seafood exports represented USD 860 million, showing a decrease from the previous three years, further falling to USD 510 million and 323,000 tonnes in 1999. The fall in export revenue reflects lower landings due to the hake crisis and also adverse domestic and international market conditions.

Looking at the composition of exports by type of product, the increased commercialisation in the external market was mainly linked to products of nil or low added value. As an example, exports statistics for 1997 – a record year – show that total fishing products exported reached USD 1,030 million (at USD 1,294/tonne) of which almost a third corresponded to products of low added value (fillets). Exports to European countries (Spain, France, The Netherlands and Italy) consisted mainly in whole and H&G fish. In fact, according to the statistics provided by the National Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture (DNPYA)¹⁵⁸ and INDEC, the value per tonne of fish exported and the degree of elaboration of national fishing products remained the same before and after the signing of the EU Agreement, whilst the volume of catches grew dramatically after 1993.

The composition of exports during the NEM period exhibits important changes, associated with the increasing relative weight of various exports produced by specialised long-distance fleets such as jiggers in the production of squid, frozen scallops by factory vessels, as well as factory vessels dedicated to the production of surimi.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the exponential growth of exports was not linked to a qualitative change in the productivity of the manufacturing sector but rather based on the expansion of harvesting. In 1977 frozen products constituted 71 percent of all exports (in volume) while the rest came from the main manufacturing industries in the sector. In overall terms, during the NEM period, the volume of frozen products dominated the export market, accounting for well over 90 percent of all exported products throughout the decade (Figure 4.18). By contrast, the external sales of salted, dry and preserved manufactured products recorded a negative trend, with very low share in the total value of exports from the fishing sector.

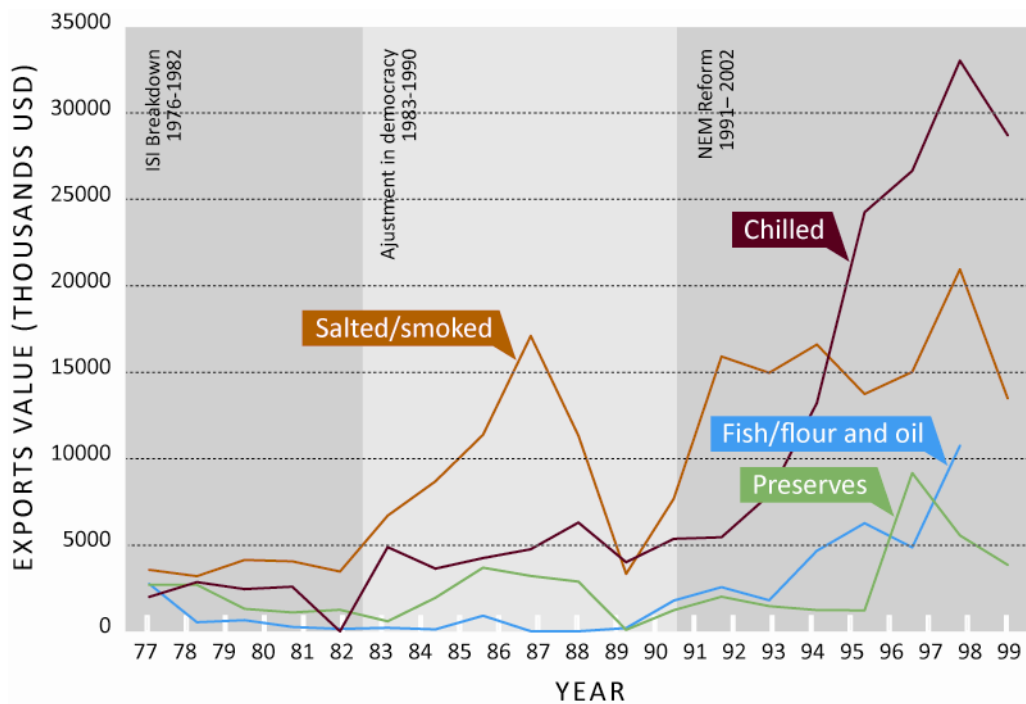
In terms of species, until 1993 hake products (whole, H&G and fillet) represented between 40 and 50 percent of the total volume of exports and from that year until 1999 (almost without exception) hake occupied the second place in export volume after squid. In terms of value,

¹⁵⁸ Dirección Nacional de Pesca y Acuicultura.

¹⁵⁹ Frozen prawn exports maintained the same weight throughout the period, accounted for 23.2 percent of exports revenue and 5.3 percent of the total volume of catches.

during 1996 and 1997 squid became the main exported product, and over the decade it grew from USD 24 million in 1991 to USD 365 million in 1996.

Figure 4.18 Evolution of export values by type of product, 1977-1999



Source: Based on CFI Statistical Series.

By the end of the 1990s, Argentina was responsible for between 25 and 30 percent of squid world catches. In the case of hake, between 1991 and 1996 the value of exported products (frozen, whole and H&G) increased 117 percent, amounting in 1996 to USD 265 million, 5 percent lower than the value recorded in 1995 but 43 percent higher than in 1991. However, increased hake exports corresponded mostly to low added-value products (SAGPyA, 1996a).¹⁶⁰ Although the participation of hake in the total volume of exports decreased towards the end of the 1990s due to the restrictions imposed by the GoA to restore acceptable levels of reproductive biomass, in 1999 the hake fishery accounted for 28.0 and 31.6 percent respectively of the total volume and value of fish and seafood exports. In 2002, the national fisheries sector still exhibited a strong bias towards the external commercialisation of its products, with exports amounting to 456,000 tonnes and over USD 718,000 million. It is estimated that at least five of the 20 species that constituted 70 percent of total catches were at that time over-fished, compromising future yields and the further expansion of the export market (Dadón, 2003).

¹⁶⁰ While the value of exported hake fillets increased by 95 percent during that period, hake exports of higher added value rose by only 46.4 percent (ibid.).

Considering export destinations, by the mid-1990s, the main markets appeared to be relatively diversified, with a predominance of the Asiatic markets for squid, Spain and Brazil for hake and the USA for prawn. In 1998 the main export destinations were in order of importance the EU, Asia, MERCOSUR and NAFTA (Table 4.8). Although the agreement with the EU was signed with the explicit objective of diversifying harvesting and increasing the added value of Argentine fish products commercialised in the European market, out of the total volume of exports to the EU in 1998, over 65 percent corresponded to unprocessed products, while the leading product exported was hake, with Spain alone accounting for 28 percent of Argentine exports. By contrast, 83 percent and 63 percent of the exports to MERCOSUR and NAFTA respectively corresponded to manufactured products (Schonberger and Agar, 2001).

Table 4.8 Destinations of national fishing exports in 1996 and 1998

Destination	Weight in 1996 (%)	Weight in 1998 (%)
European Union	30	50.2
MERCOSUR	13	13.9
NAFTA	7	10.6
Other countries	11	-

Source: Adapted from Godelman et al (1999: 9). Based on SAGPyA Statistical Series.

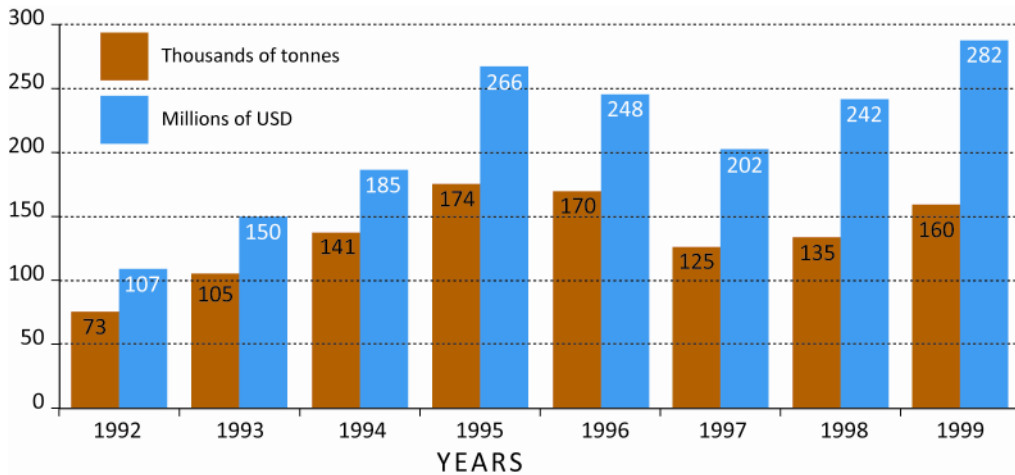
Looking at the characteristics of the main economic agents operating in the export market, according to the Argentine Chamber of Freezer Vessel Owners (CAPeCA)¹⁶¹ – which brings together the main exporters in the sector – by the late 1990s, there was a high degree of atomisation, with many firms operating in the sector and few enterprises controlling over 4 percent of the total export sales. However, a more detailed examination of the firms actually engaged in exports reveals a contrasting reality. In 2006, the main six associated firms under CAPeCA accounted for more than half of all export volume and value in that year.¹⁶² In Mar del Plata, the local beneficiaries of the export boom were a handful of integrated firms, nucleated under the Argentine Fisheries Companies Council (CEPA).¹⁶³ Instead of atomisation in the control of exports commercialisation, Mar del Plata experienced a high degree of concentration, with 10 percent of the largest firms controlling over 45 percent of the external commercialisation of hake products in 1997, whilst SMEs controlled only 10 percent (Figure 4.19).

¹⁶¹ Cámara de Armadores de Pesqueros y Congeladores de la Argentina.

¹⁶² Amounting to 132,254 tonnes and USD 407 million.

¹⁶³ Consejo de Empresas Pesqueras Argentinas.

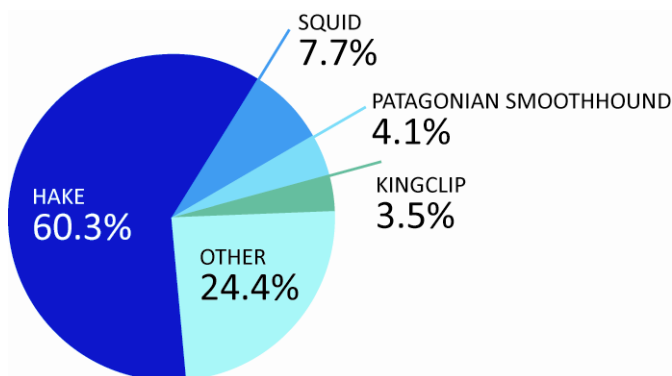
Figure 4.19 Evolution of exports from Mar del Plata in volume and value, 1992-1999



Source: Elaborated on the basis of data from Pagani et al. (2000).

Concerning the domestic market, after the mid-1970s, its participation in the commercialisation of fish and seafood products decreased steadily, corresponding mainly to fresh fish and shellfish (80 percent) followed by canned products (11.4 percent) and a small percentage of frozen products (8 percent). The supply of frozen products to the domestic market was geographically decentralised, with most products coming from the ports of Patagonia. In contrast, over 85 percent of fresh seafood products consumed domestically was supplied from Mar del Plata. This was partly due to the historical role played by this harbour in supplying the domestic market but also due to its proximity to the most populated urban centres, and therefore lower freight costs. Figure 4.20 shows the average composition of the domestic market in terms of species between 1992 and 1996. During the NEM, supermarkets and hypermarkets acquired a significant weight in the commercialisation of fish and seafood products and about 60 percent of the domestic market became dominated by a small number of transnational wholesalers.

Figure 4.20 Main species sold in the domestic market, 1992-1996 average



Source: Elaborated on the basis of data from SAGPyA (1996b).

Paradoxically for a country with the potential to amply meet its internal demand, Argentina's seafood imports increased steadily throughout the NEM period, amounting to USD 71 million in 1996 and almost USD 84 million in 1999. On average, throughout the 1990s, about 50 percent of the domestic demand for seafood products was supplied from abroad, mostly from Chile, Ecuador and Brazil.¹⁶⁴ Increased imports badly hit the broad base of fishing industries consolidated throughout the ISI period, most of which were located in Mar del Plata. As a result, the total number of establishments operating in the city decreased throughout the 1990s and manufacturing activities other than the hake fillet industry experienced a significant contraction, trends examined in Chapters 5 and 6.

In overall terms, national returns were only achieved in terms of increased export revenue. The operation of the processing fleet during this period was highly profitable, as catches and export revenue were realised from an almost free exploitation of natural capital. In addition, the new structure of the sector also affected the operation costs of the original local fleets and the quality of life of the communities depending on the fisheries sector, both in the harvesting and manufacturing sub-sectors. A study by INIDEP estimates that natural capital losses amounted during this period to USD 128 million north and south of latitude 41°S (Bertolotti et al., 2000). At the same time, the scarcity of the main commercial species and competition with the processing fleet increased by two and a half times the local fleet costs per tonne of catch between 1992 and 1998. For the offshore fleet, the primary added value decreased from 67 percent of the gross value of production in 1993 to 53.6 percent in 1999, due to the higher inputs required in harvesting operations due to the required increased in fishing effort, particularly in the case of the hake fishery.

4.4 Fishy business: From abundance to scarcity

While the Argentine Sea was up to the beginning of the 1990s one of the few under-exploited fisheries ground in the world, in less than ten years, capitalist ingenuity managed to mine almost 70 percent of the 26 main commercial species above or up to their maximum sustainable yield. During a fieldwork interview, the leader of CEPA – the umbrella organisation of the integrated firms – celebrated the fisheries restructuring process by stating: “Thanks to the policy shift introduced under Menem's administration, consumers are eating many new fish and seafood species” (Fieldwork interview with O.F., Chairman of CEPA, 31/08/2000).

¹⁶⁴ The main imports were prepared and canned fish and sea products, which together accounted for 78 percent of the volume and 75 percent of the value of all sectoral imports in 1999.

These species were indeed not 'new', as they have been in the planet longer than humans, but they were however 'new commodities', at least as far as the Argentine fisheries sector was concerned. Furthermore, the fact that species such as squid had been commercially 'discovered' was a response to already-established international markets and demands, so they were not even really new as commodities. Neither did the expansion of fisheries production enrich the diet of Argentine households but rather a number of cheap commodities were added to the international food chain. In terms of economic outcomes, the NEM reforms achieved an impressive record in rising foreign investment and exports. However, as the sector experienced a significant growth in international trade, it also became heavily reliant on foreign markets, a shift that affected in particular the SMEs operating in the canning and salting industries, many of whom were unable to compete with cheap imports.

But perhaps the most noticeable legacy of the neoliberal restructuring was that of establishing an accumulation regime of highly concentrated wealth and generalised scarcity, with a few winners and many losers. Furthermore, the neoliberal *dispositif* reconstituted itself under highly different socio-political regimes, from the Chicago's boys cum geopolitical sovereignty project of the military dictatorship of the 1970s, through Alfonsín's attempt to found a 'Second Republic' in the 1980s to Menem's unapologetic 'productive revolution', which mixed the rhetoric of the Peronist 'third way' with a political and economic project that resembled the modernising agro-export project of the 1880s' generation.

While the historical references of how the neoliberal shift became mainstreamed are highly context specific in many respects, the process resembles many common features with other experiences worldwide. One key element of the neoliberal *dispositif* is its capacity to normalise a perceived Tragedy of the Commons, in which the further privatisation of the commons is to be pursued as the solution to this tragedy. Looking at similarly contrasting legacies in the state of Gujarat, India, Johnson (2001: 1095) argues that:

While instances of resource over-appropriation are in evidence in different settings globally, the error of a narrow tragedy of the commons analysis is to assume an original nature state of open access to resources. In all social forms, humans have created institutions to restrict individual access to resources so that they may be preserved for collective benefits. Tragedies of the commons occurred when such collective institutions are undermined and individuals lose the sense that their long-term interests in resource preservation are being assured.

In Gujarat state, like in the coastal provinces of Argentina, the state and the main players in the fisheries sector embraced a pattern of modernisation that failed to support and strengthen the local institutions that historically monitored fishing effort and restricted

unsustainable practices. This failure was indeed aided by fisheries management know-how. As highlighted in this and the previous chapter, the Argentine fisheries sector became overpopulated throughout the neoliberal restructuring process by stock-based rather than habitat-based studies and by fisheries policy instruments that glossed over the problem of adapting fishing capacity and effort to the actual resilience thresholds of natural resources. On the one hand, fisheries management policies have typically been at the service of maximising the exploitation of 'abundance', assuming that fishing is sustainable until significant evidence indicates otherwise. On the other hand, this approach relies on past-event-driven stock assessments applied to measure and regulate scarcity, when its production is too deeply ingrained in the production of wealth. It could therefore be argued that a fundamental intrinsic flaw in fisheries management is that of promoting sustainable fisheries as an equivalent of sustainable accumulation.

Examining the overexploitation of monkfish in the Atlantic waters from Newfoundland to North Carolina, Michael Weber (2002) argues that the history of the US federal marine fisheries policies historically revolved around the notions of abundance and scarcity. But while scientists and managers in the US shifted their framing of the concrete world from the notions of abundance and predictability to those of scarcity and uncertainty for over a century, in the case of Argentina, like in many other countries in the global south, this shift presents noticeable differences, one of which concerns the nature and speed of this shift.

As discussed in Chapter 3, before and during ISI, scientific research was in direct dialogue with local fishing communities and harvesting was primarily self-regulated through the close interdependence of the coastal and offshore fleets and the harvesting and processing sectors. For decades, the fisheries sector was more closely influenced by wider state policies concerned with the promotion of industrialisation and social integration and upward mobility of urban-based labour than by fisheries policies. Although the notion of abundance dominated the sector at the time, the predictability of such abundance was not taken for granted. As explained by a ship-owner whose family had operated in the local fisheries sector of Mar del Plata since the 1950s:

We were always aware of the immensity of the Argentine Sea and of the little we knew about how different species are interconnected. It was only by talking to other fishermen and to people in the onshore plants that we could read changing trends. Small caught specimens were one of the key indicators to know that we were doing something wrong. My father and grandfather always said that uncertainty in this trade wasn't just about not knowing at what price landings would sell but above all, what the sea would give us.

Since the late 1970s but more intensively from the late 1990s we started to hear a whole new vocabulary: maximum sustainable yields (MSYs), total allowable catches (TACs) and so on. I don't like romanticising the past, by I see all this technical paraphernalia as a step backwards. If we cannot follow up what is happening offshore, it is not because we lack the capacity to understand ecological changes. What we now lack is the means to talk with all those operating in the sea. Fishing is now a corporate and remote game, populated by long-range fleets and international companies, many without hardly any onshore presence (Fieldwork interview with J.A.B., shipowner and leader of the Coastal Fleet Association,¹⁶⁵ 25/08/2000).

Paradoxically, from the second half of the 1970s fisheries management in Argentina had become a matter of formalised scientific research and policy administration. Furthermore, in the late 1990s, the sector was to become a laboratory to test one of the latest pets of bio-economic theory, through the introduction of individual transferable quotas (ITQs). While I will return to explore in Chapter 7 how ITQs entered the scene in the midst of a heavy socio-environmental conflict, the Chapter 5 examines how the trends analysed in this chapter reshaped not only the structure of the sector offshore but also onshore.

¹⁶⁵ Asociación de Embarcaciones de Pesca Costera, created in 1986 to congregate all local coastal ship-owners under a single umbrella. In the year 2000, the organisation had 67 affiliates.

A number of further policy objectives to the ones analysed in the previous chapter were promoted during the NEM period, closely aligned with the application of neoliberal orthodox principles to the manufacturing sub-sector. Not only rising exports and the attraction of FDI but also the 'rationalisation' of firms' economic performance (i.e. 'fewer and more competitive firms') became paramount during the 1990s. These principles were either actively promoted or endorsed by the state, radically changing the harvesting and manufacturing circuits developed under the shelter of ISI policies. Whilst the previous chapter was concerned with the 'larger picture' in terms of the economic and environmental outcomes of the neoliberal restructuring process, this chapter examines the new architecture of the fisheries and in particular of the fishing industry, exploring how the relationships between firms and workers were reassembled under the neoliberal *dispositif*.

The chapter starts by drawing a typology of the economic agents that resulted from the restructuring process *vis-à-vis* those who survived from the pre-NEM structure of the sector. As noted in Chapter 3, prior to the neoliberal turn, Mar del Plata was the epicentre of the fishing industry. After the 1980s many firms moved to Patagonian and in the 1990s the long-distance freezer and factory fleet expanded dramatically, focusing on the southern fishing grounds of the Argentine Sea. Section 5.2 examines the extent to which the restructuring resulted in the decentralisation of the sector to the Patagonian region as intended.

In 1996, the national fisheries sector employed about 24,000 people directly and an estimated 120,000 indirectly, the latter including related employment in ports, transport, services and industrial-inputs providers (INIDEP, 1998a). As previously discussed, the shift towards prevailing commercialisation in the export market meant that the sector became more sensitive to macro-economic policies. At the same time, an overvalued currency implied high national costs in personnel, inputs and services, affecting the competitiveness of national firms in the international market. In this context, overcoming the perceived rigidities of the Fordist model of production became one of the key paths pursued throughout the 1990s. Increased flexibility was not only pursued by externalising costs and risks to labour but also by reducing firms' fixed costs in the infrastructural investment and maintenance of their plants. Section 5.3 examines how and why this resulted in a flexible subcontracting system that in turn allowed firms to externalise labour and environmental costs, with the concomitant precarisation and informalisation of work. Given that fisheries production tends to be highly

localised, the analysis examines the impact of this process in the city of Mar del Plata, which in 1996 concentrated almost 70 percent of the national manufacturing establishments in the sector and about 50 percent of the total labour force involved in harvesting and processing.

Section 5.4 explores the trajectories and experiences of female and male workers in the local fishing industry, seeking to unveil not only the material consequences of the restructuring process on their working conditions but also the ramifications and long-lasting impacts of this process on their lives and the lives of their families. The final section offers an overview of the intended and unintended consequences brought about by the neoliberal *dispositif*.

The analysis relies largely on data collected during the fieldwork in 2000 and 2001, on the triangulation of statistical sources available and on accounts published in the print media. Whenever possible, details from a small number of more recent qualitative studies are also examined as a means to corroborate the extent to which the trends identified throughout the fieldwork remain unchanged in subsequent years.

5.1 New and old economic agents

The structure of the national marine fisheries sector is complex, as companies operate in the harvesting or manufacturing sub-sector alone or combining both. In addition, due to the variety of fishing technology used in the harvesting sub-sector, a further stratification of economic agents can be made, differentiating the coastal fleet, offshore fleet and freezer/factory fleet. Thus, firms might include small coastal boats, independent ice trawlers, ice trawlers integrated with onshore plants, and firms with freezer and factory vessels that do both harvesting and processing exclusively onboard or sometimes operate with onshore plants, where fish and molluscs are further processed.

Key inputs include three main production factors: natural resources, capital and labour. As the sector operates upon common-pool natural resources, changes in exploitation rates and harvesting technology adopted by certain economic agents affect not only the reproduction of commercial and non-commercial species and the marine environment as a whole but also the strategies pursued by other agents. In terms of labour, contractual arrangements can be highly diverse, ranging from waged employment in manufacturing activities to profit-sharing schemes in the harvesting subsystem and piecemeal contracts across both subsystems. In addition, the attraction and expulsion of labour might fluctuate on a seasonal or annual basis,

following cycles of expansion and contraction, defined both in ecological and economic terms. With regards to the capital factor, one of the main characteristics of the sector is that investments are of high risk, due to the high level of uncertainty associated with the variability of yields, but also of the international market.

The main outputs of the system are usually defined as: (a) the distribution of gains resulting from the equation between the share of benefits between entrepreneurs and workers, the return rate of invested capital and the rent produced by fisheries; (b) the long-term stability of the system in ecological, economic, social and political terms; and (c) the satisfaction of nutritional needs. The above inputs-outputs equation is regulated throughout the whole economic circuit by a wide range of norms established by the state but also by market trends and socio-cultural pressures, which together define the purposes and main principles that should guide the system (e.g. exports, employment, local and regional development, natural resilience and so on). As discussed in the previous chapter, the norms and values regulating the fisheries sector are not only defined by local and national actors but also by extra-local economic institutions and agents, who in the case of Argentina became increasingly influential during the NEM period.

5.1.1 Unpacking the neoliberal reconfiguration

Following the above considerations, economic agents can be analysed in the light of the different degrees and forms of integration between the harvesting and processing sub-sectors, but also according to the size of vessels and their fishing gear, their degrees of fishing specialisation and industrialisation, and their target markets and channels for distribution and commercialisation.

Before the restructuring process, economic agents were mainly organised into two groups. On the one hand, there were independent fishermen that operated with coastal boats dedicated exclusively to harvesting, who often provided raw fish to the onshore processing plants and/or commercialised their production almost exclusively in the domestic market. Coastal fishermen focused on a variety of species, and were mainly concentrated in the harbour of Mar del Plata but also operated from over 20 additional harbours along the coast. On the other hand, after the late 1960s many firms started to operate with offshore vessels and onshore plants, integrating harvesting and processing activities. Their main manufacturing activities were the canning, fish oil and meal and frozen and fresh filleting industries. While the first two industries focused on a variety of species, the last specialised in hake. The majority of the national manufacturing establishments operating in the sector were based in Mar del Plata

and during the ISI period they commercialised their production both in the domestic and export markets.

The neoliberal restructuring process brought about a more complex typology of economic agents, outlined in Table 5.1. The last four categories characterise the economic agents emerging as a result of the policy reforms adopted since 1976 and ratified and expanded since 1991. The first three categories continued working as before the restructuring but under a new set of uncertainties marked by the removal of protectionist measures and the increasing competition for raw materials under conditions of technological disadvantage. As we see later, these economic agents shrank considerably throughout the 1990s.

Table 5.1 Typology of economic agents

	Type of firm	Harvesting	Processing (1)	Commercialisation	Geographical location
Pre-NEM agents	1. Independent coastal fishermen	√	N/A	Domestic market	Predominantly Mar del Plata but also other harbours in Buenos Aires Province and Patagonia
	2. Firms with ice trawler/s and onshore plant/s	√	√ R1 / R3	Predominantly domestic market	Predominantly Mar del Plata
	3. Onshore plant/s without vessel/s		√ R1 / R84-94 / R5 and R6	Predominantly domestic market	Predominantly Mar del Plata
NEM agents	4. 'Integrated' – Onshore plant/s with ice trawler and freezer vessels	√	√ R3	Domestic and external market	Predominantly Mar del Plata but also other harbours in Patagonia
	5. Cooperatives of services	N/A	√ R1	N/A	Predominantly Mar del Plata
	6. Onboard processors - Freezer and factory vessels without onshore plant	√		External market	Exclusively Patagonia
	7. Freezer/factory vessels with onshore plants	√	√ R3	External market	Exclusively Patagonia

Note: (1) The national classification of economic activities considers the elaboration of fish and seafood products under class 1512 (code 31A under the United Nations Standard Industrial Classification – SIC). According to this classification the fishing industry can be disaggregated into different production processes and products as follows: (R1) Processing and filleting of fresh and chilled finfish and shellfish; (R3) Processing, filleting and freezing of finfish and shellfish; (R84/94) Salting; (R5) Canning; and (R6) Fish meal and oil.

The so-called 'integrated' firms – also known as the 'big names in the fisheries sector' – are mostly national family firms who had traditionally operated in Mar del Plata's hake industry. These firms managed to capitalise themselves during the ISI period and also throughout the neoliberal turn. Thus, although most of these firms predate the NEM, they acquired a new physiognomy in the 1990s, when they became organised under the umbrella of CEPA. Their strategy during the NEM was the integration of all the productive stages, backwards (integrating the direct supply of raw materials through offshore and newly acquired factory freezer trawlers) and forwards through new commercialisation strategies, directly controlling sales channels in the domestic and external markets. Although the epicentre of their activities

continued to be the harbour of Mar del Plata, over the 1990s, some of these firms expanded their operation to the Patagonian region. They specialise in processing, filleting and freezing of finfish and shellfish (R3), supplying both the domestic and external markets, although their participation in the volume exported is smaller than that of the freezer/factory fleet.

As far as the manufacturing process is concern, in the early 1990s, the integrated firms introduced the so-called 'cooperatives of services', representing an umbrella of subcontracted workers operating on a piecemeal contractual basis. The cooperatives allowed these firms to break free from their previous Fordist salaried organisation, obtaining more flexibility and reduced costs, whilst involving a precarisation of workers' conditions. Although the epicentre of the cooperatives was and continues to be Mar del Plata, the system was also gradually adopted by firms operating in the Patagonian region. With very few exceptions, the cooperatives of services lacked any form of control over the supply of raw inputs and the commercialisation of manufactured products. In this sense, they represent an economic agent in the strict sense of selling their labour, a discussion to which I return in Section 5.3.

The onboard processors correspond mostly to joint ventures of mixed capital and the subsidiaries of foreign firms who acquired fishing licenses to operate in the national EEZ during the 1990s. This group focuses on a variety of species but mostly squid and shrimp, commercialising their products almost entirely in the external market. The last group is made up also of mixed and foreign firms operating predominantly from the Patagonian region and focused on hake, with most of their processing done onboard and with simple processes requiring unskilled manual labour performed in their onshore plants. In the 1990s the last two sectors became grouped under CAPECA, operating exclusively from a selected number of Patagonian harbours.¹⁶⁶

Capital ownership plays a fundamental role in explaining the changes that took place in the industry, as well as the particular position and degree of control of the different agents examined with regards to harvesting, manufacturing and commercialisation. An estimated USD 1,000 million were invested in the sector throughout the 1990s by a handful of national firms but also in association with Spanish, Japanese, American, Norwegian, Korean, Canadian and Chinese capital (UNEP, 2002). Considering foreign capital, Spanish firms occupied the first place among the foreign investors operating in the Argentine fisheries sector throughout the NEM. Other foreign capital input included Japanese capital in the production of surimi, South

¹⁶⁶ As previously mentioned, CAPECA stands in Spanish for Cámara de Armadores de Pesqueros y Congeladores de la Argentina.

Korean capital specialised in squid, Norwegian capital also operating in the squid fishery and capital from the USA and China mostly associated with the factory fleet (UNEP, 2002).

Looking at the relative weight of different agents within the harvesting sector, the inshore and offshore fleets (coastal boats and ice trawlers) generated in 1997 almost USD 166 million in production sales. Of this amount, 28 percent corresponded to the coastal fleet, 13.6 percent to ship-owners operating with ice trawlers but without onshore plants and 58.4 percent to the integrated firms, which denotes the hegemonic role played by these within offshore harvesting. Concerning the last two economic agents in Table 5.1, their expansion was directly linked to the remarkable increase of the factory/freezer fleets throughout the 1990s. While catches by these fleets were either marginal or null prior to 1978, they rose at a rapid rate during the NEM period, accounting for almost two thirds of all marine landings in the second half of the 1990s.

Considering the dependency on the hake fishery, it is estimated that between 1987 and 1996 the number of companies operating in the hake fishery almost doubled (INIDEP, 1998a).¹⁶⁷ By contrast, the inshore fleet continued fishing a variety of species and accounted only for 16 percent of total hake landings in that year. Table 5.2 shows that the hake fishery constituted the main resource for firms with trawlers without onshore factories, for the integrated firms¹⁶⁸ and the rest of the industrial fleet. However, there was a high degree of concentration of catches according to the size of the firms. Whilst SMEs represented 77 percent of the firms in the hake fishery, they were only responsible for 10 percent of hake catches, whereas the largest ten companies accounted for over 70 percent (Bertolotti et al., 2000).

Table 5.2 Hake dependency among different economic agents, 1997

Processing fleet type	Hake as a % of total landing	Filleting as a % of total hake processing	H&G as a % of total hake processing
Trawlers with onshore plants	81	39	61
Trawlers without onshore plants	54	24	74
Integrated trawlers, longline, shrimp, squid, with onshore plants	71	28	68

Source: Based on INIDEP estimates (1998b)

¹⁶⁷ Over half of the total number of firms operating in 1997 focused on this species.

¹⁶⁸ Trawlers with onshore plants.

Looking at the manufacturing sector, Table 5.3 shows the evolution of the number of establishments operating in the national fishing industry in 1982, 1987 and 1996.¹⁶⁹ At first glance, the total number of active plants appears to have increased throughout the period analysed, although the annual rate of new establishments incorporated between the first and second census intervals shows a significant decrease, from 7.5 between 1882 and 1987 to 2.5 between 1987 and 1996. A more disaggregated look at the actual number of active establishments presents an even more worrisome picture. Almost 34 percent of all plants surveyed in 1996 were in fact cooperatives of services. Although statistically these cooperatives are classified under heading R1, in most cases, they do not constitute proper industrial establishments but rather a collective of subcontracted workers, often operating in one of the plants of the subcontracting firm; this is why they are commonly referred to as 'pseudo-cooperatives'. Furthermore, as they emerge and contract according to market demands, their number varies significantly year by year.

Table 5.3 Evolution in the number of national fishing industry establishments, 1982, 1987 and 1996

CIU Code	Production sub-heading	1982	1987	1996
R1	Processing and filleting of fresh and chilled finfish and shellfish (including freezing and cold storage)	59	79	50
R3	Processing, filleting and freezing of finfish and shellfish	61	83	77
R84/94	Salting	36	33	18
R5	Canning	15	17	8
R6	Fish meal & oil and algae processing	10	5	6
Sub-total		181	217	159
R1 Cooperatives	Cooperatives of services	-	-	81
Total		181	217	240

Source: Based on data from the 1982 National Economic Census and 1987 and 1996 National Industrial Fisheries Census.

Excluding the cooperatives, it emerges that, despite the fact that 1996 marked a record year in catches and exports, the total number of operating plants had decreased by almost 27 percent in comparison to 1987 and was even slightly below the 1982 record. According to the National Economic Census in 2004-2005 there were 211 plants enlisted in the national fishing industry, out of which only 153 were active. In fact, activity levels varied significantly during the NEM period and particularly after the hake crisis since 1998. Throughout the 1990s, many plants were permanently closed down, while others were acquired by the integrated firms and

¹⁶⁹ Unless indicated otherwise, the statistics provided refer to industrial establishments rather than firms, given that a single firm may have several establishments or plants. According to INDEC, an industrial establishment is defined as every factory or workshop where part or the whole production process takes place, consisting of the transformation and/or elaboration of raw materials and/or ensemble and finishing of products.

open temporarily according to fluctuations in the availability of raw material and external demand. My survey of all establishments operating in Mar del Plata's hake industry in 2000/2001, also confirms this trend. Considering the processing and filleting of fresh and chilled products (R1), the processing, filleting and freezing of finfish and shellfish (R3) and the cooperatives of services, a total of 141 local establishments were enlisted by different official records, but only half were active at the time of the survey. I return to explore the findings from this survey later in this and the following chapter.

Looking at the composition of the manufacturing sector by production sub-heading, it is possible to see that by 1996 the fishing industry had become less diversified, with a significant decrease in the establishments dedicated to salting, canning and the production of fish meal and oil – three industrial activities that matured throughout the ISI period and were mostly based in Mar del Plata. By contrast, hake dependent establishments (R1, R3 and the cooperatives) accounted for almost 87 percent of all manufacturing plants active in 1996. This confirms that despite the apparent level of diversification of catches, the fishing industry as a whole became increasingly dependent on a single species, which was already almost fished up to its MSY prior to 1991. As discussed in Chapter 4, throughout the neoliberal turn, the overcapitalisation of the national fleet added substantial pressure on hake stocks, both north and south of latitude 41°S. This process was closely link to the shift in commercialisation from a dual orientation to a predominant dependency on external markets – also examined in Chapter 4 – and to the geographical redistribution of the sector analysed below.

5.2 Regional development or geographical polarisation?

Argentina has 25 ports along the Atlantic coast, located in five provinces over the Argentine Sea: Buenos Aires, Rio Negro, Chubut, Santa Cruz and Tierra del Fuego, the last four of which are part of the Patagonian region (see Figure 4.1). As explained in Chapter 4, until the restructuring process, Mar del Plata concentrated the majority of offshore vessels and processing plants. However, by the end of the 1990s, the city was losing its historical hegemonic role, while another five harbours in the Patagonian region were emerging as new players in the industrial fisheries scene, in particular, Puerto Madryn, Puerto Deseado, Punta Quilla, Ushuaia and Comodoro Rivadavia. By 1999, these five harbours together with Mar del Plata accounted for about 90 percent of the total volume of marine landings.

The establishment of new firms in the Patagonian region was actively promoted by the GoA both before and after 1991. During the lead-to-NEM period, this process was mostly associated with a number of agreements signed with third countries and with the chartering regime. In addition, the shift to the Patagonian harbours was aided by a special reimbursement regime introduced in 1983 concerning all products exported from the region and comprising all harbours south of the Colorado River. The percentage to be reimbursed started at 7 percent in San Antonio and increased towards the south, reaching 12 percent in the southern port of Ushuaia.¹⁷⁰ During the NEM, the geographical shift was promoted through a series of additional measures, including the agreement with the EU and also by the shrimp and squid booms, together with the wider opening up of the economy, which attracted FDI to the sector and the deregulation of fishing licenses. These mechanisms made it possible for the freezer/factory fleet to mine the Argentine Sea without paying any fees to the provincial governments. In a context of crisis in the balance of payments, increased export revenues from the sector were promoted at any cost to ameliorate the crisis.

As a result of the aforementioned measures, fish and seafood exports – both processed and unprocessed – became one of the most dynamic sectors in the Patagonian region. According to the Ministry of Economics, between 1988 and 1993, the four coastal provinces in the region increased their fish and seafood exports by 275 percent, whereas during the same period total regional exports increased by 141 percent. Meanwhile, exports from the fisheries sector in Buenos Aires province grew by 31.6 percent. While the close correlation between overall landings and exports and the expansion of the activity in the Patagonian region could be read as an indicator of the successful geographical decentralization of the sector, two different pictures emerge when considering the evolution of the harvesting and processing sub-sectors respectively.

5.2.1 Offshore and onshore realities

Prior to 1976, most catches took place in the north of the continental shelf (bio-geographic regions 1 and 2 in Figure 4.1). Between 1984 and 1999, Buenos Aires province gradually lost its hegemonic role, while the volume of landings increased exponentially in the Patagonian

¹⁷⁰ Although this special regime was only meant to be operational until 1995, it was then prorogued until 1999 by Law 24,490. As previously discussed, in August 1996, the Ministry of Economics decided to exclude fish and seafood products from the export reimbursement regime. Many firms congregated under CAPeCA appealed against this decision and were able to overrule it. Although the legitimacy of the position taken by the GoA was later ratified by the Supreme Court, in practice the reimbursement regime continued to be in operation. The dispute was partly settled by congress later, who reconfirmed the application of the reimbursements regime to the Patagonian fisheries sector but limited this benefit to those firms that operated with onshore plants in the region and excluded those whose production was fully manufactured onboard.

region, particularly during the NEM period.¹⁷¹ Looking at the most active harbours, in 1984 Mar del Plata was still the main port, accounting for over 71 percent of all national landings. However, its participation in 1991 had decreased to almost half of all landings and by 1999 local landings represented just over 30 percent of the national total. At the same time, landings in the harbours of Puerto Madryn and Puerto Deseado grew significantly, representing respectively 5.5 and 5.8 percent in 1984, 10.9 and 8.2 percent in 1991 and almost 29 and 12 percent in 1999. The southern harbour of Ushuaia had a marginal role in 1984, but accounted for over 10 percent of total landings in 1999.

A disaggregated examination of the fleets operating from each harbour allows an appreciation of the actual economic agents that drove the expansion of harvesting in the Patagonian region. In 1996, the coastal and offshore fleet of Buenos Aires province had almost the same number of vessels as before the NEM, accounting respectively for 25 and 46 percent of provincial landings. These figures correspond almost entirely to Mar del Plata, with landings from the freezer fleet coming from a handful of local integrated firms. By contrast, in the Patagonian region, the participation of the coastal fleet in 1996 was spread across 14 harbours, where artisanal and coastal fishing predated the restructuring process. The operation of this fleet exhibited a diversified harvesting pattern (36 species of fish and shellfish) and was dedicated to meeting local and regional demands (Caille, 1996). However, the real transformation within this region only took place in a few Patagonian harbours and was linked to the operation of the freezer/factory fleet. In 1996, landings from this fleet only surpassed 100,000 tonnes in four regional harbours, namely Puerto Madryn, Puerto Deseado, Puerto Quilla and Ushuaia.¹⁷²

But while the long-distance fleet operating south of latitude 41°S grew dramatically in the 1990s, the manufacturing sector did not experience a similar trend. Looking at the distribution of plants located in Patagonian in 1996, these were spread across nine harbours, mostly located in the province of Chubut, which together accounted for over half of the total number of plants in the region. Second and third were the provinces of Santa Cruz and Rio Negro,

¹⁷¹ In 1984 Buenos Aires province accounted for almost 84 percent of total landings, but its participation decreased to 60 percent in 1991 and to just over 35 percent in 1999. By contrast, the share of the Patagonian region in the total volume of landings was nearly 14 percent in 1984, growing to 38 percent in 1991 and about 63 percent in 1999 (SAGPyA and CFI Statistical Series).

¹⁷² During the lead-to-NEM period, Puerto Madryn became the main port for the industrial processing fleet, attracting both firms operating with and without offshore plants. Whereas in 1991, the local freezer/factory fleet accounted for 43 percent of total local landings, by 1996 its weight had increased to over 73 percent. In the same year, Puerto Deseado fisheries sector was almost entirely based on the freezer/factory fleet, which accounted for 91 percent of total local catches in 1996, followed by Punta Quilla and Ushuaia, the last two being epicentres of the squid and surimi fisheries.

accounting respectively for almost 24 and 11 percent of the total number of plants in Patagonia, followed by Tierra del Fuego with over 7 percent. In the cases of Santa Cruz and Tierra del Fuego, the provincial governments made significant investments throughout the 1990s to modernise their harbours, attracting mostly large storage plants associated with the factory/freezer fleet.

Taking a historical look at the evolution of manufacturing establishments by region and excluding the cooperatives, the Province of Buenos Aires lost its historical hegemonic role in the 1990s, while the number of plants operating in Patagonia grew prior to the NEM (from 18 in 1982 to 34 in 1987) and further increased to 62 establishment in 1996. The level of inactivity among plants listed in the 1996 census was 3 percent in Patagonia and 28 percent in Mar del Plata.

Nationwide, the main production sub-headings in 1996 were the processing and filleting of fresh and chilled finfish and shellfish (R1) and processing, filleting and freezing of finfish and shellfish (R3), followed by the salted, canning and fish meal and oil sub-sectors, the last being almost entirely located in Mar del Plata. As mentioned before, category R1 includes two types of establishments, those run by firms who commercialised their production and those run by cooperatives of workers, who mostly sell their labour to firms in the R3 category. In 1996, most cooperatives were located in the Province of Buenos Aires (70) and particularly in the port of Mar del Plata. By contrast, the majority of the manufacturing establishments operating in the Patagonian provinces exhibited a low level of diversification and were mostly focused on production sub-headings R3 and R1. According to data provided by the Ministry of Economics the personnel employed in the industrial plants operating in Patagonia decreased in fact from 2,863 in 1984 to 2,773 in 1994.¹⁷³ The production value from the Patagonian fishing industry over the national total experienced a modest increase from 4.4 percent in 1984 to 5.7 percent in 1993, with contrasting trends among the four regional coastal provinces. During the same interval, the weight of the regional value output of the manufacturing sub-sector over the national total remained the same in the Province of Rio Negro, decreased in Santa Cruz and increased in Chubut (Aranciaga, 2003).

As previously explained, throughout the second half of the 1990s, the development of the fisheries processing sub-sector in Patagonia was encouraged by the modifications made to the reimbursement regime in the 1990s, which tightened duty charge export reimbursements to

¹⁷³ Economic Reports No 32 to 37, elaborated by the National Secretary for Economic Programming of the Ministry of Economics.

onshore production. An additional incentive arose with the deepening of the hake crisis in 1998, when the GoA prioritised the distribution of the hake TAC to those firms operating with onshore plants. As a result, some firms opened new plants in the region to access higher fishing quotas. However, the majority of these plants were dedicated to support the operation of the long-distance fleet (e.g. maintenance works, cold-storage facilities) rather than processing activities.

By 2001, the Patagonian fisheries sector generated about 2,500 direct and indirect jobs, out of which only 900 benefited people living in the region (Aranciaga, 2003). Looking at the whole regional economic circuit, fishing per se employed mostly foreigners and among locals, the new jobs created were low-skilled, seasonal and precarious in the contractual arrangements adopted. Onshore plants included a reduced number of administrative employees and low-skilled workers, mostly young local women. The adoption of precarious contractual arrangements was enabled by the weak development of sectoral trade unions in the region.

5.2.2 The NEM geography of the sector

Considering the typology presented in Table 5.1, within the Patagonian harbours those agents predating the neoliberal restructuring process did not benefit from the new business environment, either in terms of export revenue, increased catches or growing employment. In fact, regional coastal fishermen faced increased competition over certain resources and half of the manufacturing plants operating in sub-headings other than the filleting and freezing of finfish and seafood closed down during the 1990s. The real winners in this process were the three types of new economic agents emerging during the NEM, namely foreign and mixed capital firms who operated exclusively with freezer/factory vessels, those who had a long-distance fleet and offshore plants and finally the integrated firms grouped under CEPA, who claimed to be constituted mostly by national capital.

Considering the last of these, as mentioned before, many integrated firms originally from Mar del Plata either shifted or expanded their operation to the Patagonian region in the 1990s. Out of the 107 active establishments surveyed in Mar del Plata during the fieldwork in 2000/2001, almost 16 percent of the largest establishments under heading R3 – the integrated firms – had opened new plants in Patagonia during the NEM period and had acquired long-distance vessels at the beginning of the 1990s through the chartering regime.¹⁷⁴ Respondents from these firms highlighted that the shift to Patagonia was an essential strategy to remain

¹⁷⁴ The total number of active local establishments operating under sub-heading R3 surveyed during the fieldwork was of 32 plants, corresponding to 25 firms.

competitive in the globalised business environment of the 1990s for the following reasons: first, because it allowed such firms to increase their exports under the shelter of the reimbursement regime; and second, because they were able to expand their fishing grounds beyond areas where overfishing was taking its toll and to reduce operational costs.

Concerning the cost structure of the sector in the 1990s, production costs exhibited great variations across firms depending on the degree of integration among different phases (harvesting, manufacturing and commercialisation) but also on their geographical location, with significant differences between the ports of Mar del Plata and Patagonia.¹⁷⁵ For instance, for ice trawler ship-owners operating from Mar del Plata, fuel and maintenance costs represented about 50 percent of total operating costs, whilst the other 50 percent went into labour. By contrast, for freezer vessels operating from the Patagonia region, fuel costs accounted for 10 to 15 percent and maintenance for another 15 percent. In the late 1990s, as a direct result of overfishing north of parallel 42°S, ice trawlers from Mar del Plata required about 20 steam days to fill in their holds – twice as much as in the early 1990s – whilst the industrial fleet operating from Patagonia could steam for less than a day to the same effect.

Considering the hake industry of Mar del Plata, raw materials accounted towards the end of the 1990s for 60-70 percent of their total operating costs, whilst labour accounted for 15-20 percent (INIDEP, 1998a). Before the NEM, the cost structure used to be 50 percent for labour, 30 percent for raw materials and the remaining 20 percent for other costs. The dramatic change in the incidence of labour and raw materials in the operating costs of the local hake industry was not only due the increasing scarcity of hake but also to the decreasing weight of wages, a reduction achieved through the flexibilisation of workers under the cooperative regime. These two aspects – how to control and/or reduced raw materials and labour costs – were central to the strategies adopted by firms to cope with the restructuring of the sector.

In the case of Patagonia, the emergence of new fishing establishments across several regional harbours during the NEM could be regarded as the seed for an incipient process of micro-regional development. Even if the creation of direct employment by the newly established firms was not significant, it could be speculated that many localities were to benefit in the medium to long term from the stimulation of indirect jobs to serve these firms. However, only a handful of Patagonian harbours became in fact new enclaves of economic activity, attracting workers and service providers from the region and other parts of the country. In overall terms,

¹⁷⁵ According to Bertolotti (1986), during the 1970s the cost of inputs represented between 23 and 24 percent of fisheries GNP; in 1980 it increased to 30 percent and declined until 1984 to 16.6 percent.

the model of fisheries development promoted throughout the NEM relied extensively on FDI, rising exports and expanded fishing effort and was based on an advanced technological model that increased firms' capacity to mine the sea but with weak spill-overs in terms of local and regional development. As highlighted by one of the key informants interviewed during the fieldwork:

The decentralisation of the fisheries sector was fair in principle. But, in practice, it was like 'undressing one saint to dress another one'. The incentives to promote the development of the fishing industry in Patagonia should have been compensated with equal measures and policies to support the plants already operating in Buenos Aires province. Instead firms in this province found themselves under conditions of competitive disadvantage and this fostered their exodus from Mar del Plata to a few ghost towns in the south of the country (Interview with CL, Lawyer specialised in fisheries, 14/08/2000).

A senior manager of the Regional Harbour Consortium of Mar del Plata further unpacks the above statement, contending that while many of policies adopted during the restructuring process were apparently 'protectionist' developmental measures, in reality they 'protected' the interest of big national and foreign capital at the expense of local and regional producers:

Although the reimbursement regime was introduced with the explicit objective of promoting the regional development of Patagonia, in reality it was part of a state strategy to transnationalise the Argentine Sea. It was clear from the onset that this measure was insufficient to open new opportunities for national firms. Beside a few, most local firms already had their infrastructure in Mar del Plata and lacked the capital to open new plants in the south, while the few national firms already established in Patagonia were financially constrained to access the exports market. If we look at the current situation [2001] in Patagonia, beside the coastal fleet, we don't find a regional fisheries sector but rather floating factories – most of them of foreign capital – who fish and process onboard. The real objective of the regime was first geopolitical – to populate the Argentine Sea with foreign vessels operating under the national flag. Later on, the government of Menem sized this mechanism as a way to attract FDI and increase export revenue. The objective of supporting the regional development of Patagonia became gradually lost and just a façade to legitimise the opening up of the sector to foreign capital (Interview with R.A., Senior Manager of the Regional Harbour Consortium, 02/07/2001).

Towards the end of the 1990s, the development of the national fisheries sector, both north and south of the Colorado River, became the central focus of heated conflicts, which were addressed through the 1997 Federal Fishing Law, the frequent establishment of closed seasons and debate over the allocation of a system of ITQ. As discussed in Chapter 7, the 'Fisheries War', unleashed at the turn of the 21st century, polarised the integrated firms versus the freezer/factory firms, pretty much around the alleged higher impact of the former on the generation of local employment and development. The conflict was underlined by the economic restructuring of the sector, the overexploitation of the main commercial species and, as discussed below, the precarisation of the labour force.

5.3 The end of Fordist organisation?

As discussed in Chapter 3, the development of the Argentine fishing industry took place throughout the ISI period under the premises of the Fordist model, broadly based on the principles of Taylorist administration that generalised the one best way to organise labour, intensifying the production process and dividing tasks within the factory. This model was supported by a series of institutional mechanisms regulating the behaviour of the different agents involved in the production process. These included the regulation of salaries through collective negotiations, the establishment of minimum wages and a stable contractual system safeguarded by the state. However, in the 1970s this model was deemed obsolete and firms in the sector became increasingly concerned with overcoming the 'rigidities' of the Fordist model by decentralising the production process towards subcontracted firms.

Worldwide post-Fordist strategies followed two different mechanisms, the decentralisation of production through vertical subcontracting or through the horizontal association of firms. In the first case, one firm subcontracts part of the production to another firm, specifying the characteristics of the product and the time to deliver it. This is called 'vertical decentralisation' because all decisions remain in the hands of the subcontracting firm, whose interest is to obtain the lowest price and faster delivery for the products subcontracted. By contrast, when production is decentralised through horizontal relations between firms, both parties become partners and the relationship is not controlled by price but by the exchange of ideas and articulation of capacities to improve the quality of the final product. In this case, industrial restructuring is linked to elements of no-cost competition, such as the capacity to supply differentiated demands for products of higher quality, to adapt to technical norms and specifications, to strategically define the markets and to involve workers and subcontractors in the management of the production process.

Vertical decentralisation is often defined as a 'renewed form of Fordism' (Lipietz, 1992), because the central firm maintains control of the production process, while reducing wage costs and gaining elasticity to respond and adapt to fluctuating demands; in short, basing its competitiveness on the flexibilisation of labour inputs and costs. In this way, the process of vertical decentralisation puts pressure on the subcontracted firms, who often operate under precarious contractual and working conditions. As a result, the fluctuations of the market in terms of demand and availability of raw materials are externalised from the subcontracting firms towards the lowest links in the production circuit. In the case of the Argentine fisheries sector, this process had dramatic impacts on the organisation of production and on the

relationship between capital and labour, and was facilitated by the deregulation of the labour market. In this context, 'vertical decentralisation' involved a series of complex and often fraudulent strategies through which the previous 'Great Compromise' was replaced by the antagonistic confrontation of capital and labour and the defeat of the latter through the concomitant processes of flexibilisation, terciarisation and precarisation, which came together through the cooperativisation of the labour force. Before exploring the details of this process, an overview of the changes in employment generated by the fisheries sector is in order.

5.3.1 Vertical decentralisation

The 1996 National Industrial Fisheries Census recorded about 12,400 people working in the processing sector at the national level, including both formally employed workers and cooperative workers, with an estimate of almost a similar amount of workers employed in the harvesting sector, out of which only over a third were national workers (Madaria, 1999). This census is the only available source providing nationwide statistical employment figures for the sector as a whole, however, official figures have to be treated with caution, as they are interpreted by different studies with significant variations. These differences are partly explained by the fact that the structure of the sector had become remarkably complex by 1996, with many processing plants operating under informal conditions outside of the statistical radar. Adding to this difficulty, during the fieldwork I observed that it was common for the largest establishments to report cooperative workers as waged workers, when in fact such workers had ceased to be under a salaried regime, while still operating in the plants of the subcontracting firms, albeit on an irregular basis and under piecemeal contracts.

All in all, the actual number of workers employed in the processing onshore plants in 1996 is likely to be close to the above figure, but out of these more workers than those recorded in the census are to be found in the pseudo-cooperatives, particularly in Mar del Plata. Considering this locality, the personnel locally employed in harvesting and processing activities was estimated in December 1996 to include 11,607 workers, out of which about two thirds were engaged in onshore processing plants. At the national level, almost 79 percent of these workers depended on the hake fishery, with the highest proportion working in the onshore plants of Mar del Plata. In Patagonia by contrast, most hake-dependent workers were operating in the harvesting sector.

Looking at the geographic distribution of employment across all processing plants, the 1996 National Industrial Fisheries Census records that approximately 65 percent of the total labour

force working in the fishing industry was concentrated in Buenos Aires province, followed by Chubut with 25 percent, Santa Cruz with almost 10 percent and Tierra del Fuego, with less than 1 percent. Even if the number of workers is likely to be higher in the case of Buenos Aires province due to the high concentration of unrecorded cooperative workers in Mar del Plata harbour, these figures ratify the production patterns discussed before, in which Buenos Aires province continued operating with onshore manufacturing, while the development of the sector in Patagonian harbours was predominantly based on onboard processing.

Between 1987 and 1996, the total number of workers in the national fishing industry decreased by 11 percent. The fall of employment was mostly felt in the Province of Buenos Aires (particularly in Mar del Plata), where the number of workers decreased by 25 percent. In contrast, the number of workers in Patagonia increased by 37 percent. The bulk of the industrial workforce in 1996 was found in the processing and filleting of frozen products (R3) (specialised in hake fillets and H&G) and in the cooperatives of services (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4 Employment in onshore plants by region, 1996

Processing type	Buenos Aires Province	Patagonian region
(R1) Processing and filleting of fresh or chilled finfish or shell fish	376	490
(R1) Cooperatives of service	3,303	749
(R3) Processing, filleting and freezing of finfish or shell fish	2,979	2,881
(R84/94) Salting	707	-
(R5) Canning	762	21
(R6) Fish meals and oils	106	12
Total	8,233	4,153

Source: Elaborated on the basis of the 1996 National Industrial Fisheries Census.

Turning to the typology of economic agents discussed before, Table 5.5 shows the relative weight of each agent in the generation of employment. Considering the total number of workers employed in 1996 in the processing sector at the national level, almost a third were occupied by the main economic agents operating prior to the restructuring process (second and third categories), while the rest were 'employed' by the new economic agents emerging throughout the NEM period. Within the last group, it becomes once more evident that the freezing/factory sector operating with onshore plants (mostly in Patagonian harbours) had little impact on the overall employment structure of the processing sub-sector. The most significant agents in terms of employment were the cooperatives of services followed by the integrated firms, both predominantly located in Mar del Plata.

Table 5.5 also shows the low weight of agents in the third category, historically populated in the case of Mar del Plata by SMEs operating in the canning and salting industries, oriented to the domestic market and operating under a unified collective bargaining agreement with the majority of their workers legally associated with a single trade union. During the 1990s, while most of these firms went out of business, the integrated firms became stronger and could be regarded, as the real winners of Menem's 'productive revolution'. As discussed before, key to their competitiveness in the new business environment was their success in developing a segmented labour market. One of the big entrepreneurs in the local fishing industry celebrates the success of these firms as follows: "We were able to remain competitive on the basis of efficiency improvements... Since the constitution of cooperatives with the [previous] personnel, productivity has been significantly improved, absenteeism – which had previously fluctuated to up to 25 percent – has been reduced, and today [1994] we have products that wouldn't exist if it wasn't for the cooperatives" (*Redes*, 1994: 18).¹⁷⁶

Table 5.5 Relative distribution of employment in the national fisheries sector by type of agent, 1996

	Type of firm	Harvesting	Processing	Commercialisation	Employment (%)
Pre-NEM agents	1. Independent coastal fishermen	√	N/A	Domestic market	N/A
	2. Firms with ice trawler/s and onshore plant/s	√	√ R1 / R3	Predominantly domestic market	21.2
	3. Onshore plant/s without vessel/s	N/A	√ R1/ R84-94/R5 and R6	Predominantly domestic market	7.2
NEM agents	4. 'Integrated' – Onshore plant/s with ice trawler and freezer vessels	√	√ R3	Domestic and external market	20.8
	5. Cooperatives of service		√ R1	N/A	39.1
	6. Onboard processors – Freezer and factory vessels without onshore plant	√		External market	N/A
	7. Freezer/factory vessels with onshore plants	√	√ R3	External market	11.7
	Total				100.0

Source: Elaborated on the basis of the 1996 National Industrial Fisheries Census.

According to the 1996 census, the cooperatives employed a total of 4,052 workers, out of which 82 percent were located in Buenos Aires province and almost entirely in Mar del Plata. If this city was the epicentre of the national fishing industry prior to the neoliberal restructuring process, during the NEM it became home to the majority of the processing labour force working under the cooperatives. Towards the late 1970s, the local fishing industry of Mar del Plata employed about 10,000 workers of which almost 40 per cent were

¹⁷⁶ Original in Spanish, author's translation.

women.¹⁷⁷ By 1990, there were about 7,000 waged workers, and by 1992 only 3,000.¹⁷⁸ By 1994, about a third of those who had lost their job in the larger industrial plants had joined the cooperative system and by 1996, about 44 percent of all workers in the local fishing industry were based in cooperatives, while others made redundant in 1992 had not been reabsorbed by the sector (INIDEP, 1998b).¹⁷⁹

The bulk of the reorganisation of the labour force into cooperatives took place over a period of four months between 1991 and 1992. During this period, many workers were fired or coerced to resign under the promise to be reinstated in their jobs as cooperative partners. Among those fired, very few workers received any compensation, and still today, many are awaiting a verdict in their legal suits with their former employers, who in many cases declared themselves bankrupt and therefore exempt from fulfilling their contractual obligations (Mateo et al., 2010). The sheer speed of the process prevented workers from mounting a defence. Some continued working in the same factories where they had been previously employed, but lost their status as full-time salaried employees. Others made redundant formed new cooperatives, operating informally in small workshops and even households. Multiple testimonies gathered during the fieldwork and from the media confirm this process, as explained below by two workers who initially opposed the new regime:

When many factories closed down... we found ourselves on the streets and the cooperatives were the only option... In despair, many comrades exchanged their compensation for the chance to be part of the cooperative proposed by the bosses. Supposedly, we were going to become independent and earn more money! With other comrades, we walked around the harbour trying to explain to others what was behind [those promises]. But eventually, we had to surrender and start working for the cooperatives, nobody could afford to be jobless for so long... In the end, it was [the] cooperative [system] or nothing (Interview with E.T., 2006, Mar del Plata. Adapted from Mateo et al, 2010: 42).¹⁸⁰

We shifted to the cooperative system under the pressure from the patrons... SOIP was an accomplice of the companies. When we were pushed into the cooperative system, SOIP did not call for an assembly, a demonstration or a strike. Trade union leaders were well paid for their complicity (Interview with M.D., 2000, Mar del Plata. Adapted from *Puerto No.* 10, 2000: 14).¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ Since the 1970s, women have had a significant role in the local fishing industry of Mar del Plata, particularly in processing activities such as canning and filleting.

¹⁷⁸ Figures based on the records of the Fish Industry Workers Trade Union (Sindicato Obrero de la Industria del Pescado – SOIP).

¹⁷⁹ In 1989, the ratio between waged personnel and total employment in the local fishing industry was 0.91, which means that almost all the workers employed in the sector were under a salaried regime. By contrast, in 1996 less than a third of the total personnel employed in the fishing industry were waged workers. The rest were either casual workers or workers associated under the cooperative system.

¹⁸⁰ Author's translation.

¹⁸¹ Original in Spanish. Author's translation.

In a fieldwork interview, the co-editor of *Puerto*, an independent publication dedicated to investigate trends in the fisheries sector, summarised the shift as follows:

The mechanisms chosen by the entrepreneurs to separate themselves from the workers and to drag them towards the cooperatives of work were diverse and ranged from seduction to plain blackmail. In this way, workers were led to believe that by abandoning their salaried status, they were going to turn into small entrepreneurs. Alternatively, they were simply threatened to be jobless if they did not accept the cooperative system (Fieldwork interview with G.N., journalist, 22/06/2001).¹⁸²

With the implementation of the cooperative system, workers lost their time payment guarantee, food vouchers, additional annual salary, family bonus, paid holidays and bank holidays and sick leave. In terms of direct monetary income, at the beginning, the differences were not too significant. By the mid-1990s, waged workers earned USD 0.16/km, while the cooperative workers received USD 0.156/km.¹⁸³ Nevertheless, their real exploitation was manifested in the number of extra hours required to earn an almost similar amount, the intensity and instability of work and the lost of all social benefits and rights. In 1999, only 28 percent of all the workers in the fishing industry were protected by the health insurance system offered by the trade union, while an estimated 54 percent had to rely on alternative health care systems paid directly by each worker (Schonberger and Agar, 2001). At best, cooperatives operated with life insurance, which was not paid by the contractors but deducted from workers' earnings. Apart from this, labourers under this system lacked any protection in case of ill-health, work-related accidents and partial or total disability (Gennero de Rearte et al., 1997).

Over time, workers in the cooperatives continued to see themselves as 'employees' instead of 'cooperative associates' or 'autonomous workers'. Almost a decade after the shift, they still tried to remain affiliated to SOIP and to participate in the trade union elections and fought for the restoration of the 1975 collective bargaining regime, struggles to which I return in Chapter 7. Below, a worker explains how a handful of companies dominating the sector used the cooperatives as a façade to regulate the fluctuating demand for cheap labour:

The managers of the cooperatives are in fact front men working for the old bosses; they fix the price and quantity [of fish to be processed], and then recruit workers through the radio on a day-by-day basis. When we arrive at the 'cooperatives' we have to take the job under any conditions imposed on us... Some cooperatives work with life insurance that only covers death and total disability. These are the so-called 'legal cooperatives' but in practice they operate in the same way as those cooperatives that don't have any papers. They are a fraud (Interview with M.C., male fillet worker, 10/09/2000).

¹⁸² Original in Spanish. Author's translation.

¹⁸³ Fieldwork survey 2000/2001.

Historically the structure of the local fishing industry was characterised by the coexistence of medium- and large-size plants with smaller piecemeal working establishments, known as *fasoneras* or 'caves'. These were informal satellite plants established by the main firms to expand their production capacity when required by harvesting surpluses. As explained by Pradas (2006: 54), the *fasoneras* "always existed as a trend because the patrons were unable to regulate efficiently raw material catches. Thus when they had a surplus in relation to the processing capacity of their main plants, they used the 'caves' [unused plants] where workers were hired on a piecemeal basis, and paid in black at the end of the day".¹⁸⁴ The main difference between the *fasoneras* and the cooperatives of services emerging in the 1990s is that the former were an ad-hoc mechanism to expand manufacturing capacity when needed, while the latter became a generalised strategy absorbing the bulk of the processing process under precarious working conditions.

5.3.2 Externalising labour costs

Workers in Mar del Plata's fishing industry found themselves in the 1990s in one of the following three groups: a minority continued working as waged employees under the umbrella of the sectoral collective bargaining agreements, while many were shifted to the cooperative system and a third group became unemployed. Considering the second group, it is possible to identify a number of different cooperative regimes, which included: (1) those who worked in the plant of the subcontracting firm in an exclusive and permanent relationship; (2) those cooperatives that operated outside the main plants of the subcontractors, which in general were managed by ex-*fasoneros* (those organising piecemeal work in the so-called 'caves');¹⁸⁵ (3) those cooperatives providing services under short-term contracts, operating with different contractors over time; and (4) clandestine establishments, whose number is difficult to define, comprising precarious plants and even households, where a small number of workers would operate under completely informal conditions.

Although not all cooperatives constituted in the 1990s were legally a 'fraud', their situation was far from being black and white, with many 'greys' in between displaying a complex spectrum of informalisation and precarisation. According to the national Institute for Cooperative Action¹⁸⁶ (IAC), in 1999 only a third of the local cooperatives of services were fully registered, while the rest operated without even the basic infrastructure required to perform their tasks safely. In 2000, the head of IAC's delegation in Mar del Plata announced to the

¹⁸⁴ Original in Spanish. Author's translation.

¹⁸⁵ The plant and infrastructure of these cooperatives was owned by the subcontracting firm, by the *fasonero* or by a society registered to that effect.

¹⁸⁶ Instituto de Acción Cooperativa.

press that about 96 local establishments had been penalised for misusing the cooperative regime, 20 of which had been closed down (*La Capital*, 17/11/2000). In 2004, the Ministry of Labour of Buenos Aires province charged 23 'pseudo-cooperatives' for labour fraud. In a press interview, the local delegate from this ministry in 1997 characterised the situation as follows:

A few business men organised this fraud, although they don't like the cooperatives to be called this way, they are a clear form of labour fraud... [they operate] with people who are not partners of the cooperative, who do not vote in any assembly, do not share the profits, have no access to decisions, neither keep accounting records. Instead these cooperatives only have receipts, showing that workers are paid 200 or 300 'mangos',¹⁸⁷ this is clearly a case of labour fraud... In the harbour, the worst affected are the fillet workers, but they are not the only ones. A few days ago we inspected several plants producing fish meal and found deplorable working conditions. You have to see how hard they work, without gloves, boots or anything... Now we don't only have to force these gentlemen [the entrepreneurs who control the cooperatives] to formalise their workers, we also have to show them how many people have become disabled thanks to the cooperative system, people who cut their foot, hand or lost a finger, those who suffered accidents at work... they are all abandoned, they don't have health or disability insurance and the entrepreneurs look in another direction (Interview with J.M.S., Regional Delegate of the Ministry of Labour of Buenos Aires Province, *La Capital*, 14/12/1997: 14).¹⁸⁸

As previously argued, the decentralising of processing phases outside the firms' legal and contractual responsibility did not respond to the real principles of cooperativism, such as egalitarian organisation, collective negotiation and management of production, or equitable distribution of the benefits. Instead, the cooperative structure was imposed by some firms upon their previously waged workers in order to avoid taxes and social contributions, as well as regulations concerning the local environment and working conditions. In this way, they managed to establish a flexible contractual system, in which payments became directly related to productivity, and the risks inherent in external market fluctuating demands were transferred to the workers.

Prior to the 1990s the weight of social contributions amounted to 75 and 90 percent of the total salary mass in the hake industry and other processing activities respectively. The high incidence of social contributions was due to the high number of work-related accidents and illnesses affecting labour in the fishing industry (INAP, 1999). It is estimated that the companies who shifted their personnel into cooperatives reduced overall labour costs by 30 to 40 percent (2000/2001 fieldwork survey). In addition, given that most of the cooperatives operating in Mar del Plata in the 1990s were hake dependent, their workers were badly affected by the scarcity of the resource and by closed seasons and other measures regularly

¹⁸⁷ Argentine slang implying a 'worthless amount of money'.

¹⁸⁸ Original in Spanish. Author's translation.

taken since the turn of the 21st century to restore adequate levels of reproductive biomass. Some of the workers interviewed explained that when the demand went up, they would put in up to 12 hours a day, with no bonuses for working over public holidays or weekends (ibid.). By contrast, during the hake crisis, underemployment became a structural trend within the sector, as most workers were only able to work a maximum of one to two days per week and on an intermittent basis.

The restructuring process not only worsened material working conditions but also disarticulated the pre-NEM matrix of political relations. The records of SOIP reveal that in 1984 there were 4,200 regular affiliates participating in the trade union elections; by 2002 the number of voting affiliates was reduced to 1,157 workers (Allen, 2001). It is estimated that by 2010, between 4,500 and 6,500 workers had been displaced from their previous waged status in the local fishing industry, most adding to the underemployed army in the cooperatives system (Mateo et al., 2010). Two of the many workers shifted from the salaried to the cooperative system in the early 1990s explain the working conditions under the new system:

With the cooperative system all forms of social protection have vanished!¹⁸⁹ As autonomous workers we have to pay our own social security contributions and our income is not even enough to survive. Most people have been unable to keep up with their retirement pensions for the last seven to eight years. Under the cooperative system we have lost the rights historically gained after decades of struggles (Fieldwork interview with R.M., male worker in a pseudo-cooperative since 1992, engaged in the industry since 1973, 15/08/2000).

We are only working one or two days a week. Many of our comrades spend the night by the door of the cooperatives, waiting until 4 a.m. when the cooperatives open, just in case someone is absent (Fieldwork interview with M.D., female worker in a pseudo-cooperative since 1992, 15/08/2000).

A paradoxical aspect of the cooperatives of service is that what once emerged as a mechanism of workers' resistance and struggle against capitalists' domination mutated during the neoliberal restructuring into an instrument of super-exploitation manipulated by capitalists. As argued by Neffa (2008: 98):

Historically, this type of cooperative was created in the 19th century by semi-skilled and skilled workers to organise non-capitalist enterprises, where an egalitarian and mutually supportive relationship among their members prevailed, who aimed to work outside a dependant relationship and without being subordinated. By contrast the cooperatives of services emerging in the 1990s were economic units in which their members were in juridical terms cooperative partners instead of waged workers, therefore excluding their relationships from being regulated by labour laws and social security.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ These include: health insurance, social security, paid holidays, annual bonus, contributions for children, maternity leave, accident insurance and retirement contributions.

¹⁹⁰ Original in Spanish. Author's translation.

In this way, the cooperative system was transformed into a 'legal' option for firms to reorganise labour and the production process and to regulate the self-exploitation of labour. By definition, work under these cooperatives is precarious, as their workers operate as autonomous labourers and without trade union representation. Although in 1992 the IAC¹⁹¹ established that all cooperatives of services should guarantee equal social security conditions for their members to those enjoyed by waged employees, I found during the fieldwork that most cooperatives in the fishing industry were unaware of such regulations, while their application was poorly monitored and enforced. In the context of the Latin America NEM, this is far from an isolated case, as contended by Ramírez Rojas and Guevara Fletcher (2006: 100), over the time "... the flexibilisation of the labour market has been traduced into an unusual proliferation of labour cooperatives, a euphemism by which entrepreneurs avoid the labour duties that they should assume with their workers in a more human scenario".

In the Argentina of the 1990s, the outsourcing and subcontracting boom through cooperatives of services extended to the whole national territory and to a wide variety of economic sectors, becoming a prevailing practice in manufacturing activities with high seasonal labour variations, such as the food and agro-industry (Bendini and Gallegos, 2002). These cooperatives constitute a process of tertiarisation, in the sense that they dress-up industrial workers as 'service providers', with the caveat that the actual service provided is their manual labour. In the case of the fishing industry, industrial workers were disguised as cooperative partners and the front-men of the firms as the presidents of such 'cooperatives'. By contrast, in a real cooperative the partners buy the raw materials, process fish and then commercialise their product, with the profit made equally being distributed among its partners. Instead in the fraudulent application of this concept, the pseudo-cooperatives distort the above principles, as the 'associates' contribute their labour and are remunerated in relation to the amount of fish processed, while the raw materials and commercialisation are controlled by the firms (Rodríguez, 1999). The benefits for the latter are multiple, who not only become able to link labour costs purely to productivity as-and-when market demands dictate, but also to avoid gross and profit income taxes, transferring these fiscal debts to the subcontracted cooperatives.

5.3.4 Externalising environmental costs

The restructuring of the fishing industry brought not only negative social and natural consequences but, in the case of Mar del Plata, also resulted in the deterioration of the city's

¹⁹¹ In Spanish: Instituto de Acción Cooperativa. Nowadays Instituto Nacional de Asociativismo y Economía Social (National Institute of Cooperative Association and Social Economy).

environment, particularly in the harbour area, traditionally the social and political epicentre of the activity and home to most onshore factories and their workers. In 2001, 85 percent of the operating plants were still located in this area, taking up an area of 350 hectares (Photo 5.1).¹⁹² In that year, the harbour had the highest concentration of slums in the city, with 36 squatter settlements on private and public land housing about 5,000 families in 2011.¹⁹³ Most slum-dwellers had been traditionally employed by the fishing industry and by 2001 they were either engaged in piecemeal work in the cooperatives or unemployed. Since the 1990s, living conditions in the area have worsened due to frequent floods caused by the accumulation of industrial waste blocking the local drainage system, and also by foul-smelling emissions from the fish meal factories.

Over the years, the breakwaters built in the harbour have affected the coastline, causing the erosion of the beaches located to the north of the city. In addition, sand accumulation constrained the operations of the fishing fleet, demanding regular dredging. During the 1960s and 1970s, significant public and private investments kept the harbour infrastructure operational. Since the late 1980s, environmental conditions started to deteriorate rapidly, both due to the state's withdrawal from the administration of the harbour but also because of reduced investments in infrastructure and maintenance by the onshore plants. These and other associated processes epitomise the most materially concrete side of the so-called 'urban sustainability crisis', a crisis in the maintenance of collective techno-infrastructures and services. Of course this crisis is not only material in nature but also political and socio-cultural. In a wider sense, the social and physical impacts produced and/or accelerated under the neoliberal restructuring process on the city can be read as the final link in the chain of externalisations from the global economy downwards. This implies the reversion of the urban condition as a vehicle for and expression of social progress. As argued by Fernández (2005: 73), a typical characteristic of the urban condition under the neoliberal era is that "cities take away more than what they offer". Furthermore, this could be read as an outcome of the hypertrophic protection of potential economic gains at the expense of other constitutive dimensions of the urban and of urban life. We return to this issue in Chapter 7 to examine in particular how the discursive and material boundaries of the 'conceived' and the 'lived' (Lefebvre, 1976, 1991) were shaped and reshaped as the symptoms of a fundamental change in the urban condition came to a head through a number of socio-environmental conflicts affecting Mar del Plata from the end of the 1990s onwards.

¹⁹² Comprising about 20 percent of the total urban area.

¹⁹³ In 1996, informal settlements on private land alone housed 3,209 inhabitants (Fernández, 1996).

Photo 5.1 Location of Mar del Plata's harbour and panoramic view



Source: Consorcio Portuario Regional de Mar del Plata (CPRMdp)¹⁹⁴

One obvious and extensively discussed side of the urban sustainability crisis concerns the withdrawal of the state from ensuring the functioning of the urban condition as a vehicle of social integration and upward mobility, but also from safeguarding universal conditions of environmental quality. As discussed before, the neoliberal shift was underpinned by the notion of differential sustainability, incarnated in the discourse and practices of state withdrawal from universal to a few 'strategic' areas of intervention. Throughout the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century, these practices became emblematic of the state's actions against the protection of the common public infrastructure of the harbour and the working and living space of the local fisheries labour community.

As previously mentioned, for decades, the national state was responsible for the administration of Mar del Plata's harbour, but following public investment cuts, the GoA announced in 1994 the intention to privatise it. The local government challenged this decision and together with local firms and trade unions, demanded a role for the local fishing community in its administration. As a result, in 1999 the Ministry of Public Works of Buenos Aires province authorised the constitution of an advisory provincial-local body and in 2000, a public but non-statal consortium became responsible for overseeing the operation and administration of the local harbour. Although the initial objectives of this consortium focused on safeguarding access to and control over key collective assets for the fishing community, "the actually pursued objectives became soon more corporate than initially expressed" (Interview with A.R.G., Chief Security Department CPRMdp, 30/08/2000). The municipality and local economic agents viewed the consortium as an opportunity to improve the harbour infrastructure for industrial purposes but also to turn it into an international passenger and

¹⁹⁴ [<http://www.puerto-mardelplata.com.ar/index.html>] [Last accessed: 24/06/2010].

freight point in order to revitalise the local economy.¹⁹⁵ The plan included the removal of the slums settled on public land in order to extend the regional railway system to the harbour.

Attempts to evict slum-dwellers from the wider area of the port's community started in the late 1990s and continued well into the first decade of the 21st century. Throughout this period, the focus of the state was on the eviction and relocation of those settled on private lands, in prime central locations from a real-estate perspective. In 2005 the government of Buenos Aires province launched a programme entitled Dignidad (dignity), articulated to a nationwide programme aimed at providing adequate housing to those slum-dwellers suffering from very poor living conditions, in terms of housing precarity, overcrowding and lack of basic services. At the time, it was estimated that between 15 and 20 percent of the total population of Mar del Plata (700,000 inhabitants) lived in 219 slum settlements dispersed all over the city, which according to official statistics housed 11,000 families in acute conditions of housing emergency (Núñez, 2009). However, Dignidad only supported the construction of 500 new houses allocated to those relocated from Villa Paso – consolidated informal settlement on private land in a central location equipped with full infrastructure, which housed a large proportion of workers from the local fishing industry. This initiative was used to support a project approved by the municipal council in 1999, whose rationale at the time is expressed by its author: "The poor are necessary for their labour force, as workers, but a city dominated by market laws has not been built to house them".¹⁹⁶

The 500 new houses built by Dignidad were located in three different peri-urban areas far away from the port, all lacking basic infrastructure and transport public facilities. Furthermore, in 2007 work in two of these locations was suspended before completion, as the two contracting building firms demanded higher payments. In March 2008, 200 families occupied one of the relocation plots with the aim of completing the houses by themselves (Núñez, 2009). Their attempt was repelled by the police and followed by repeated occupations and violent evictions. However, throughout this process, these and many other families consolidated their organization under a collective known as 'The Mar del Plata Homeless',¹⁹⁷ which was federated to other homeless collectives in the country. I return in the Chapter 7 to

¹⁹⁵ In 2007 Mar del Plata started a strategic planning process in which the harbour was envisioned to support a 'first class city'. The authors of the specific strategic plan for the harbour stated at the time that "given the large investments required to improve the accessibility of the harbour for the operation of the industrial fishing fleet, the purpose of the plan is to enhance instead its potential role to support tourist activities rather than industrial production" [<http://www.ggsalas.com.ar/plan-estrategico-para-el-puerto-de-mar-del-plata/>] [Last accessed: 01/09/2010].

¹⁹⁶ Extracted from, 'Debate on the Project "Relocalisation of Villa Paso"', Proceedings of the Honourable Municipal Deliberative Council, 16/09/1999. Author's translation.

¹⁹⁷ Los Sin Techo Mar del Plata.

examine how and to what extent, the claims and actions of this collective became linked to those of other local collectives congregating the workers in the pseudo-cooperatives.

In addition to the aforementioned processes, the restructuring also led to a chronic lack of private investment in infrastructural updates and maintenance in those industrial fishing establishments that remained in business. By in 1990s, local firms started to externalise their environmental costs by discharging their wastes directly into the sewage and drainage systems. This trend was further aggravated by the generalised practice of subcontracting part of the production process to informal (unlicensed) cooperatives, who lacked any treatment facilities to reduce and treat industrial wastes (Allen, 1999). Wastewaters from fishing industries are rich in fats, blood, proteins and other organic residues, and, to a lesser degree, chemicals used to clean the plants. According to the 1996 National Industrial Fisheries Census, in that year only the larger plants had primary treatment systems in operation, with 60 percent of all local factories discharging their industrial wastewater through clandestine connections into the drainage and sewage networks or directly into the sea (INIDEP 1998b).¹⁹⁸ Ratifying this trend, during the 2000-2001 fieldwork I found that most of the cooperatives lacked even decanting tanks. The situation is described by a senior manager of the municipal state-owned company for water and sanitation (OSSE)¹⁹⁹ responsible for overseeing industrial and residential liquid wastes discharges:

I have worked for this organisation since 1972, well before it was transferred to the municipal government and turned into a parastatal company in 1984. In all these years, I have never before seen such a high volume of effluents illegally discharged from the factories in the port. Our role is mainly to monitor that industrial effluents are within acceptable parameters. When this is not the case, as with the majority of the plants operating in the local fishing industry, there is really little else we can do beyond applying fines, but this mechanism is falling increasingly into disuse. I cannot recall the number of times in which we were 'officially instructed' to withdraw applied fines. OSSE is supposed to shift from regulation, monitoring and enforcement to 'persuasion' but I would like someone to explain what this means. Are we supposed to 'persuade' companies who are already fully aware of how their effluents should be treated before discharging? Or the illegal cooperatives who hardly have any means to comply with the most basic regulations? (Fieldwork interview with S.P., Head of the Quality Department of OSSE, 19/12/2000).

A senior officer from the Municipal Environmental Under-Secretariat evaluates the limited scope to address the aforementioned problems from a political perspective:

¹⁹⁸ Since 1985, Mar del Plata has had a sewerage treatment station but, because of budget cuts, it only provides primary treatment: liquid and solid effluents are separated and then discharged directly into the sea. As a result, sea and beach pollution has also worsened during the last two decades.

¹⁹⁹ Obras Sanitarias Sociedad del Estado (OSSE) Mar del Plata, transferred to the municipal government in 1984 and formerly known as Obras Sanitarias de la Nación.

The municipality has inherited a long-term crisis and is doing its best to cover deficits in areas that lack basic infrastructure. The problem now is quantity, not quality. The port is deteriorating but at least it has basic infrastructure. We don't have the human resources to monitor efficiently who is polluting and where, and even if we did, we would then face serious problems in enforcing existing regulations. In a context of recession and crisis, we cannot close-down factories because they are illegally discharging blood and fat into the sewage or drainage system or even directly into the sea. We are forced to be flexible and to a certain point 'blind' to avoid the worst consequences (Fieldwork interview with C.K., Head of the Municipal Under-Secretariat for Environment Management, 17/08/2000).

In the 1990s, the fishing industry started to be associated with the overexploitation of groundwater sources, on which the municipality as a whole depends to supply domestic, industrial and agricultural users. In 2001, onshore plants in the fishing industry accounted for the highest consumption volume among industrial users.²⁰⁰ Over the years, the port had been particularly affected by the depression of groundwater levels, suffering recurrent water shortages. As a result, many factories installed clandestine pumping systems to guarantee a regular water supply, further aggravating the situation.²⁰¹

The body responsible for monitoring the quality of fish and seafood products is the National Agro-food Quality and Safety Service (SENASA).²⁰² The provincial government of Buenos Aires establishes the legal framework dealing with the control of atmospheric emissions and OSSE regulates the emission and treatment of liquid and solid wastes. Since 1996, a new legal framework introduced by the provincial government demands the environmental auditing of all industrial plants. The municipality is responsible for its enforcement while the provincial government assesses the environmental auditing reports. All fishing industries are requested to submit an environmental audit report in order to obtain a Certificate of Environmental Aptitude (CEA). In theory, no industry can operate without a CEA, however, according to municipal records, in 1998 only 13 percent of the fish processing plants had submitted an environmental audit report and only 10 percent had been certified. These figures exclude the many pseudo-cooperatives and informal establishments of which the municipality had no records. Still today, the environmental framework regulating the fishing industry has a poor level of enforcement owing to the dispersed and conflicting remits of several agencies.

²⁰⁰ In the canning factories, water is used to wash raw materials and containers and for sterilisation processes, and in the cold storage factories it is used for ice production, general hygiene, and fish processing.

²⁰¹ As a consequence, in 1999, the main wells that supply the area presented a high level of salinisation (800-900mg/l) and also a high concentration of chlorites, reaching values of 6,000mg/l, far above the maximum value recommended by WHO as acceptable for human consumption (700mg/l) (Allen, 1999).

²⁰² Servicio Nacional de Sanidad y Calidad Agroalimentaria.

Beyond the official division of responsibilities, the local government of Mar del Plata acquired throughout the 1990s new functions but lacking in budget and institutional capacity terms.²⁰³ By the late 1990s, like many other municipal administrations, Mar del Plata's government became allured by the promises of Barcelona-style strategic planning. The local administration embarked on a strategic planning process in 2001, a process driven by the main economic agents of the city – including the main firms in the local fishing industry – which six years later gave birth to a strategic plan for Mar del Plata. Though the plan as such has not materialized as a whole, throughout its elaboration and dissemination it became influential in constructing an image of the city as a competitive and flexible system to be managed like an enterprise and with the support of marketing strategies. The diagnosis supporting the strategic plan was ahistorical – the city was examined as made of fragments, snapshots deprived of the lived experience – and also naïve in assuming that the city could be the artifice of its own economic success. Furthermore, the issues discussed in this section were either ignored or addressed through an emphatic rejection of informal settlers or producers. Sustainability was of course one of the qualities of the desired city, albeit defined as an attribute of competitiveness confined to certain spatial and social fragments. The discussion in Chapter 7 examines some aspects of the clash between this emblematic version of the conceived city and that of the lived city, as these meet in the narratives and counter-narratives emerging throughout the 'Fisheries War' conflict.

5.4 The end of the salaried age

As discussed above, workers in the sector were seriously affected by the restructuring process in terms of wages below the minimum consumption basket, labour instability and the erosion of basic labour rights. Such conditions were not exclusive to the fishing industry but widespread across the Argentine working class. As argued by Neffa (2008: 71):

If we acknowledge that for most informal workers the predominant characteristics [of work and life] are [signalled by] precarious conditions, insecurity and instability, low wages and profit-earning capacity; lack of social protection and social vulnerability, informal work constitutes one of the hard cores of the economic, financial, fiscal, labour and pension-system problematic of the country affecting almost half of the Argentine EAP [economically active population]. It is therefore possible to conclude that in this country [informality] shifted from being a marginal segment of the labour market and a reserve labour army to become a structural feature of this market.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ These included a new role in the environmental management of the city through the creation of a specific under-secretary. However, industrial monitoring and infrastructure management continued to be treated as two separate spheres, just as the monitoring of fishing and processing are also regulated, respectively, by separate national and local bodies.

²⁰⁴ Original in Spanish. Author's translation.

To be fully appreciated in its wide ramifications and depth, the impact of the restructuring process on labourers needs to be examined in the light of the specific living and working conditions of female and male workers. This analysis allows a deeper understanding of the commonalities, differences and particularities in the perceived and lived experiences of impoverished female and male workers within the fisheries sector. The total universe of reference in the analysis (workers within the fishing industry of Mar del Plata – both inside and outside the cooperatives) was made in 1996 of just over 7,700 workers, out of which approximately 40 percent were women. Their ages ranged between 18 and 45 years and most of them did not have secondary school education.²⁰⁵ Many were migrants from other localities within Buenos Aires province and the northeast region of the country. These workers constituted the most impoverished segment of the national fisheries sector. For many, filleting fish under precarious labour conditions was their first experience in the labour market.

Considering the hake crisis affecting the sector from 1998 onwards and also the dynamic conditions under which workers could be absorbed or expelled from the sector, the total universe of workers in the local fishing industry was further reduced in the following years. A study conducted by Mateo et al. (2010) reveals that by 2010 there were just over 6,000 workers in the onshore processing plants of Mar del Plata, who despite being the engine of capitalist accumulation within the sector, continued to operate without a collective bargaining agreement and legal trade union representation. Though working conditions in the local fishing industry faced a number of further mutations in 2002 – as a result of the devaluation of the national currency and change in government orientation towards a post-neoliberal regime – the fact that impoverished workers continue to experience a similar reality reveals that the structural legacy of the neoliberal turn has not yet been reversed.

5.4.1 Labourers' trajectories through precarious work

The life stories of many workers engaged in the local fishing industry during the ISI period, reveal that historically they had enjoyed respect within their society, perceived their remuneration to be good, had savings capacity and the opportunity to access credit and housing, among other indicators of their social inclusion. As manual workers they enjoyed not only a dignified social position but also social mobility. Maria, a mother of two who had worked with her husband in the filleting industry since the early 1970s, talks about the experience and expectations of many workers like her prior to and after the 1990s:

²⁰⁵ According to the 1996 National Fisheries Industrial Census, most workers in the sector had a low educational level, the majority only had primary education, with a second group unable to complete even primary school and a third with incomplete secondary school.

Before, we were not rich, nor poor. We worked hard but the effort was worthwhile. Over the years, we managed to build our own house and to send the kids to school. It was also easy to obtain credit, nobody denied it to a worker from the fishing industry, now they laugh at you! I leave the house at 4 a.m., at that time you can see hundreds of men and women walking around the harbour and checking one cooperative after another to see if there is any work. We have to walk because we cannot afford the cost of bus fares any more. Sometimes we don't get a table [to fillet] in the whole week, if we are lucky we work one or two days per week... the rest of the time we just walk. My husband stopped seeking work because he is 50 and the plants only want young people. He does bits and pieces in construction, but with the fishing industry in crisis there is not much work in the city (Fieldwork interview with M.D., 15/08/2000).

The above testimony not only highlights the social marginalisation and vulnerability of the workers during the restructuring process but also a number of important features that characterise this sector of the proletariat in terms of age, education and gender. Historically, entrance to the fishing industry's labour market did not require a high level of education or highly specialised skills. Filleting can be defined as a semi-skilled trade, in which skills are orally transmitted and learnt from others and through observation and repeated practice. For this reason, this industry acted historically as an accessible entry point to the labour market for women and men with low educational credentials. Ricardo, a fillet worker who started working in the local fishing industry in 1973, recalls those days: "You only needed to know someone already working in the industry to introduce you to the plant manager. If you applied yourself, after a month or so learning the trade, you knew you had work for life" (Fieldwork interview with R.M., 15/08/2000). Another worker recalls how the situation was in the 1970s:

During the 1970s you would walk into a factory and if you did not like the working conditions, you simply had to go to another place [plant]... Not only there was plenty of work, but the salary was enough to support a family and satisfy its basic needs, with the additional advantages of having permanent work, social security, pension contributions and being part of the [fishing industry] trade union (Interview with Natividor, 2009, Mar del Plata. Adapted from Mateo et al., 2010: 31).²⁰⁶

By the mid-1990s, the most common occupations undertaken by workers before entering into the fishing industry were unskilled jobs in the construction sector and as waiters for men, and domestic service and the garment industry in the case of women. At the time of the hake crisis, the skills and educational profile of workers in the sector limited their options to re-enter the labour market through other economic activities, beyond casual and poorly paid jobs. As highlighted by Mateo et al. (2010: 34): "fish filleting is neither a totally skilled or unskilled job, neither is it a trade in which workers are simple appendices to an automatised process". During the Fordist period, salaried workers had a certain degree of control to regulate their rhythm and productivity within the overall planning and control of the factory,

²⁰⁶ Original in Spanish. Author's translation.

but they received a guaranteed wage, often topped up with productivity rewards. By contrast, during the 1990s, the generalisation of piecemeal work pushed workers to employ their labour force at their maximum capacity and intensity and to extend working hours, allowing capitalists to increase the intensity of work as and when needed. A female fillet worker and left-wing political activist, describes the day-to-day routine of informal workers in the sector:

Those who are lucky enough to have a permanent [filleting] table listen to the radio at 8 p.m. and then find out at what time they will start working the following day. Those who are not so lucky might be called when the fish arrives at the plant. The working day lasts until there is no more fish, it could be 5 or 15 hours, sometimes were are called at 3 a.m. to unload two crates of fish and two hours after are back at home, we never know how the next day will be. We can't take our children to the doctor, or to school. Often we have to send someone else to school parents' meetings because we have to be ready to take onboard any work available at the last minute. This is how life is for workers in the black market; we are not even in control of our personal time and life (Fieldwork interview with M.N., 24/08/2000).

Seven years later, another testimony made by a local lawyer representing several workers in conflict with the cooperatives confirms that the above situation had not changed:

At 52 years of age, Mirta, mother of three and grandmother of five, feels that she has been abused and fights for what she deems fair. She asks her comrades not to be afraid and to speak out about their hardships. In the first fortnight of July [2007], she earned 35 Argentine pesos, at 15 cents per kilogram [of filleted hake]. The only two times she got a table, she managed to work for 40 minutes. She had been called at 3 a.m. Her story is similar to that of many other workers congregated around bonfires on the streets, fighting the cold, waiting for work (Interview with R.G., Mar del Plata, *Puerto* (2007) 45: 23).

In a recent study that looks at workers' conditions within the local fishing industry, Mateo et al. (2010) corroborate the persistence of precarious working conditions 18 years after the emergence of the cooperatives. The authors identify four segments of the labour force, those who operate as waged permanent workers, those whose contracts are framed as SMEs, those in the cooperatives of services and those working under fully unrecorded and informal conditions. The boundaries between the last three segments appear to be permeable, with workers often moving across from one to another one. There are, however, significant differences between those working under waged contracts and those who do not, the latter suffering not only from material instability but also anxiety and uncertainty.

Work in the sector involves a number of serious and common health risks associated with: the standing position in which work is performed; frequent injuries on the upper extremities due to the sharp tools used; falls and injuries while loading and unloading fish crates, and several common illnesses caused by the cold and humid environment in which labour operates. In the 1970s workers fought for a reduction of the working day from the eight statutory hours.

Although this was not accepted by the firms, in 1975 SOIP renegotiated the collective bargaining agreement to include a surplus payment for insalubrious work. Needless to say, under both the legal and illegal versions of the cooperative system, in the 1990s workers lost even that compensation. The working environment in the fishing industry increased not only the physical but also mental risks associated with the trade. Physical working conditions worsened not only because of the precarious (or totally absent) protective equipment used in most cooperatives but also because of the intensity and long hours of work. Mentally, repetitive work often produces depression and passiveness to which the uncertainty that characterises the cooperative system adds anxiety and sleep disorders (Nicolaci, 2008). As a result of all the above, average working life in the trade is relatively short; most workers find it difficult to work beyond the age of 50. For the generation that spent most of their lives working within the cooperative system, the situation is aggravated by the lack of health insurance while at work and lack of pension when retired.

Neffa (1998) defines the dramatic situation of informal workers as a 'silent holocaust', in which a whole generation of workers is dragged into an inevitable future of destitution. It should be highlighted that workers under the cooperative system not only were deprived of regular social security contributions by those who used their labour force but also became debtors to the Federal Administration of Public Revenue (AFIP)²⁰⁷ due to overdue contributions in their status as autonomous registered workers. Due to the reduced number of days at work at the beginning of the 21st century, fillet workers within the cooperatives received an average monthly income of USD 300, out of which they were expected to pay income tax of almost USD 100 plus 30 pesos towards the pension system (Nahum, 2003a, 2003b). While most cooperative workers were obviously unable to keep up with these contributions, in some cases the managers of the cooperatives deducted these from the money paid to workers. However, in many cases, these monies never went to AFIP. Speaking about her future, Mirta explains the dramatic prospect for someone aging under this system:

I see myself scavenging, fighting with others who are perhaps in a worse situation than mine, trying to gather anything to earn a cent... or sitting and waiting for someone to take pity of me. I don't have the satisfaction of being able to say one day: now, I will get retired. I have paid all my [pension] contributions throughout the 40 years in which I worked but these never reached the system. [When we were shifted] we were obliged to pay five years of contributions as autonomous workers... but all is gone (Adapted from Mateo et al, 2010:59).

²⁰⁷ Administración Federal de Ingresos Públicos.

5.4.2 Gender, work and family

Looking at the gender profile of workers in the fishing industry in Buenos Aires province, according to the 1996 National Industrial Fisheries Census, 34.5 percent of the total personnel employed in the onshore plants were women, although their participation varied across different processing activities and also the size of establishments. Female workers had historically prevailed in the canning and salting plants, two of the worst hit sectors by the neoliberal restructuring process. In terms of establishments' size, women's participation appeared to be more significant in the larger plants (with 51 or more employees). In 1996, women represented almost 20 percent of the labour force in the cooperatives, though the figure is likely to exclude the most informal segment of the cooperatives, found to be an important niche for women during the 2000/2001 fieldwork. A survey conducted by INDEC in 1997 estimates that the weight of female workers in the processing plants of Mar del Plata was close to 40 percent (INDEC, 1998). According to this source, the typical female worker in Mar del Plata was over 40 years of age and had either complete or incomplete primary education. In more than half of the cases, the salary of female processing workers was the main household income.

Women also represent a sizeable proportion of the manufacturing workers in the processing plants located in Patagonia. A comparative study by Josupeit (2004) looking at the involvement of women in the fisheries sector in selected harbours in Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil confirms a number of trends.²⁰⁸ First, the number of female staff working in processing plants in 2001/2002 exceeded the number of male staff and was particularly high in the packaging sector (close to 100 percent), whilst lower in loading and unloading tasks. In general, the number of women in the sector appeared to increase in proportion with the degree of complexity of the processing task. Managers contended that they preferred to employ younger female workers (18-35 years), seen as more 'docile' and easily adaptable to learn new techniques (ibid.). However, this preference only extended to manual labour, as more qualified jobs were predominantly done by men. In the Patagonian harbours, only 12 percent of the plants appeared to provide some sort of training to their staff and as in Mar del Plata, most female workers had either incomplete or complete primary school education.

²⁰⁸ In the case of Patagonian harbours, this study commissioned by FAO, involved 252 interviews with female workers conducted between December 2001 and March 2002. Most of the female labour in the sector was found in the cooperatives. In Mar del Plata almost 100 women working in seven processing plants were interviewed between May and October 2001. In this case, although the interviewees covered the full range of production and processing tasks, the study does not make any reference to women working under the cooperative system, where under legal or illegal conditions.

More than two thirds of the Patagonian female labourers interviewed during the above study worked more than five days a week, and 63 percent more than eight hours per day. Only a minority of workers enjoyed full rights – such as social security and maternity leave – and only 6 percent of the interviewees were affiliated to a trade union, mostly those engaged in administrative jobs. When asked about the most valuable aspects of their quality of life, most female workers highlighted two aspects: work and health, whilst less than five percent made reference to their rights to work under socially just conditions, access better education and housing (Pascual, 2001). In the majority of the cases the income of the female worker was the primary source of earnings in the family, repeatedly reported to be insufficient to make a decent living.²⁰⁹ Childcare was a common problem for most female workers, even those living with a partner were often forced to leave their younger children alone or under the care of older siblings (ibid.).

Considering the land-based factory workers in the hake sector of Mar del Plata, according to a study produced by the World Bank in 2000, nearly 30 percent were women and out of them a third were household heads. However, these figures underestimate the real weight of women in processing activities due to their larger participation in under-recorded precarious cooperatives. For women in particular, the precarisation of work has had very dramatic consequences, worsened by the instability and irregular pattern of labour that characterised the sector after the early 1990s. A female worker interviewed during the fieldwork describes how women juggle between earning an income and parenting:

There are two sides to our lives: we are either at work for long and at ridiculous hours or begging for work. But we don't think about this, we just get on with life as it is. Our kids grow up on their own and faster than other kids, as they have to pick up the work that we cannot do at home, look after their siblings, cook, clean the house... Then, one day we open our eyes and realise that we don't know them any longer. This often happens when your girl becomes pregnant or your son involved with drugs... you think, why me? And then when you look around you realise that it is not just you or your children, your story is repeated again and again by the experiences of so many comrades. But even then, it is difficult to stop, someone has to bring bread to the table and that thought takes over anything else... (Fieldwork interview with M.S.V., fillet worker, 16/08/2000).

Karina Fernández (2005: 7), Chief Editor of *Puerto*, a local magazine dedicated to the fisheries sector, characterises the experience of many women in the cooperatives as follows: “Mothers suffer because they have to leave their kids alone and children suffer from the deprivation of a playful childhood, the anxiety of calling for their mum and not getting her. [These children] have to overcome the feeling of being abandoned and in many cases don't manage to do so.

²⁰⁹ Only 17 percent of the women interviewed had some additional source of income from activities outside fisheries.

This not only constitutes a present but also a future drama, which could only be address with the elimination of illegal work”.

Child labour is another reality intensified under the clandestine cooperatives, where under-16s often do casual work cutting *cococho* (a fleshy part of hake jaw considered a delicacy) or peeling shrimps. Although the lack of detailed quantitative studies makes it difficult to determine how many children and teenagers are engaged in these activities, an article published in *Puerto* (2005) provides a vivid description of the deplorable working environment in which children are engaged, the poorest within all processing establishments. However, child labour is not restricted to the productive sphere but also to the domestic labour performed particularly by girls who from a young age have no option but to replace their working mothers. The invisibility of this group is reinforced by two factors: they are children and they are female.

A study by ILO (2009) highlights that in Latin America, 29 percent of girls-teenagers between 5 and 15 years of age perform regular domestic tasks in contrast with 15 percent of boys, whilst the gap between girls and boys is even higher among older teenagers. An in-depth study by Cutuli (2009) focuses on the life stories of two girls whose mothers work in the cooperatives in Mar del Plata when and where work is available. Like many other workers, these women listen to the radio in the evening and then go to rest immediately after in order to get up at 2 a.m. when they start searching for a filleting table. Meanwhile, their daughters prepare dinner and feed their siblings and look after them throughout the night. Their mothers would spend most of the following day either working or searching for work and then rest to recover for a similar routine day after day, six days a week. The daughters are therefore the primary carers of their families. Within the limits of what is possible, they also attend school, although they find it difficult to find any study and leisure time. Apart from a few local errands, leaving the house is not an option; boyfriends are met at home, where both girls started their sexual life while looking after their siblings.

The interviews were done in 2009, when both girls were teenagers, however they did not recall a different life, as they had become the primary carers of their families at a young age, when the only working option for their mothers was that of piecemeal jobs at the cooperatives. Like their progenitors, these girls have no control over their own time; when there is fish and workers are in demand their day might be 15 hours long; when the market is quiet, they would regularly dedicate between eight and ten hours to running their households. When asked about their future dreams, both girls found it difficult to transcend any extra-

domestic future and talk about maternity as their only expectation. One of them at the age of eighteen was a mother of two, and perceived looking after her children and her siblings as a natural progression of life.

The above stories among many others are a testimony of a spiral of 'compulsive solidarity', in which girls and teenagers have no other choice but to support their mothers, becoming in the process invisible (Bourdieu, 1973). They work without remuneration; their reality is not recorded by any statistic or even valued by their own families. Their sacrifice is transmitted from one generation to the next as they represent the weakest and most invisible link in the precarisation of labour. As explained by a female worker interviewed during the fieldwork:

If my daughter does not take over, we don't eat, I often remind her of this when she complains... and then I feel guilty. I realise it is unfair on her and many other girls to dump so many responsibilities on their shoulders. Meanwhile, those who introduced the cooperatives are getting their pockets full. They exploit us and in turn we exploit our own children... because it is exploitation, isn't it? Imagine if we were able to say 'enough' and stop working until the bosses, the government or someone provides the necessary childcare support... but we don't even talk about this, at best, we fight for more regular and better paid work (Fieldwork interview with A.C., 13/09/2000).

Another hidden reality reported by many female workers is that of sexual harassment, as explained by a female worker interviewed by Mateo et al. (2010: 68):

For the single fact of being young and relatively good looking, or if you are not it really does not matter... once you are in [have access to a filleting table], you are expected to pay for the privilege... sexual harassment by the managers of the plants is very common, I have experienced it, if you don't give in, they chase you until either you leave or they fire you (Interview with M., Mar del Plata, December 2009).

As argued by Robert Castel (2003), in the last few decades the neoliberal erosion of a salaried society has given rise to a 'metamorphosis of the social question' in which the sphere of work has become characterised by a complete divorce between the judicial and political recognition of the rights of workers as citizens, and the market's dictation of who works, how and when, depending of productivity and profitability considerations. In other words, if during the ISI period salaried work was an essential vehicle of social integration, the neoliberal turn marks the end of the salaried age, with large segments of the EAP becoming rescindable and socially excluded according to their gender, age, skills and so on.

5.5 Expected and unexpected outcomes

The fast transformation of the sector throughout the 1990s prompted a number of studies by UNEP (2002) and the World Bank (1999) on the impact of trade liberalisation policies on the Argentine fisheries sector. Pursuing a cost-benefit analysis, these studies are typically structured around the following three arguments. First, they all characterise the ISI period as a phase in which the fisheries sector developed within an open-access harvesting system in a context of poor or null regulation.

Second, the impact of ISI is either overlooked or criticised as 'inefficient'. 'Inefficiency' refers in this context to two main contentions: on the one hand, ISI policies are blamed for limiting the potential development of the sector as an export-oriented activity and, on the other hand, for the creation of a 'deficient' industrial structure, highly dependant on national subsidies and protectionist policies and unable to reach an organisational and technological maturity comparable to other international firms operating at the front of techno-organisational innovation.

Third, while acknowledging the existence of 'some' problems generated by the adoption of trade liberalisation policies (namely over-fishing, depletion and social unrest) the aforementioned studies focus on "exploring the room for curtailing the negative effects of these policies whilst harnessing their potential benefits" (UNEP, 2002: 3). Their conclusions converge in prescribing a 'clear' private property regime in the exploitation of fisheries resources under the system of ITQs. As discussed in Chapter 1, this line of argument characterises the selling of an ideology imposed on the global south since the mid-1970s across different economic sectors, not just fisheries, and across different developing countries, not just Argentina. In contrast with the above three-step diagnosis, an examination of the ISI and NEM scenarios suggests an alternative interpretation.

First, although the ISI business environment was not closely regulated by a tight fisheries management approach, in practice, fisheries were not exploited as an open-access system but as a system self-regulated by a closed community of agents. The diversification of the species exploited during this period provides evidence of how the system worked. In this context, while most national vessels operated with unrestricted licenses, restricted licenses were reserved to limit fishing efforts over species under stress and to regulate a limited number of pilot schemes granting temporary fishing rights to foreign vessels. According to one of the interviewees:

Fishing licenses can be either used as a tool to promote the rational exploitation of the resource, industrial development and the creation of employment or, on the contrary, to give away national natural resources and to prompt the bankruptcy of the national fishing industry. Their use during the ISI period was clearly geared towards the first scenario. However, during Menem's administration they were used as a mechanism to open the Argentine Sea to foreign capital (Fieldwork interview with C.L., 14/08/2000).

Second, prior to the NEM, state policies provided a clear framework for the industrialisation of the sector within a protected environment. In a sector characterised by high conditions of uncertainty (climatic, ecological, economic, technological and so on), protectionist policies harboured the emergence and consolidation of a large number of SMEs covering a diverse spectrum of processing activities (e.g. salting, canning, hake filleting, fish oil and meal, etc.). Although it is true that the sector exhibited a modest level of technological modernisation in comparison to the main fisheries of advanced capitalist countries, this feature reinforced its capacity to generate employment and to keep harvesting efforts within the limits of ecological resilience. The absence of a freezer/factory fleet facilitated the consolidation of horizontal and vertical links of integration between the national harvesting and processing activities and the persistence of labour-intensive practices guaranteeing the expansion of well-paid and regular employment. In relation to exports, already in the ISI period the national fisheries sector had acquired a double orientation towards domestic and external markets. Even if export revenue was relatively modest, this dual orientation protected the sector from its peripheral position in the international market and from external and internal shocks and fluctuations.

Third, as pointed out by Reid et al. (2000: 1) although the task of fisheries management is to solve problems and wider conflicts engendered by over-fishing and overcapitalisation, often fisheries management becomes in itself a source of conflict. This observation fully applies to the Argentine experience. Prior to the NEM, the fisheries sector operated under a simple and vague framework, in which the state's role was more focused on promoting and protecting the development of the sector than in disciplining it. As we see in Chapter 7, by the end of the 1990s, fisheries management became increasingly entangled with the sector's interests-based structure and this structure turned out to be so complex and conflictive that attempts to institutionalise an overall fisheries management framework became the target of further conflicts, threatening the governability of the sector.

Recapitulating the analysis presented in this and the previous chapter, throughout the 1990s, the neoliberal restructuring *dispositif* effected a deep transformation of the economic, social, physical, natural and political performance of the national and local fisheries sector. Figure 5.1 reveals that, in fact, the expected outcomes of the NEM reform were widely offset by negative

ones. Furthermore, many effects that could be appraised as positive from a single perspective were in fact made possible and sustained by multiple negative impacts. Even a narrow cost-benefit evaluation of the gains and problems triggered by the restructuring of the sector would generate a zero-sum game picture, in which even those economic agents who initially benefited from the process are unlikely to sustain their gains in the medium to long term.

Figure 5.1 Outcomes of the NEM reform

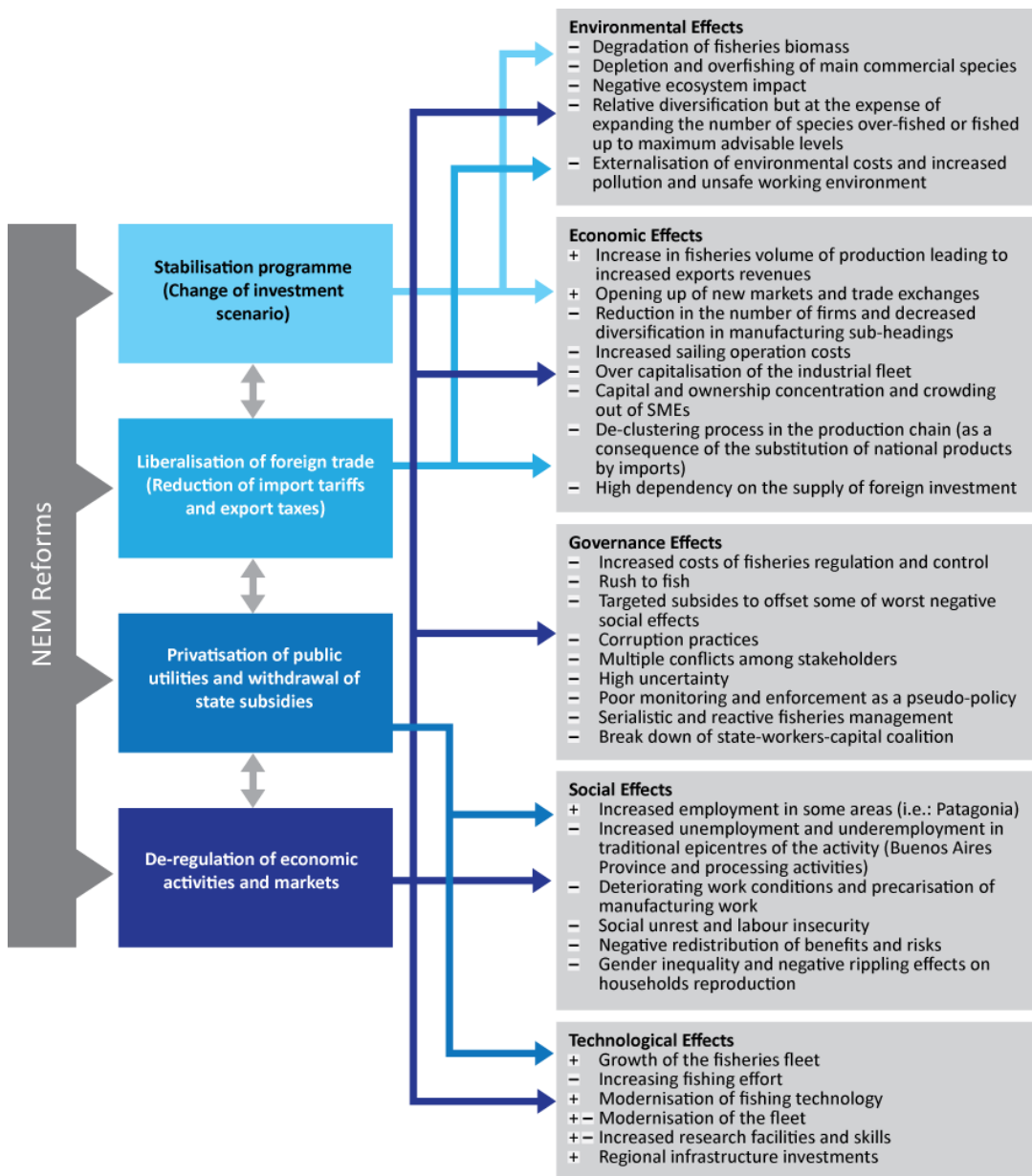
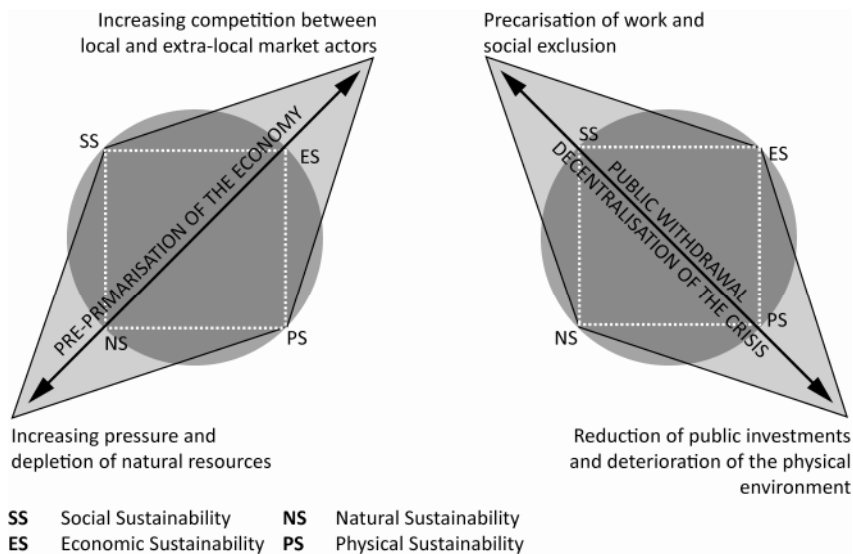


Figure 5.2 provides a schematic representation of the how the business environment or governability of the sector was expanded throughout the NEM period beyond the resilience of the system in which the sector operates. Considering the main two axes concerned respectively with economic and natural performance and social and physical (built

environment) performance, it is possible to see some of the structural trends that redefine the (un)governability of the sector beyond the specific outcomes previously discussed.

On the one hand, the economic and natural performance of the agents operating in the sector experienced a significant process of transnationalisation of capital, particularly within the harvesting sector. This resulted in the overexploitation of the main commercial species and unfavourable conditions for the national enterprises competing with foreign companies over the same fish stocks and in the same markets. In short, a new economic rationality, nurtured and propagated by the restructuring process, exacerbated the commodification of nature beyond the resilience limits of the natural-resource base on which the system ultimately depends. This process was part of the wider re-primarisation of the economy discussed in Chapter 3, through which the ISI industrial legacy was eroded and replaced by a formula in which nature became more nakedly the primary source of value. The over-expansion of the fishing capacity of the fleet operating within the Argentine jurisdiction led not only to the depletion of the main commercial species, but also to a high degree of social conflictivity.

Figure 5.2 Redefined limits of the fishery sector's business environment throughout the NEM



Source: Allen (2001: 157)

Looking at the other axis, the externalisation of costs and risks to labour and to the physical or built environment were exacerbated by the withdrawal of the state both from its former role in curbing and/or preventing such externalisation and in supplying the necessary investments and subsidies to attenuate negative effects on the labour force and on the city's environment. Considering its social impact, the changes undergone by the national and local fisheries sector throughout the 1990s echo a process experienced in many other economic sectors, in which

unemployment, underemployment, instability, labour precarity, low wages, structural poverty and social exclusion came to dominate the appropriation of labour force not just in times of economic decline but also of booming accumulation. Informal work, piecemeal contracts, low remuneration as well as the oscillation between unemployment, underemployment and over-employment (in terms of long working hours) all led to what O'Donnell (1999) has termed as a 'low intensity citizenship'. In this context workers became increasingly defenceless to confront capitalists' avarice, as traditional statutory and trade union channels became co-opted, deactivated or simply dismantled.

The reinforcement of social exclusion through the sphere of work has been defined by Robert Castel (2003) as a process of 'disaffiliation' in which workers become disenfranchised in two specific ways. On the one hand, disaffiliation takes place through the loss of waged work and with this through their vanished subscription to several social institutions concerning health, education, retirement and so on. On the other hand, disaffiliation is substantiated through the erosion of associational links, family relationships and their affective cores. Labour uncertainty (in all its dimensions) weakens household and collective relational structures, as every dimension of the social question is connected in one way or another to the social construction and regulation of the labour market.

Multiple fragmentations in the sphere of work impact on the social question, producing new and different manifestations of the conflict between labour and capital. The simultaneous increase of precarious work together with the very low social protection available for those unemployed implied a dramatic change of rules for increasingly subordinated workers. In this way the labour market became characterised by less permanent jobs to which people could return to, whilst most work opportunities were connected to temporary and poorly paid jobs. In addition, low or zero unemployment protection implied the possibility of full deprivation. For workers who had a different labour experience, this rupture was traumatic, yet it nurtured a strong sense of social injustice that in turn may fuel the collective re-articulation of their struggles *vis-à-vis* struggles over the appropriation of nature. Chapter 7 returns to this question, exploring the extent to which both struggles effectively converged under the 'Fisheries War' conflict unleashed in the turn of the 21st century. But before, the following chapter examines the experiences, perceptions and strategies of those firms and workers who survived the neoliberal restructuring process, exploring how they made sense of and responded to a new business environment.

As previously discussed, the neoliberal shift was heralded by the foreignisation of the fleet, the geographical shift of many economic agents to the Patagonian region, the precarisation of labour and the displacement of the ice-trawler cum onshore processing system in favour of a transnationalised freezer/factory fleet and onboard processing system. Most of these changes took place at the expense of the epicentre of the activity, historically consolidated in Mar del Plata. By the turn of the 21st century and despite a significant reduction in the number of industrial establishments and jobs, this industry still played a crucial role in the economic life of the city, partly due to the shrinking of many other local economic activities.²¹⁰ However, the neoliberal restructuring *dispositif* had consolidated an enduring set of uncertainties, constraining the actual conditions under which local firms and workers were to display their accumulation and survival strategies. Furthermore, it had also articulated a new set of rules, closely associated with the premises of EM, as local firms were expected to react positively to a new business environment: adopting self-regulating strategies and taking the opportunity to leapfrog technological innovation.

Surprisingly – given the aspiration of EM to be a model of environmental reform worldwide – few studies examine its application to the restructuring of localised production processes in the global south. Furthermore, studies on how firms respond to restructuring processes commonly focus on behavioural changes but tend to omit any reference to the wider context through which such responses are moulded. Applying the framework outlined in Chapter 2, this chapter examines how entrepreneurs and workers under the cooperative system within the local fishing industry of Mar del Plata interpreted, experienced and responded to the NEM business environment and its implicit adherence to EM principles. The discussion examines the strategies adopted in response to a new macro-economic context and to new rules in terms of performance, efficiency, investments, technological and organisational modernisation and changes in management approaches. The analysis draws mostly on the data gathered through the 2000/2001 fieldwork survey, which examined the total universe of local industrial establishments that, at the time, formed part of the hake industry in Mar del Plata city.

²¹⁰ Despite significant changes in the number of industrial units and personnel employed over the period, in 1994 the local fishing industry still accounted for 33.1 percent of the total value of local industrial production, 36.4 percent of the local industrial employment, and 6.1 percent of all industrial establishments. By the end of 2010, the local fisheries sector as a whole accounted for almost 93 percent of the total value of Mar del Plata's municipal exports.

6.1 Bringing the universe of analysis into focus

Before examining firms' and workers' experiences and responses to the neoliberal restructuring process, a brief characterisation of the universe under analysis is in order. Within the wider typology of economic agents outlined in the previous chapter (Table 5.1), the fieldwork focused on three specific groups operating in the local fishing industry in Mar del Plata: establishments within processing sub-headings R1 and R3 and R1 cooperatives of services (from now onwards referred to as 'cooperatives'). All three categories were almost exclusively focused on the hake fishery, though with different degrees of autonomy and interdependence across the harvesting, processing and commercialisation process. Table 6.1 provides a comparative overview of the total number of local establishments identified during the 2000/2001 fieldwork and those surveyed by the 1996 National Industrial Fisheries Census – from now onwards referred to as the 1996 Fisheries Census.

Table 6.1 Breakdown of all Mar del Plata establishments surveyed by the 1996 Fisheries Census and 2000/2001 fieldwork survey, by type of production sub-heading²¹¹

Survey source	Status	R1 Cooperatives of Services		R1 Processed and filleted fresh products		R3 Processed, filleted and frozen products		Total	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1996 National Industrial Fisheries Census	Active in 1996	66	100	27	100	44	100	137	100
	Rejected in 1996	12	18.2	10	37	7	15		
2000/01 Fieldwork Survey	Closed	42	51.9	21	65.6	14	34.1	77	50
	Active at fieldwork survey date ¹	39	100	10	100	28	100	77	100
	Rejected fieldwork survey	11	28.2	3	30	5	17.9	19	24.7
	Questionnaire 1	28	71.8	7	70	23	82.1	58	75.3
	Questionnaire 2	21	53.8	6	60	19	67.9	46	59.7
	Total	81	100	31	100	42	100	154	100

Note: (1) Includes those establishments operating at the time of the fieldwork, who rejected the interview.

As a clear manifestation of the crisis faced by the sector, 40 percent of the 137 establishments recorded as active by the 1996 Fisheries Census across the three production sub-headings had closed down at the time of the fieldwork.²¹² By far the worst affected category was that of R1 establishments, consisting of SMEs dedicated to the processing and filleting of fresh and chilled finfish and predominantly oriented towards the domestic market. In the case of the

²¹¹ For a detailed explanation of the fieldwork survey questionnaires, see Appendices A and D.

²¹² The 1989 Local Industrial Census recorded 148 establishments in the three categories analysed, though the majority of the cooperatives did not exist at that time.

cooperatives, a small percentage of establishments was temporary closed.²¹³ Out of the 77 active plants operating at the time of fieldwork survey, over two thirds (58 establishments) were covered by the fieldwork survey (questionnaires 1a and 1b) and almost 60 percent (46 establishments) responded to an additional in-depth interview (questionnaires 2a and 2b).

Considering the year of creation of the establishments surveyed in 2000/2001, the bulk of the cooperatives, almost 48 percent of R3 establishments and 43 percent of R1 plants, had emerged during the NEM. In other words, not only the number of industrial units changed significantly in the 1990s but also the physiognomy of the local fishing industry, with very few survivors from the ISI period. The only six R3 establishments who were established prior to the restructuring process were 'integrated firms' who, as discussed in Chapter 5, managed to capitalise themselves both during the ISI and NEM periods.

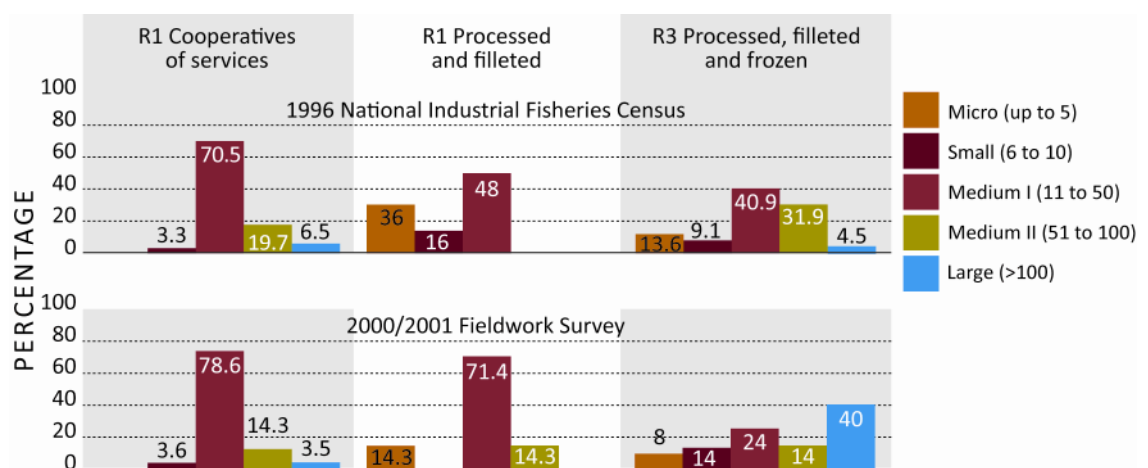
In the case of the cooperatives, when asked about the reasons for their creation, the workers (or 'cooperative members') interviewed gave three main reasons. Over 50 percent of the establishments claimed they had been forced by their former employers to reorganise themselves under this system, making reference to the extensive process of labour flexibilisation implemented at the beginning of the 1990s and discussed in the previous chapter. Acknowledging the same coercive process, about 46 of the cooperatives interviewed also perceived this form of reorganisation as the only feasible coping strategy at the time. Similarly, respondents from those cooperatives created after 1996 explained that once laid off by the firms for whom they worked as waged employees, they felt that the cooperative system was the only way to re-enter the labour market. Only four establishments (14 percent) declared that they were truly inspired by cooperative principles. Out of these, two were the only cooperatives that predated the NEM period. Nevertheless, over half of the cooperatives interviewed expressed that they believed in the cooperative principles as a positive form of organisation, which was distorted in the 1990s as a means of reducing labour costs and externalising market fluctuations to the weakest link.

Comparing the results of the 1996 Fisheries Census and the 2000/2001 fieldwork survey by size and production heading (Figure 6.1), micro (up to 5 workers) and small (6 to 10 workers) R1 establishments constituted over half of those operating in 1996, but by 2000/2001 most of the surviving plants were of medium I size (11 to 50 workers). Variations in the case of the cooperatives and R3 establishments are less clear cut as they were closely interconnected

²¹³ Presumably these were '*fasoneras*', which were plants run by R3 firms on an ad-hoc basis to expand their processing capacity in the face of peak market demand.

through subcontracting arrangements. In both surveys, most cooperatives were ranked among medium I sized establishments, followed by those of medium II size (51 to 100 workers). Surprisingly only a handful of cooperatives were small, mostly corresponding to those run independently by workers. The rest operated mostly under subcontractual arrangements managed by R3 establishments, with the larger cooperatives (over 100 workers) often working for a single R3 firm. The larger cooperatives – or ‘pseudo-cooperatives’ – were constituted by former salaried workers of large industrial establishments, working in the same plant were they used to work before the restructuring. This also explains the surprising number of R3 establishments classed as micro or small units, as these were plants owned by firms who kept a minimum core of administrative staff while reorganising their personnel into a cooperative.

Figure 6.1 Variation in the number of Mar del Plata establishments by production sub-heading and size between 1996 and 2000/2001



Source: Based on 1996 Fisheries Census and 2000/2001 fieldwork survey (questionnaires 1a and 1b).

In terms of employment, the fieldwork survey recorded a total of 3,348 manual workers operating in the 58 establishments interviewed. However, due to the fact that often R3 establishments reported labourers subcontracted under the pseudo cooperatives as their own waged workers, this figure should be interpreted with caution. The actual number of manual workers operating in the local fishing industry at the time of the survey is likely to be lower – particularly in the case of R3 establishments – and closer to 2,300 workers, out of which over 46 percent were operating under the cooperative system. Nevertheless, the fieldwork survey offers an accurate representative sample of the relative breakdown of manual workers by gender. Almost 59 percent of all manual workers in the three types of establishments surveyed in 2000/2001 were male, though female participation in the cooperatives as casual workers is likely to be higher (Table 6.2).

Table 6.2 Percentage of manual workers by production sub-heading and gender. 2000/2001

Gender	R1 Cooperatives of Services	R1 Processed and filleted fresh products	R3 Processed, filleted and frozen products	Total
Female	34.9	33.5	45.5	41.4
Male	65.1	66.5	54.5	58.6

Source: Fieldwork survey 2000/2001 (questionnaires 1a and 1b).

Through the interviews it was confirmed that women in particular were hired on a day-by-day basis. Thus, while for workers under the cooperative system as a whole, daily work and income fluctuations were reported as a regular condition, women were found to be more vulnerable to labour-demand fluctuations and to poor working conditions when work was available. Most of the respondents were male, either owners or managers of the plants in the case of R1 and R3 establishments, or presidents or treasurers of the cooperatives. As a general rule, women were rarely found in any of the above positions, despite their relative weight among the total number of workers in the surveyed plants. This denotes a high level of gender subordination, in which women are excluded from the spheres of work organisation and, as discussed in Chapter 7, also of political representation in the trade-union system.

6.2 Assessing room for manoeuvre

As previously argued, changes in the business environment are not just moulded by external (PEST) pressures but they can be conceptualised as social constructs, in which specific agents appraise their room for manoeuvre, their own resources and how to best respond to both. Against this background, it is possible to add another interpretative layer to their coping and accumulation strategies. All establishments interviewed through an in-depth questionnaire²¹⁴ were first asked to identify the key events at the international, national and local levels that they recognised as milestones in the neoliberal restructuring process and then to assess the main PEST factors or pressures reshaping their business environment as a result.

Over 75 percent of the establishments across the three analysed categories saw the restructuring process as closely aligned with the NEM turn introduced by Menem. About 7 percent of the respondents saw the international accords signed during the lead-to-NEM period as the beginning of the restructuring process, while others acknowledged such events as precursors of the dramatic shift more unequivocally performed by Menem. Over all respondents, about 13 percent expressed awareness of a dramatic shift within the sector but were unable to identify specific milestones in the process. About 5 percent argued that the so-

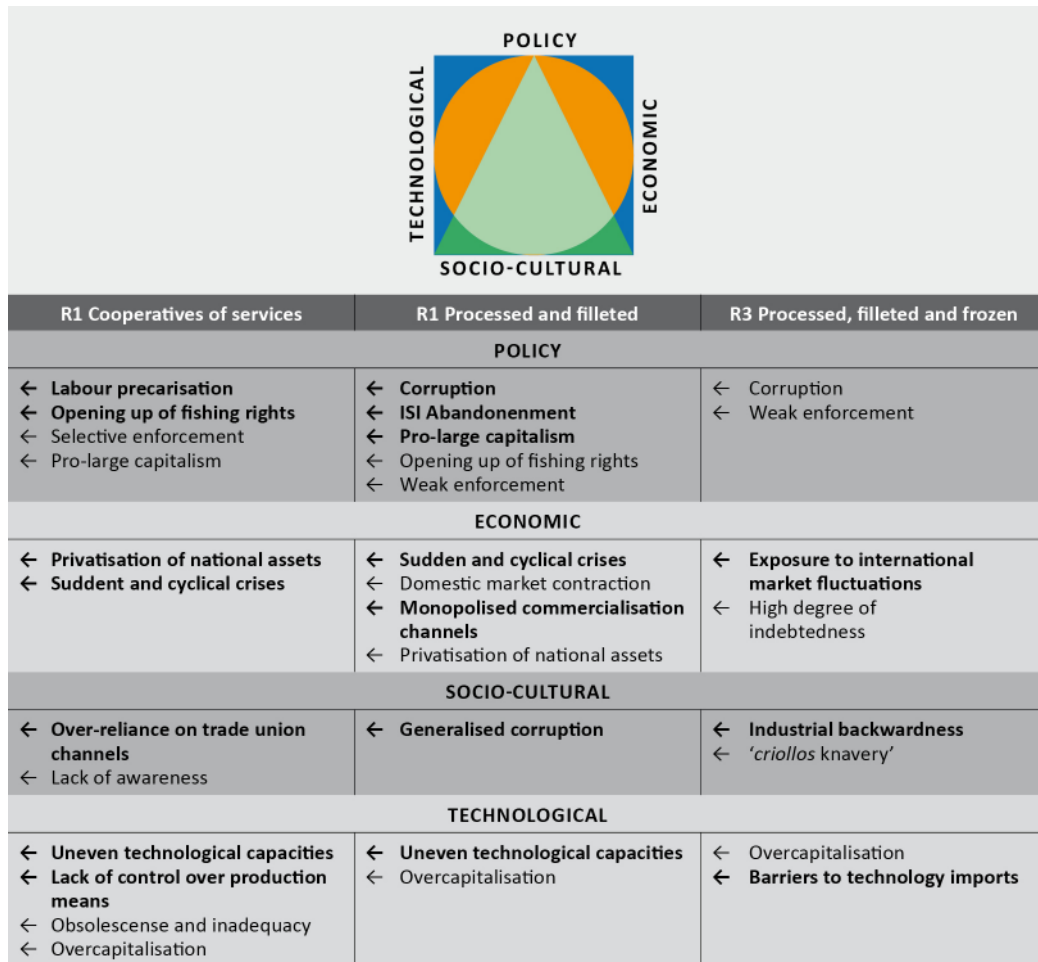
²¹⁴ Questionnaire 2a in the case of R1 and R3 establishments and questionnaire 2b in the case of R1 cooperatives. See Appendix D.

called restructuring was not a 'planned' process, but a chain of interconnected changes driven by market forces and subsequently endorsed by the state. For the majority who saw the restructuring process as unequivocally linked with the NEM, almost a third stated that the turning point was triggered by either the abandonment of ISI protectionist policies or the deregulation of the labour market that made possible the massive shift to the cooperative system in 1992. For almost 40 percent, the restructuring started with the opening up of fishing rights to foreign firms, first through the chartering regime and later through the EU accord.

When locating the restructuring driving forces at different scales, most respondents saw a closed alignment between international pressures and national policies. The most commonly cited local events associated with the restructuring corresponded to the closure of local firms, the cooperativisation of workers and the shrinking of commercialisation channels in the domestic market. But these were seen however not as 'local' processes but rather as local manifestations of changes driven by national and international corporate interests. In the words of one of the respondents: "Mar del Plata's fishing industry has always been a good 'thermometer' to check the health of the national fisheries sector as a whole. I doubt any other locality has felt the impact of the restructuring as badly this city, but still, this has not been a local but a national process" (Fieldwork survey, 05/09/2000).

In terms of the assessment of their business environment (Figure 6.2), PEST pressures were qualified as negative whenever they increased uncertainty, driving the regulation of the sector beyond the carrying capacity of the natural-resource base and towards the crisis experienced at the turn of the 21st century. Most respondents across the three types of surveyed establishments agreed in highlighting that the most significant pressures were related to policy (P) and economic (E) changes. Among the former, interviewees identified two main pressure factors. First was the incompetent and/or irresponsible fisheries administration, manifested through the overcapitalisation of the fleet due to the EU and other international accords and also through the lack of a clear and consensual fisheries policy and the government's inability to enforce closed seasons and other regulatory mechanisms. The second main policy pressure was associated with the problem of generalised corruption within the political national leadership and bureaucracy. Interviewees complained that during Menem's administration the leadership of SAGPyA was often in the hands on people with vested interests in the sector. As explained by the owner of a R1 establishment: "From Felipe Solá onwards, the administration of the sector was plagued with irregularities and run by puppets of the big capitalists. Most senior positions were occupied by people who were also shareholders in the new ventures formed with foreign companies" (Fieldwork survey, 22/09/2000).

Figure 6.2 PEST pressures pushing the business environment beyond the carrying capacity of nature, by production sub-heading, 2000/2001



Note: The thickness of the arrows corresponds to their strength in negatively expanding the business environment.

Source: Fieldwork survey 2000/2001 (questionnaires 2a and 2b)

A third policy pressure highlighted by many respondents – particularly among the cooperatives – was the enforcement of detrimental policies to the labour force that made possible its precarisation. Even if this was not seen as a factor that led directly to overfishing, it was perceived as playing an important role in deteriorating the previous contract among workers and entrepreneurs to work within nature’s limits and to safeguard environmental conditions within the plants. As explained by those working under the cooperative system:

In the past, if fish were too small, we would paralyse the plant until we were not given young specimens. For us, this was a matter of preserving both the resource and our livelihoods source, but also of protecting our working conditions... it is very difficult to fillet young specimens, you get more injuries... nowadays, we have to process whatever we are given. Striking is not an option, you don’t work, you don’t earn (Fieldwork survey, 10/08/2000).

The dismantling of labour’s rights was the first blank cheque that Menem gave to the large entrepreneurs; followed soon by the freedom to plunder the Argentine Sea. The government removed any barriers to overexploit labour and the resource feeding the greed of a few to accumulate more at any social or environmental cost (Fieldwork survey, 17/08/2000).

The industry was 'modernised' in appearance, with the introduction of more demanding sanitary conditions and international production standards (HACPP and all that)... But when you come to any of the plants where work is actually done, you can see how 'modern' they are. Nowadays a firm gets the international accreditation stamps required to export on the information provided by their model plant, but then work is subcontracted and performed in many 'caves' like ours... the whole thing is a parody! (Fieldwork survey, 23/08/2000).

Considering economic pressures, respondents highlighted various factors making the business environment more prone to cyclical crises than ever before and therefore promoting the rush-to-fish. The most highly cited pressure was that of the 'general socio-economic crisis' of the country, including high interest rates that prohibited access to private credit, increased competition from cheap seafood imports and a saw general decline of the purchasing power of most households, shifting internal consumption to low protein and cheaper diets. As explained by the manager of a R1 establishment:

In the 1990s, the new equation was clear: less capital to produce (if you were small), less commercialisation channels if you worked in the domestic market and were not big enough to enter the supermarket circuit. However you look at it, the economic environment became very hostile to SMEs (Fieldwork survey, 29/08/2000).

R3 respondents identified a number of additional pressures in the economic climate of the 1990s, namely a higher exposure to market fluctuations (e.g. price constraints to compete in international markets; gap between fixed labour costs and fluctuating prices), as well as a high degree of indebtedness among firms and a lack of government support to renegotiate their debts. Another pressure conceptualised as 'economic' and reported by most interviewees – particularly across cooperatives and R1 establishments – was connected to the 'privatisation of national assets', spanning from the indiscriminate issuing of fishing licenses to the privatisation of the local harbour. In fact, economic and policy or regulatory pressures were identified by many as closely overlapping. In the words of one of the interviewees: "The market and the state became so closely aligned in the 1990s that it's difficult to establish where the dictates of each began or ended" (Fieldwork survey, 05/09/2000).

In socio-cultural terms, respondents from R3 establishments blamed the 'backwardness' of Argentine society for resisting the modernisation of the sector. The same group also extended the blame to the '*criollos* or native knavery' as the ultimate expression of self-interest: "given the space, we all try to 'cut corners'; this is why we have overfishing and pseudo cooperatives" (Fieldwork survey, 06/09/2000). Across all establishments, most respondents highlighted the problem of 'increased corruption' not just within the national administration but also among economic agents. As explained by the manager of an R3 establishment: "The sector became more open to economic gambling and unfair competition, if you knew who to bribe and could

afford it, life became easier. Corruption is corrosive, it affects everybody. For some, it is driven by speculation and greed, for others by desperation” (Fieldwork survey, 25/08/2000).

Workers in the cooperatives blamed their historical reliance on trade-union channels to negotiate on their behalf. Many argued that although they had known for a long time that the system was corrupt, they became accustomed to being ‘subordinated’ rather than ‘represented’. While some saw trade unionism as an important legacy from the ISI period that inscribed workers as full members of the national society; most argued that this legacy had been destroyed since the mid-1970s: “Trade unions became from that point a mirage of what they were in the old days, but we were too slow to reclaim our own political space” (Fieldwork survey, 22/08/2000). Together with this, workers referred to their own lack of understanding of the cooperative system, both genuine and imposed. Most workers interviewed identified this as a pressure stemming from their collectives, blaming themselves for their inability to resist the abandonment of the waged regime. As highlighted by one respondent:

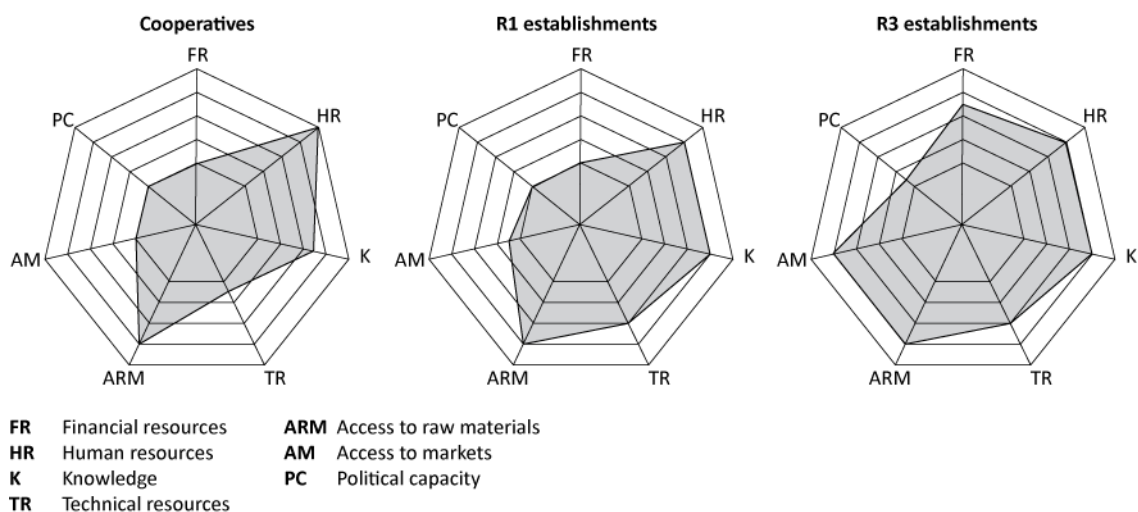
Many of us have not even completed primary school. Thus, when the bosses’ lawyers came and told us where to sign [their resignations] we followed like sheep. Even when the scam of the cooperatives became clearer, we still could not gain any understanding of how to work as a real cooperative; we just prayed and begged for work (Fieldwork survey, 24/08/2000).

With regards to technological factors, these were not regarded as drivers of a changing business environment, but rather as a consequence of other pressures. In this context, the most popular response across the three types of establishments was that the technological changes experienced throughout the restructuring fostered ‘uneven competition’ in the exploitation of the natural resources. Interviewees made reference to the overcapitalisation of the sea through the increased fishing capacity of the processing fleet in competition with the onshore plants. Two additional pressures reported by a handful of interviewees both in the cooperatives and R3 establishments were the inadequate technology of enforcing bodies to monitor overfishing and the obsolescence of many of the local plants. For entrepreneurs (R3), the modernisation of manufacturing was restricted by high duties applied to technology imports *vis-à-vis* the lack of credit facilities. For workers within the cooperatives, the main problem was their structural inability to own their facilities and equipment.

As a means to explore how establishments within the local fishing industry shaped and defined their own strategies and responses to changes in the PEST environment, the fieldwork survey explored their assessment of internal resources, in terms of their quality, access to and control over such resources. The resources collectively identified as crucial in shaping their capacity

were: (a) financial resources (capital and access to credit); (b) human resources (skills and availability); (c) knowledge (know-how on quality standards, innovation in production, etc.); (d) technological resources (infrastructure and technology available); (e) access to raw materials; (f) access to markets (internal and external); and (g) access to capacity to influence the policies regulating the sector. Interviewees were asked to rank these resources from very poor (rank 1) to very good (rank 5) and to explain their ranking. Figure 6.3 presents the overall results for each type of establishment and factors the weight of each response within the whole universe analysed under each category.

Figure 6.3 Assessment of internal resources by production sub-heading, 2000/2001



Note: Ranks 1-5 are represented from the centre of each figure outwards.
 Source: Fieldwork survey 2000/2001 (questionnaires 2a and 2b).

In the case of the cooperatives, unsurprisingly, human resources (i.e. labour) were identified as the resource over which workers exerted most ‘control’, although such control was often defined as self-exploitation, with women workers identified as particularly vulnerable to super-exploitation. In the words of a male worker in one of the largest cooperatives:

Under the current system our labour is the only resource we have. With so many comrades laid off, the industry is not short of experienced workers. You can see hundreds of them every morning queuing in front of the cooperative and begging to have a table, ready to work for whatever pay. Under this system [payment by productivity] if there is fish and you are lucky, you get some cash home, but you don’t know how much and how regularly. If you get sick you are out, there is no safety net. Women are worst off; they have to face more abuses than us... there is a prevailing mentality that puts them last in the queue. Many are household heads but still treated as if they were just seeking for an odd job (Fieldwork survey, 29/08/2000).

As explained before, female and male workers in the cooperatives became disenfranchised from the sector’s trade union, which meant that they had to sell their labour at the price fixed by the subcontracting firms outside any collectively agreed bargaining process. Women workers

were already marginalised in the pre-neoliberal system; the fisheries sector was traditionally a male-dominated world even when women became a sizeable part of the workers in the manufacturing sub-sector. This form of 'patriarchal capitalism' (Young, 1986) became even deeper in the advent of the precarisation of work. Under the cooperative system, women became further marginalised through at least two extended practices. First, even under the payment-by-productivity system, women were often paid less than men for an equal amount of filleted fish. Second, in the face of scarce work, women were the last to be given a table to fillet.

Access to and capacity to influence the PEST environment received the lowest rank, with over two thirds of all respondents assessing this resource as very poor and the rest as poor. This can be interpreted as part of the 'less Great Compromise' discussed in Chapter 3, through which workers lost their traditional institutional channels to collectively negotiate working conditions. However, as we see later, as institutionalised workers' channels became less and less effective to access the state, female and male workers found other means rather than those of the unionised system to voice their claims. One of the workers interviewed explains why:

For decades we were part of one of the strongest trade unions in the city. In the past, it was common to hear on the streets: 'if the fillet workers strike, the city comes to a standstill'. SOIP was never a model of transparency, they have their ways to negotiate things with the patrons under the table but at least we had means to hold them accountable and to fight for our working conditions. Now, who can we go to? This is why so many comrades think that pickets and other forms of direct action are the only way to be heard (Fieldwork survey, 05/10/2000).

Financial assets were also unsurprisingly ranked as very poor or poor by most interviewees. This extended not just to the lack of access to credits and subsidies but also to more informal channels of credit to buy food and other essential items. As discussed in Chapter 5, prior to the NEM period, to be a worker in the local fishing industry represented a sort of 'collateral' or, in other words, a security pledged for the repayment of small loans – an asset that workers lost together with their status as waged employees during the neoliberal turn.

In terms of knowledge, while most interviewees among the cooperatives referred to their know-how of the trade as one of the few assets available, a third of them characterised this resource as poor or very poor, arguing that they had little knowledge to improve and innovate on the quality of their produce. As explained by one of the cooperative members:

Most of us have been in this trade for over a decade, we know how to do our job. However, we are used to working on a production line and under the directives of the firm. Since the creation of the cooperatives, we have continued pretty much doing the same, though under worse contractual conditions. However, when comrades talk about becoming more independent, 'innovators' as they are called nowadays, we always arrive at the same conclusion: we don't know how to add value to the final product,

what sells better, how to commercialise, and so on. Our prospects for ever becoming more than just subcontracted labour are pretty slim (Fieldwork survey, 16/10/2000).

Lack of access to commercialisation channels – ranked by most cooperatives as poor or very poor – aggravated the above vicious circle. Beyond the selling of their labour, workers were blind to trends in the market, new techniques, a comparative evaluation of the price at which different products sell and so on. Therefore, they were forced to draw exclusively on the knowledge of how to best fillet. While this knowledge was fluently shared among those with years in the trade and those who entered the activity after being expelled from other sectors, no further knowledge-sharing loops with the subcontracting firms were available.

Technological resources were ranked by over two thirds of respondents as very poor or poor, while the rest characterised them as fair. It should be remembered that most of the cooperatives operated within the plants of the subcontracting firms. The main reasons given by those interviewed for their assessment included the lack of investment on infrastructure and poor maintenance. Those cooperatives operating in rented plants acknowledged the poorest conditions, due to their inability to invest in anything else other than rudimentary equipment.

Last but not least, opinions over access to raw materials were more diverse; while almost a third ranked this asset as 'fair', 'good' or 'very good', the rest evaluate it as 'very poor'. For the first group, the reasons given ranged from: "despite increased competition, the Argentine Sea is generous" (Fieldwork survey, 02/10/2000) to "we don't exert any control over harvesting but beyond the closed seasons there is fish and when there is fish, there is work" (Fieldwork survey, 27/10/2000). By contrast, those who ranked access to raw materials as very poor saw over-fishing and the depletion of hake as more than just a contingent trend. Workers within this group were able to articulate clear links between the environmental and socio-economic sides of the crisis affecting the sector in 2000:

We are increasingly talking about the scarcity of hake, in the plants, on the streets, in the news, it is everywhere! With 25 years in the trade I have never before seen such alarming signs that something is profoundly wrong. There is less fish and the fish we receive to fillet is smaller. It takes much longer to process young specimens without wasting fish... you have to be bit of a surgeon, and if you are not, the consequences are clear, workers have more cut injuries and more often than ever, and for those who manage to keep all their fingers there is the issue of reduced income or longer hours, and often both! (Fieldwork survey, 25/08/2000).

For establishments in the R1 sub-heading, despite the relatively lower number of respondents, the assessment was highly consistent among all interviewees. As in the case of the cooperatives, human resources and knowledge were again ranked as their strongest assets.

Access to raw materials was also ranked as good but with the caveat that many saw the situation rapidly deteriorating due to the over-fishing of hake, while lacking a clear strategy on how to face or counteract this trend. Technological resources were appraised as fair, outmoded but still adequate for the tasks performed. The three most problematic areas identified in the assessment were those concerning access to the market, to financial resources and the capacity of these establishments to influence the regulation of the activity. As explained before, R1 establishments channelled their production almost entirely to the domestic market. Respondents explained that the main problem faced in this respect was the emergence of more monopolistic relations, with large food corporations (mostly transnational hypermarket and supermarket chains) taking over small and medium chains of food commercialisation. This meant that local R1 establishments became at best dependant on one 'big' client or at worst relegated to sell their produce to local fish mongers. In terms of access to financial resources, the main problem reported was that of lack of credit lines for SMEs. Most respondents contrasted this situation with the ISI period, in the words of one of the interviewees:

Family enterprises like ours would have never lasted more than a season if it wasn't for the pro-SME policies of the government in the 1950, 60s and 70s. Some argue that if we are not large enough to compete in the current economic climate, we are doomed to disappear. For many this has already been the case... we were the heart of the harbour and now, just a handful of moribund small firms... if you ask me about my company, to be honest, we find it very difficult to know where will be in a year's time. The problem is not just lack of access to credit, but when you combine this with uncertainty in getting fish and knowing who will buy your produce and for how much, it is impossible to plan, and without some form of planning it is difficult to know where the business is heading (Fieldwork survey, 06/11/2000).

In terms of their capacity to access and influence the policy-making process, respondents' perspectives were even gloomier. They did not see any channels within the government through which to exert influence and relied exclusively on their own informal networks. As put by one of the interviewees:

We have very little muscle to put pressure on the government. When I see the harbour taken by workers' demonstrations, I wish we could find a similar way to protest. But perhaps because we have more to lose, we tend to be more conservative and protective of the little we still have. We just complain about the situation... this is like the tango of the fishing industry! (Fieldwork survey, 15/09/2000).

Finally considering the assessment of establishments under the R3 sub-heading, as it could be expected, this subgroup expressed a more positive appreciation of their internal resources. While access to and control over human resources, knowledge, raw materials and markets were consistently ranked as 'good', access to financial credit and connected to this to technological improvements were seen as 'fair' and areas of concern. Respondents expressed that it was difficult to access and/or guarantee a niche in the export market without concomitant

investments to upgrade their plants to the state of the art. Those firms who had also opened plants in the Patagonia region explained that such investments were only possible due to a number of combined opportunities opened up during the NEM period. Such opportunities included the special reimbursements regime for exports from the Patagonian region and the association with foreign capital via the EU accord. I return later to examine how R3 firms used these opportunities to articulate their business strategies and to reposition themselves in the market. With regards to human resources, the cooperativisation of personnel was seen as an essential strategy to reduce labour costs and to cushion the impact of sudden fluctuations in the volume of fish to be processed.

As in the other two cases, the lowest rank was attributed to access to and control over the regulation of their own business environment. This is slightly surprising given that at least a third of the establishments interviewed under this heading were organised under CEPA, a corporate organisation championing: (a) the renewal and upgrading of the fishing fleet; (b) the technological modernisation of the processing sector conforming with EU and international standards such as Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP); and (c) the promotion of incentives to supply the domestic and external markets. As such, CEPA enjoyed a significant degree of power to influence national fisheries policies as well as the sector's economic circuit from harvesting through to production and commercialisation. Despite enjoying such political capital, R3 respondents explained the low ranking attributed to their capacity to influence the sector's business environment as a result of prevailing conditions of high uncertainty. As explained by one of the interviewees:

We are serious entrepreneurs, not fish mongers. We lead the national fisheries sector and have shown that it is possible to modernise the sector. Still, we face a number of significant challenges, mostly because of the ambivalence of the government in establishing clear rules. Such rules span from macro-economic decisions that affect exports to decisions about who is affected by closed seasons and who will benefit from the allocation of individual fishing quotas (Fieldwork survey, 05/12/2000).

Across all surveyed establishments, the capacity to voice and influence the regulation of the sector was identified as the weakest asset controlled by firms and cooperatives, albeit for different reasons. For workers under the cooperative system and for SMEs under the R1 sub-heading, this was due to their marginalisation during the restructuring process, through which their traditional channels to influence the regulation of the sector became undermined. By contrast, for the larger R3 firms, this was mostly a reflection of tensions between market and government-led attempts to regulate the sector and also of the increased competition with foreign operators.

6.3 Cooperatives' strategies

The above analysis reveals that among all the surveyed establishments, the cooperatives were subjected to the highest level of uncertainty in their operation; with uncertainty stemming both from the wider business environment and their poor access to and control over internal resources. Another way to cross-examine this observation is through the analysis of the cooperatives' size, links to subcontracting firms and tenancy of the plants where they work. Table 6.3 shows that, at the time of the survey, the majority of the surveyed cooperatives were of medium size and rented the plants in which they operated; 25 percent worked exclusively in the plants of one or two subcontracting firms, and only one large cooperative owned the plant where it worked. The latter was a particular case as it was created in the 1950s as a workers' association and through time it managed to operate like an enterprise.

Table 6.3 also reveals a high level of subordination in the operation of the cooperatives, which reinforces their high degree of vulnerability to labour-demand fluctuations. Almost 90 percent operated exclusively as subcontractors, about 76 percent of them did so by selling their labour force exclusively to one or two firms, working either in the firm's plants or in plants rented by the workers. About 15 percent of the cooperatives subcontracted their services to several firms and only 9 percent were found to be in a position to directly sell what they manufactured, in addition to subcontracting their labour power to other firms.

Table 6.3 Cooperatives' subcontracting links and plant tenancy by establishment size, 2000/2001

Size	Subcontracting links – Services sold to:											
	To 1 or 2 firms in the plant of the subcontracting firm			To 1 or 2 firms in the plant of cooperatives			To several firms (>2) in the plant of the cooperative			Manufacturing and direct sale to small retailers (independent)		
	Coop tenancy of plant			Coop tenancy of plant			Coop tenancy of plant			Coop tenancy of plant		
	Plant owned	Plant rented	Without plant*	Plant owned	Plant rented	Without plant*	Plant owned	Plant rented	Without plant*	Plant owned	Plant rented	Without plant*
Micro (< 5)												
Small (6 to 10)											1	
Medium I (11 to 50)			8		11			5			1	
Medium II (51 to 100)			2		3							
Large (> 100)					1					1		3
Total			10		15			5		1	2	

Source: Fieldwork survey 2000/2001 (questionnaires 1b and 2b)

Looking at the cooperatives' responses to the restructuring process it is therefore unsurprising to find that most respondents identified little room for manoeuvre to do anything else other than cope. One third of those interviewed failed to identify any strategy at all; while the rest declared that the main successful strategy adopted was that one of improving the capacity of their workers/associates, although this was done on an informal and unsystematic basis, by *coaching less experienced workers*.

The second strategy most widely adopted (by 28.6 percent of all respondents) focused on *expanding the number of firms* to whom the cooperative sold its services. This was seen as a means to avoid the trap of being over-reliant on a single subcontractor, although only three cooperatives were able to operate through a combination of two strategies: subcontracting the service of their associates to one or more companies in the firms' plants and also selling their labour force to several firms for short-term contracts, either in the plant of the cooperative or of the firms. In third place, about 24 percent of the respondents *hired non-associated workers* as a strategy to expand and contract labour according to the fluctuations of demand, thus replicating the same flexible approach adopted by the subcontracting firms and drawing among those workers who were completely disenfranchised (i.e. who did not even have the umbrella of the cooperative to sell their labour).

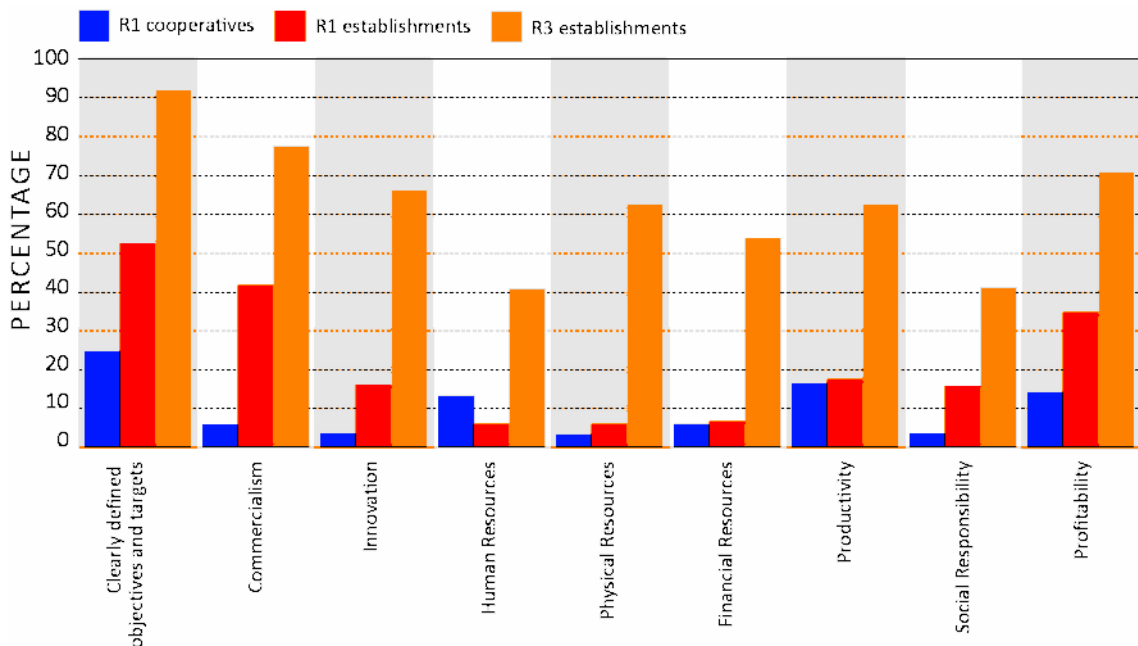
Another relatively popular strategy among the most proactive cooperatives consisted of seeking *channels to sell their produce independently to local fish mongers*. Although 24 percent of the respondents entertained the idea of adopting this strategy, only one cooperative created well before the NEM reported some degree of success, although it did this in addition to subcontracting its labour force to other firms. The same cooperative tried to improve its access to raw material by *buying it directly from independent fishermen*. While many cooperatives saw this approach as a model of how to operate, penetrating the value chain upwards and downwards required a number of assets that most claim to lack. Among the most commonly cited barriers preventing cooperatives to access a more independent model of operation were the following: lack of access to direct commercialisation channels, lack of capital to buy raw materials, lack of know-how among associates to go beyond the selling of their labour, and inadequate infrastructure to obtain the license and accreditation required to engage in direct commercialisation. In relation to the last of these, out of the whole universe of surveyed cooperatives, almost a third did not have any type of license to operate, while the rest had either a license from SENASA and the municipality or just one of these.

Respondents also stressed that their reliance on one or two subcontracting firms and precarious tenancy of the plants where they worked also constrained them from moving up the value chain. Those who only worked in the plants of the firms to whom they sold their services defined themselves as 'homeless cooperatives' and could not identify any viable route to break from this status. Those who rented a plant faced serious limitations to investing any capital in the plants and to upgrading their infrastructure. Only three cooperatives (about 14 percent of all respondents) reported to have made some *investments in technological improvements*, although these consisted of minor improvements in the rented plants in which they operated. The 1996 National Industrial Fisheries Census revealed that out of the total number of local cooperatives surveyed in that year (61) only 16 percent had been able to engage in significant infrastructure investments between 1992 and 1996, mostly dedicated to fresh produce storage cells. The source of capital in such cases was the collective use of one-off redundancy payments received by those associates who had been laid off in 1992.

Considering the previous discussion, a distinction can be made between software and hardware strategies. Whilst hardware strategies involve investments in technological improvements, the rest of the strategies could be labelled as software in the sense that they involved changes in organisational and commercialisation aspects. Considering the lack of capital that characterised most cooperatives, it is not surprising to find that hardware strategies were marginal or null. Among the software strategies adopted, a further distinction could be made between *coping and proactive strategies*. The first group makes reference to those strategies that were adopted as a way to cope with fluctuations in the demand of subcontracted services. Thus, these strategies aimed at reducing the vulnerability of the cooperative by improving its competitiveness in hiring out its labour force. Examples of these are the attempts to expand the number of firms to which services are provided, attempts to build the capacity of the personnel in order to increase the productivity and the use of non-associate workers as a way to gain flexibility in the face of fluctuating demand. By contrast, proactive strategies indicate efforts by the cooperatives to gain more autonomy and to become less reliant on the subcontracting of their labour force. Examples include attempts to directly buy and sell their own produce and to diversify their production. These strategies emulate the operation of firms under heading R1, focusing on the processing of fresh fish and targeting the domestic market, but very few cooperatives were able to adopt and sustain proactive strategies.

Unlike other forms of entrepreneurial organisation, the cooperatives do not distinguish between managerial and operative tasks.²¹⁵ This feature in their organisational structure reinforces other internal and external barriers for the cooperatives to progress beyond the selling of their labour. The 1996 Fisheries Census examined the planning capacity of all surveyed establishments. Looking at the results for the cooperatives, it is possible to see that they exhibited only marginal planning capacity (Figure 6.4).

Figure 6.4 Assessment of planning capacities by production sub-heading, 1996



Source: Based on data from the 1996 National Industrial Fisheries Census.

Over a quarter of the local cooperatives surveyed in 1996 appeared to have some form of clearly defined objectives and targets but these were mostly related to generic quality management (how to use their human resources, how to monitor staff productivity and to keep a minimum margin of profitability to remain in operation). Examining the same planning domains in the light of the result from the 2000/2001 fieldwork survey there was little variation. In general terms, the cooperatives did not have a competitiveness strategy to position themselves within the local fishing industry and were only able to engage in sporadic efforts to sustain the selling of their services.

Furthermore, both surveys revealed that most cooperatives organised their activities only on the basis of information about the past and the present, gathered through a day-to-day

²¹⁵ Within a workers' or services cooperative, all associates without exception perform manual labour tasks. In addition, some of them are also members of an 'administration council' that makes decisions on behalf of all associates. Members of the administration council are usually fillet workers elected because they enjoy a higher level of literacy and/or are able to conduct simple administrative chores.

evaluation of the volume of filleting likely to be subcontracted, their associates' productivity, absenteeism and work accidents and rates paid by volume of processed fish. During the peak years of the hake crisis, uncertainty about most of these factors increased due to the fluctuating availability of raw materials. When asked about the percentage of their processing capacity effectively utilised in the previous year, the cooperatives interviewed in 2000/2001 found it difficult to provide detailed records but most respondents estimated to have worked at between 50 and 25 percent of their full capacity due to the lack of fish. The worst affected cooperatives by the hake crisis were the most autonomous ones; this was because in times of hake scarcity, R3 firms subcontracted only those cooperatives working in the firm's plant and under exclusive arrangements.

6.4 Firms' strategies

Considering the establishments surveyed under the R1 and R3 sub-headings, as previously mentioned, the former comprised small and medium plants dedicated to the processing of fresh fish and seashell products, owned by firms who commercialised their production almost entirely in the domestic market. R3 establishments were typically medium to large plants, owned by firms who worked in the processing of fresh and frozen products and channelled their production mostly to the external market. Considering their respective planning capacity, according to the 1996 Fisheries Census, almost 53 and 92 percent of the R1 and R3 establishments respectively reported to have clearly defined objectives and targets (Figure 6.3). However, looking at other specific capacity domains, significant differences emerged between these two categories.

As already highlighted, the number of active R1 plants decreased dramatically between 1996 and 2000. In fact, during the fieldwork survey, a number of cooperatives were found to be working in plants that were previously owned by SMEs in the R1 production sub-heading that had closed down in the early 1990s. Thereafter, their plants were either bought or rented by R3 firms to establish new cooperatives or *fasoneras*. Comparing the R1 and R3 establishments active in 1996 and 2000/2001, in terms of their organisational structure and origin of capital, it also becomes apparent that the most affected R1 establishments were those run by a single owner or by various partners of national capital. Thus, the majority of active R1 establishments in 2000/2001 were family enterprises, although none of those interviewed during the fieldwork were survivors from the ISI period (Table 6.4).

Table 6.4 Comparative distribution of R1 and R3 establishments by type of organisation and origin of capital, 1996-2000/2001 (absolute number and %)

Year and source	Single owner		Family enterprise		Various partners national capital		Various partners capital (national and foreign)		Foreign capital	
	R1	R3	R1	R3	R1	R3	R1	R3	R1	R3
1996 National Industrial Fisheries Census	5	1	3	16	9	12	-	6	-	2
	(29.4)	(2.7)	(17.6)	(43.2)	(52.3)	(32.4)	-	(16.2)	-	(5.4)
2000/01 Fieldwork survey	-	1	5	9	2	5	-	6 ¹	-	2 ²
	-	(4.3)	(71.4)	(39.1)	(28.6)	(21.7)	-	(26.1)	-	(8.7)

Source: Fieldwork survey 2000/2001 (questionnaires 1a and 2a)

In the case of the R3 establishments, the absolute number of plants owned by family enterprises or various partners of national capital decreased between 1996 and 2000/2001, while those owned by various partners of mixed capital or exclusively by foreign capital remained stable. The last of these were owned by Chinese firms, while establishments owned by mixed capital companies were a product of the EU accord, featuring mostly Spanish and Italian capital. Cross-examining the details provided by those interviewed during the fieldwork with the records of the firms who registered joint ventures under the EU Agreement, half of the R3 establishments that were originally family enterprises became mixed capital joint ventures after 1994.

In summary, all establishments owned by national firms in 2000/2001 had been created prior to the NEM period, while those emerging during Menem's administration were owned partly or exclusively by foreign firms. Despite representing a small number in absolute terms, these firms occupied a dominant position in the value chain, denoting the transnationalisation of the sector and also a pattern of vertical integration and concentration. The latter is evident when looking at the strategies adopted by firms to position themselves in the production chain. Table 6.5 provides an overview of the strategies adopted by establishments in the R1 and R3 manufacturing sub-headings. In overall terms, a distinction can be made between those strategies adopted to gain more control over the harvesting, manufacturing and commercialisation stages, although these are often interrelated.

The bulk of R1 establishments operated with raw materials supplied by third parties and commercialised the totality of their production in the domestic market, with many firms reporting a contraction of previous niches taken over by R3 firms. Only one establishment was different from the rest in that it had the capacity to operate with its own raw material supply and to commercialise its production both internally and in neighbouring countries (Uruguay), though the Uruguayan market represented only 20 percent of the total manufactured produce.

This firm responded to the restructuring process by expanding its portfolio of shareholders with other partners of national capital (one local R3 firm), which in turn allowed it to diversify its production to both fresh and frozen products and to commercialise these through a regional supermarket chain.

Table 6.5 Strategies adopted by R1 and R3 establishments in response to the restructuring process, 2000/2001 (%)

Strategies adopted	R1 Processed and filleted fresh products (total 17)		R3 Processed, filleted and frozen products (total 37)	
	No	%	No	%
Capital re-organisation				
Association with national capitals	1	5.9	7	18.9
Association with foreign capitals		0.0	7	18.9
Harvesting (Access to raw materials)				
Supplied by third parties	16	94.1	7	18.9
Raw materials supplied by own ice-trawlers	1	5.9	18	48.6
Raw materials supplied by own ice-trawlers and freezer/factory vessels		0.0	12	32.4
Vessels acquired through chartering regime		0.0	8	21.6
Vessels acquired and/or licensed through EU accord		0.0	8	21.6
Manufacturing				
Keeping a core of salaried workers			10	27.0
Cooperativisation of the personnel working in the firms' plant	6	35.3	17	45.9
Subcontracting <i>fasoneras</i>	0	0.0	13	35.1
Subcontracting independent cooperatives (short term contracts)	1	5.9	15	40.5
Selling manufacturing services to other firms	6	35.3		
Investments on technological upgrading (infrastructure and equipment)		0.0	11	29.7
Production improvements (quality and diversification)	1	5.9	11	29.7
Opening up of additional local plants		0.0		
Opening up of new establishments in Patagonia		0.0	8	21.6
Commercialisation				
Exclusively domestic market	16	94.1	2	5.4
Exclusively external market		0.0	6	16.2
Both external and domestic market	1	5.9	29	78.4
Actively seeking new channels	1	5.9	13	35.1

Source: Fieldwork survey 2000/2001 (questionnaire 2a).

The rest of the establishments did not report strategies other than the cooperativisation of their own personnel and the selling of their services to other local R3 firms; two strategies adopted by just over a third of the surveyed establishments. Two respondents explain the reasons behind the adoption of these strategies:

We have been in business since 1984, processing hake fillets sold locally and in Buenos Aires. However, in the 1990s it became more and more difficult to remain in business. Soon after the agreement with the EU, we realised that some of the big names in the local industry were growing fast, buying new vessels, opening new plants in Patagonia and securing more export niches... they needed to expand their production capacity without investing in more local plants, and this is where we fitted into the picture.

Nowadays, we work regularly for one of them, and this helps to cushion the contraction of the internal demand (Field survey, 18/08/2000).

The main lesson we learnt in the 1990s is that unless we became part of the circuit of the 'winners', we were destined to disappear. You only need to take a look around the harbour to realise this... In fact, we have partly become *fasoneras* for them [R3 firms] but this brings some additional income, though not much. More importantly this was the only way to secure a relatively stable supply of raw materials, especially since hake became scarcer. The deal is simple, we provide them with extra manufacturing capacity when needed and they guarantee a minimum supply of fish for us to operate. One additional change is that when this started in 1996, we had to shift our personnel to a cooperative. Though they are still working within our plant but this was a sort of implicit demand from the big firm for whom we work, they wanted reduced costs and explained that this was the only way forward. In fact, their solicitor did all the paper work for us. We know this is not ideal for the workers, as they lost a lot of benefits but at least, they can keep a regular livelihood (Field survey, 06/11/2000).

The above reveals that throughout the 1990s, the sector became more vertically integrated and controlled by a handful of R3 firms, while the cooperativisation of the workers permeated the whole structure of the local fishing industry. R1 establishments appeared to have been mostly able to adopt reactive strategies in response to the restructuring process of the 1990s. This observation is confirmed by the self-assessment of their internal resources (Figure 6.3) and of their planning capacity (Figure 6.4). Although over 50 percent of the surveyed establishments appeared to have clearly defined objectives and targets, in the case of R1 firms, these were only generic with their planning capacity mostly focused on commercialisation and profitability.

According to the 1996 Fisheries Census, only a third of these establishments were able to make minor investments in infrastructure improvements and new equipment. Like the cooperatives, most R1 establishments operated on the basis of internal information about past and present trends. During the fieldwork, when invited to reflect on the main challenges faced to respond more proactively to the restructuring process and to green their performance, R1 respondents identified two main barriers: the first one referred to the scarcity and/or fluctuations and higher cost of raw materials, the second to the increased lack of viability for SMEs to remain in business due to contracting commercialisation channels, heavy indebtedness and lack of affordable credits.

The above picture is at sharp contrast with the situation of R3 establishments, who appeared to have been able to draw on a wider spectrum of strategies. The 1996 Fisheries Census revealed that over two thirds of these establishments were operating at the time with information about the future, both from internal and external sources. Their planning capacity spanned to a wide range of domains and was particularly robust in the areas of commercialisation, innovation and profitability. Looking at the self-assessment of their internal resources, R3 establishments

clearly appeared to be better positioned to respond to the restructuring process and to adopt ecological modernising strategies than the other two categories analysed (Figure 6.3). Almost 38 percent of these establishments received a capital injection during the 1990s, through their association with either national or foreign investors. In both cases, these were the respondents that reported the adoption of a wider set of proactive strategies, spanning the expansion of their control over the harvesting, manufacturing and commercialisation stages.

In terms of access to raw materials, the majority of R3 establishments owned both manufacturing plants and ice trawlers. The 2000/2001 fieldwork survey revealed that although almost 49 percent of the establishments were run by ice-trawling ship-owners, a group of firms were also able to modernise their fleets through the acquisition of freezer/factory vessels during the 1990s. Over 32 of the R3 establishments surveyed in 2000/2001 were within this category, corresponding to the 'integrated firms'. This is the group of firms that capitalised themselves through the chartering regime and the EU accord – the two main mechanisms through which they became associated with foreign capital.²¹⁶ Eight of these firms were able to expand their operations by opening new state-of-the-art plants in Patagonia, by which they accessed the export reimbursements regime and fishing licenses south of parallel 36°.²¹⁷

In terms of strategies directly linked to the manufacturing process, almost all the surveyed R3 establishments obtained their labour force through a variety of subcontracting mechanisms, relying one way or another mostly on the workers' cooperatives. About 46 percent of the establishments reported to have shifted their previous salaried manual workers to the cooperative system. The main reasons given for the adoption of this strategy were the flexibility of the system to respond to fluctuations in the market, the reduction of labour costs and contractual obligations and of labour conflicts and absenteeism. Less than a third reported they worked with a reduced core of salaried workers and relied either on *fasoneras* or short-term contracts with independent cooperatives. These two systems were also used by the establishments who operated with their own cooperativised workers, as a means to expand their manufacturing capacity when needed.

Within the local fishing industry, subcontracting became an extended system, where the subcontracting firm provided the raw material and sometimes advance payments (Gennero de

²¹⁶ With the exception of two establishments exclusively owned by foreign firms.

²¹⁷ Almost 40 percent of the R3 respondents, who both did and did not operate in Patagonia, regarded the measures promoting the geographical shift of the sector to Patagonia as favourable and fair, due to the increasing operation costs of the local offshore fleet. The rest, described the regional incentives as 'a distortion of the market' and a source of 'unfair competition'.

Rearte et al, 1992). For R3 firms this represented a means to focus on the critical stages of harvesting and commercialisation, while subcontracting those tasks that are more labour intensive. Subcontracting was also a mechanism to reduce operative costs, and in particular to offset increasing costs of raw materials due to the depletion of hake and unfavourable trends in the international market. This strategy involved a wide spectrum of practices, some sanctioned with a degree of formalisation and others openly informal. The deployment of combined formal and informal strategies by firms traversed not only the labour market but also the articulation of capital throughout the production cycle, from harvesting to commercialisation. All phases within the economic circuit became linked not only to informal practices, but in many cases to illegal practices. Reflecting on this process, Nahum (2005: 30) contends that:

The 'black economy'²¹⁸ is not limited to the maritime trade unions... In the market a significant amount of fish is sold in black; more than half of the onshore factories labour is hired in black; the majority of the vessels recently sold were purchased for values above those declared and all freezer vessels operating in Mar del Plata were brought to the country at higher prices than those declared to avoid import-duty taxes. Hake catches are higher than reported landings, hiding kilos, crates and species. Obviously, those who look to the other side are paid in black, like many inspectors who never see the discards or the absence of mandatory fishing gear.²¹⁹

Beyond subcontracting, only two additional strategies were reported within the manufacturing process, namely investments in technological upgrading and production quality improvement and diversification. Considering the former, according to the 1996 Fisheries Census, all local R3 establishments made significant investments (particularly in 1995 and 1996), especially in infrastructure (by-product cooling and freezing cold storage, tunnel-belt freezers and freezing plates, equipment in the production line and vessels). During the 2000/2001 fieldwork survey, almost 30 percent of the establishments reported significant investments after 1996. A similar percentage of respondents referred to concerted efforts to diversify and improve the quality of their production. In 1996, 20 establishments had a documented environmental quality system (ISO 9,000) and 25 had adopted the HACCP system. In all cases, firms reported that these had been adopted due to demands from their overseas clients. However, full application of ISO norms was rare among the surveyed firms and only a small group (13 establishments) had written quality specifications and instructions for their workers. In terms of diversification, the bulk of the production of the largest R3 establishments was spread across four products (mostly based on a simple manufacturing hake process such as H&G hake, interleaved fillets, block-frozen hake fillets and hake sausage rolls), while only five establishments manufactured fish residue sub-products.

²¹⁸ In Spanish: *economía del negro*, meaning 'slavery economy'.

²¹⁹ Original in Spanish. Author's translation.

The 1996 Fisheries Census reported that almost 41 percent of the R3 surveyed establishments had clearly defined objectives and targets in relation to the capacity building of their personnel and also in relation to social responsibility. However, in the 2000/2001 fieldwork survey I found little evidence of either. None of the R3 respondents had a corporate social responsibility policy and staff capacity was mostly built among senior management personnel. When it came to manual workers, most establishments declared a reliance on oral practices and instructions given directly to the staff by their line managers. For those who relied on independent cooperatives, these two aspects of planning were entirely overlooked. In practice, the payment-by-productivity system meant that workers had to find out by themselves how to improve their manufacturing skills, facing otherwise the consequence of fewer contracts and lower payment.

In terms of commercialisation, over 78 percent of the R3 establishments surveyed in 2000/2001 were operating both in the external and domestic markets, with the latter representing typically between about 20 percent of their total production.²²⁰ Over a third of the R3 establishments reported that they had actively sought strategies to expand their commercialisation channels, although the main barriers encountered were low international prices in comparison with national production costs, trading barriers and lack of fiscal and credit incentives. The main strategy reported to secure export niches was through the association with foreign capital, mostly through the EU accord.

Despite the variety of strategies adopted by R3 establishments and the fact that some of these firms experienced a significant degree of upward mobility throughout the restructuring process, respondents reported a number of persistent challenges faced throughout this process. Scarcity was commonly cited as the main source of uncertainty for these firms and also the most significant barrier to sustain their accumulation process. 'Scarcity' however was often defined as a matter of unequal distribution of fishing rights over the hake fishery, that is as a condition created by the indiscriminate opening up of fishing rights to the foreign factory fleet.

The above discussion suggests that contrary to the claims of ecological modernisers, the application of flexible production mechanisms and diffusion of certified environmental practices has done little in this case to advance the possibility of greener production. In one of the very few studies that examine the potential for EM in the industrialising countries, Mol and Sonnenfeld (1999) question the compatibility of EM and development in the context of Malaysia's small paper manufacturing mills, acknowledged as vital sources of local livelihoods,

²²⁰ Only two firms were entirely focused on the domestic market – mostly as suppliers of large supermarket chains – and the rest commercialised their production exclusively in the external market, primarily Japan, China and the USA.

social welfare and local economic development. As in the case of Mar del Plata's fishing industry, the transition to more environmentally friendly practices is hampered not just by 'the lack of resources' but also by the fact that any improvement of Malaysia's 'weak environmental regulations' would see the mills competed out of the market.

Putting aside the not very minor problem of how to 'modernise' and re-tool SMEs (and informal producers) to perform more in line with EM principles, Mol and Sonnenfeld (ibid.) suggest that the good news for developing countries is that if able to leapfrog the stage of environmentally damaging industrialisation, they might face lower marginal costs than developed countries to adopt cleaner technologies, therefore having a relative advantage. But even those enthusiastic about the prospects for technological leapfrogging admit that this process would be highly dependant on foreign investment and technology transfers from the most advanced economies who control the development of cleaner technology. EM faith in institutional reform, environmentally benign markets, the agency of self-regulating businesses and leapfrogging technological innovation appears to have at best the capacity to drive some discreet changes in the environmental performance of a few corporations but leaves too many questions unanswered to be taken seriously as the best available global plan to build a new green Great Compromise capable of addressing the structural reproduction of inequality and environmental injustice in the global south.

I have argued so far that the business environment is the 'political space' where structural conditions become translated into specific and concrete conditions of certainty and uncertainty. But this business environment is not just a set of given conditions but actively transformed by those seeking to enhance its predictability. The next section examines how different 'environmental managers'²²¹ constructed and contested different narratives on scarcity, vulnerability and uncertainty as a basis to redefine the regulation of the sector throughout the so-called 'Fisheries War' that almost paralysed the sector at the turn of the new millennium.

²²¹ Wilson and Bryant (1997) argue for an inclusive definition of what environmental management entails and of who is an 'environmental manager'. In doing so, they redefine environmental management "as a multi-layered process [equally] associated with the interaction of state and non-state environmental managers with the environment and with each other" (ibid.: 7). Thus not just the state and scientists but also TNCs and domestic firms operating in the realm of natural resources, international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, environmental NGOs, and onboard and onshore workers within the fisheries sector can be understood as environmental managers, in so far as they all seek actively and self-consciously to manipulate the environment. Such manipulation does not just entail material practices but also discursive ones. Furthermore, what bonds them is that they all "seek predictability in the face of social and environmental uncertainty" (ibid.: 19).

By the end of 1997, the national media reported that fisheries exports had surpassed beef exports and recorded an exponential growth throughout the decade.²²² The exports boom had its epicentre in the squid and hake fisheries, the former accounting for between 25 and 30 percent of worldwide squid catches. Export destinations were not significant in the MERCOSUR market but rather in distant markets.²²³ However, the celebratory tone of the achievements of the NEM was short lived. By 1998 hake catches had dropped dramatically as a result of an alarming decrease in reproductive biomass and the future of the fisheries sector was increasingly uncertain.²²⁴

By the turn of the 21st century, the Argentine fisheries sector was immersed in a crisis; the future of the sector was appraised by national and international organisations as being seriously compromised by the alarming signs of depletion of its main commercial species. This brought dramatic changes to Mar del Plata but also to the political alignment of local, national and international actors, as the sector became immersed in the so-called 'Fisheries War', a conflict triggered by the depletion of the hake fishery, which soon attracted not only local but national media attention. This chapter examines this conflict, looking at how scarcity, uncertainty and vulnerability became the nodes through which the conflict became a battlefield in which the regulation of the sector consolidated during the NEM became openly challenged. The analysis is based on the two following assumptions. First, I share Pelling and Dill's (2010) observation when they argue that socio-environmental conflicts are 'tipping points' to test the resilience of socio-political regimes. Second, I take the position that socio-environmental conflicts are often also a catalyst for political action.

The chapter is structured around three narratives emerging throughout the conflict, examining how claims and claim-makers entered into deadlock as the conflict intensified, the repertoire of claim making mechanisms adopted and the extent to which different agents managed to open new cracks in the model of differential sustainability normalised by the neoliberal *dispositif* throughout the restructuring process. The analysis applies a discursive approach,

²²² In 1997 the sector's exports were 151 percent higher than in 1991 (*La Nación*, 12/02/1998).

²²³ In particular the Asian-Pacific region was playing a significant role, accounting for 40 percent of all national fish exports in 1997, in comparison to 18.3 percent in 1991. Within this region, Japan and Taiwan were the main buyers, a trend that had started in 1993 through the squid chartering regime.

²²⁴ The first warnings forecasting the depletion of hake had come from INIDEP one year earlier but also from the fishermen who had to sail further away from the coast to fill the vessels' storage capacity and from the onshore processing workers, who noticed a significant reduction in the size of landed fish.

which treats narratives not as simple reflections of reality but as discursive practices that shape the social world and draws on the systematic examination of the most widely read newspapers at the national and local level, together with fieldwork interviews and various other publications and media.

7.1 Framing the crisis in the midst of scarcity

Towards the turn of the 21st century, the diagnosis of the crisis faced by the fisheries sector was initially shared by all sectors as the outcome of the fleet's overcapitalisation. In this context, the national government and its 'poor' fishery policy framework and enforcement were almost unanimously singled out as the culprits, triggering the discussion of a large number of emergency and structural measures to regulate fishing rights, which soon led to heated conflicts and competing claims on the framing of the crisis.

Since 1997, both the EP and congress put forward multiple proposals to re-regulate the sector, often in overt contradiction with one another. In the first semester of 1997, SAGPyA adopted a number of short-term measures to reduce harvesting pressure on the hake fishery, consisting of the establishment of closed seasons and area closures, the incorporation of onboard inspectors and higher penalties to restrict the use of inadequate fishing gear. These measures confronted serious implementation problems and opposition by the main fisheries economic agents, prompting frequent political resignations in the leadership of SAGPyA.²²⁵ In parallel, a dozen projects were submitted to congress to define a single body of norms to regulate fishing activity. The outcome was a Federal Fisheries Law (FFL) (Law 24.922), sanctioned by congress in December 1997 and enacted by the EP in January 1998.

However, the FFL was not regulated until July 1999, after a very controversial process in which different agents tried to reshape the details of its enforcement. This law integrated several previous norms and aimed at reorganising the fisheries sector in accordance with three main principles: the preservation of natural resources, the promotion of increased added-value and the protection of national employment. It established the creation of the Federal Fisheries Council (CFP)²²⁶ as the main body responsible for the formulation of sectoral policies and ratified SAGPyA as the implementation authority. The CFP was to be integrated by five representatives of the national government (including SAGPyA) and one representative from

²²⁵ For instance, in 1997, the former president of the Chamber of Fisheries Commerce – closely associated with the freezer-factory fleets – was appointed as the new head of the SSP. His legitimacy was subsequently questioned by several sectors aligned in defence of the national interests.

²²⁶ Consejo Federal Pesquero.

each of the five provinces along the South Atlantic coast. In parallel to the CFP, local and provincial councils were expected to bring together representatives from the public sector, trade unions and entrepreneurial chambers.

The second innovation of the FFL was the introduction of ITQs as the main legal mechanism to regulate and grant fishing rights. This implied the abolition of the previously unrestricted fishing licenses and the establishment of a new quota system to be allocated individually to each vessel and/or company within the limits of the MSY. Fishing quotas were to be granted according to five criteria: the average catch of each vessel between 1989 and 1996, the number of employed national workers, the volume of investments made during this period, and the production volume and record of previous offences incurred by each company. The FFL also established the right of the CFP to reserve part of the TAC for 'social interests'.

As discussed before, the physiognomy of the national fisheries sector had been deeply transformed throughout the NEM. In this context, the ISI system based on a large number of family enterprises operating with ice trawlers and onshore processing – popularly known as '*fresqueros*'²²⁷ – had lost its hegemonic role in favour of a system of larger companies of either mixed or foreign capital, operating from the harbours of Patagonia with freezer-factory vessels, the so-called '*congeladores*'.²²⁸ This group had become dominant both through their technological prevalence over the harvesting process and their economic prevalence over the commercialisation process, the latter almost exclusively based on the export market. Although the restructuring process also led to the emergence of 'integrated' enterprises,²²⁹ the conflict was initially polarised in the public arena as a confrontation between *fresqueros* and *congeladores*. Nieto and Colombo (2009) argue that the former group can be interpreted as unifying the interests of the non-monopolistic 'petit-bourgeoisie', whilst the *congeladores* can be described as the 'great bourgeoisie', who had come to monopolise the national fisheries sector by the end of the decade.

While the conflictivity between small-scale and large-scale capitalists was latent throughout the restructuring process, the scarcity of hake brought it to the surface, leaving the state to

²²⁷ The term '*fresqueros*' requires some explanation: this fleet does not have cold storage onboard facilities, which means fish are kept 'fresh' on ice and often landed ten days after being caught. This process limits the markets in which *fresquero* products can be commercialised. Thus, this group of companies relies heavily on the Brazilian market (where quality demands are lower) and has no or limited access to other export markets

²²⁸ As demonstrated in Chapter 4, the latter accounted for the overcapitalisation of the fleet and the exponential growth of fishing effort in the main commercial fisheries throughout the 1990s.

²²⁹ Firms operating in both systems and with a dual geographical localisation in Mar del Plata and the Patagonian harbours.

arbiter whose interests should be prioritised. As the implementation of the quota system was delayed by the pressures exerted by both groups, at the beginning of 1999, SAGPyA enacted a resolution establishing that in that year each vessel was only allowed to catch up to 50 percent of its 1997 annual catch. The aim of this resolution was to reduce fishing effort until INIDEP provided updated figures to redefine the TAC. This measure was largely criticised by almost all stakeholders, as it implied the enforcement of long and severe closed seasons, predicted to have serious social and economic impacts in all the national harbours. This shifted the locus of the conflict to the short-term distribution of the TAC. Several enterprises and the Chamber of Argentinean Ship-owners appealed against the resolution and obtained a favourable ruling from the judicial system.²³⁰ The appeals were based on the seeming contradictions between SAGPyA's resolution and the criteria established by the FFL to distribute fishing quotas.

In March 1999, INIDEP recommended to cap the hake fishery TAC at 161,000 and 35,200 tonnes respectively for the fleets operating south and north of latitude 41°S. Although these figures were ratified by the CFP, it soon emerged that the total hake TAC approved for 1999 had already been exceeded in the first months of the year. Consequently, the CFP announced the closure of the hake fishery from the beginning of June and for an indefinite period in order to avert the collapse of the species.²³¹ Due to fears of a devastating socio-economic impact on the main *fresquero* harbours of the country,²³² the closure of the hake fishery triggered a new wave of contradictory pieces of legislation and regulation.

Throughout 1999, the conflict became labelled as the 'Fisheries War' and occupied the headlines of Mar del Plata's newspapers and the national press, almost on a daily basis. In early May 1999, Mar del Plata's *fresqueros* became allied under the self-denominated 'Multi-Sectorial Group' (MSG). Promoted by the Argentine Chamber of Ship-owners and Processors (CAAP)²³³ and led by the local mayor, this group brought together those companies operating in the hake fishery exclusively with ice trawlers and/or on shore factories. The MSG also aligned most of the sector's trade unions associated with harvesting and manufacturing, headed by the leader of the United Maritime Workers' Union (SOMU)²³⁴. Far from being homogeneous in their demands and interests, the trade unions (and in fact the workers aligned

²³⁰ The Head of the SSP at the time described this phase as a 'festival of appeals' (Cajal and Leslek, 1999). By September 1999, 11 appeals had been approved by the judicial system, allowing many firms to ignore the closed seasons.

²³¹ This measure was approved by the CFP representatives of the national government and of the provinces of Rio Negro, Santa Cruz and Ushuaia and voted against by Buenos Aires and Chubut.

²³² Particularly Mar del Plata, and Puerto Madryn and Comodoro Rivadavia in the province of Chubut.

²³³ Cámara Argentina de Armadores y Procesadores.

²³⁴ Sindicato de Obreros Marítimos Unidos.

behind them) played a key role in resisting the closure of the hake fishery throughout 1999 and subsequent years.

The emergence of the MSG marks the first alignment of a wide range of socio-economic agents and governmental institutions, whose motto was publicly articulated as the 'defence of the national fisheries sector and the protection of the natural resource base'. The MSG embarked in a massive media campaign and social mobilisation process that soon expanded the political boundaries of the conflict beyond the city. Attracting the endorsement of Menem's political opponents, the hake crisis was reframed as the 'abusive outcome of more than a decade of neoliberal reign'. In this context, several congressmen together with the MSG demanded the application of a number of urgent measures that were encapsulated in the Fisheries Emergency Law (FEL). Crafted by a senator from Chubut province, the key provisions of this law established the displacement of the freezer fleet south of latitude 48°S and outside the EEZ; in addition, all catches were to be processed on-land and both onboard and onshore activities were to employ Argentine workers. Furthermore, the allocation of ITQs was to be postponed until all fishing licenses issued since 1991 had been scrutinised; the chartering of squid jiggers was to be derogated and all fleets (ice trawlers and freezer-factory vessels) were expected to operate with independent onboard inspectors, who should certify their effective catches. Initially, the FEL was intended as a short-term measure aimed at diffusing the conflict and gaining time to negotiate the distribution of the ITQs.

A large group of delegates from the MSG endorsed the measures encapsulated in the FEL. In a press conference held on 7 May 1999, they called on the CFP to reflect on the social consequences of a total closure of the hake fishery, warning that, if unheard, they were ready for a massive demonstration:

[The closure of the fishery] would affect 25,000 workers directly engaged in the sector and an additional 100,000 indirectly. About 80 percent of these people work in the ice trawler fleet and land-processing factories. It would trigger social chaos in the main fishing harbours of the country and affect about 50,000 families in Mar del Plata and its hinterland alone (*La Capital*, 07/05/1999: 15).²³⁵

One day after, the national and local press reported rumours from Brussels about the end of the Fisheries accord with the EU:

The Spanish government recognises that this type of agreement – based on the formation of temporary joint ventures – is exhausted. Unlike Morocco, in Argentina the end of the agreement does not imply that the foreign fleet will have to leave, but the mixed-capital enterprises created under this agreement will have to operate under

²³⁵ This news transcript – like all others in this chapter – was originally in Spanish and translated by the author.

Argentine law, with tariff duty concessions offered by the EU to fish exported from the country coming to an end. (*La Capital*, 08/05/1999: 1)

The above news was welcomed by the MSG, but one day after, the CFP rejected its emergency petition. Under the heading: 'Unheard claims', *La Capital* (08/05/1999: 15) reported that with the exception of the representatives from the Provinces of Buenos Aires and Chubut, all other members of the CFP had ratified the closure of the hake fishery for an undetermined period. The Council had however agreed to review all fishing licenses issued since 1991. A local entrepreneur reflected cynically on this decision: "It remains to be seen how they [the CFP] will deal with this task. It is rather strange that those who were involved in issuing fraudulent licenses will now be expected to scrutinise and penalise them" (*La Capital*, 08/05/1999: 15).

Eduardo Duhalde, governor of Buenos Aires province at the time, endorsed the demands of the MSG and offered to mediate with the president. Soon after, a spokesman announced that Menem was considering "postponing the closure of the hake fishery until the year 2000 in order to avert a dramatic lost of jobs" (*La Capital*, 12/05/1999: 13). Governor Duhalde and the mayor of Mar del Plata publicly announced that a pact accepting the MSG's demands was to be signed in the city two days later, claiming that "whatever is left, will be for the *fresqueros*" (*La Capital*, 13/05/1999: 12). However hours before arriving in Mar del Plata, the head of SSP gave a less optimistic prognosis:

The chances to lift the closure of the fishery are remote but the government does not have the necessary resources to ameliorate the social crisis that will be triggered by this measure. In Mar del Plata alone, this is likely to affect about 20,000 workers but there is no alternative. We have commissioned INIDEP to update us on the state of the resource and if this confirms that the fishery is almost collapsed we will remain firm in our decision... [When asked about the government proposals to mitigate the social crisis, he replied] The national government continues its discussions with the World Bank to obtain USD 200 million that would pay for the social costs of the closure. However, the loan has not yet been approved because the World Bank wants to be reassured that its financial assistance won't be used to accelerate the collapse of the resource (*La Capital*, 13/05/1999: 12).

For the next few days, the MSG remained in a state of alert and depicted by the media as 'waiting between hope and scepticism'. On 15 May, the heads of the fisheries administration at the national and provincial levels together with the mayor of Mar del Plata ratified an official agreement by which the freezer-factory fleet was restricted south of latitude 48°S. A potential closed season of 30 days affecting the *fresqueros* was to be confirmed by the CFP in the light of the latest report by INIDEP. The Chairman of CEPA responded to the news as follows:

We are not against the pact, but we believe that it does not provide an integrated answer. This is not a matter of *congeladores vs. fresqueros*, but rather of *Argentines vs. foreigners*. The answer is to nationalise the harvesting of hake. We have more than 30

years in the sector and hire the largest volume of labour force. (*La Capital*, 16/05/1999: 13)

Meanwhile the FEL had received half approval by the senate chamber and was being considered by the chamber of deputies. CAPECA, the entrepreneurial chamber representing the freezer-factory fleet, did not take long to raise its voice in opposition to both the FEL and pact signed in Mar del Plata. The *congeladores* demanded the immediate implementation of the ITQ system in the hake fishery (as stipulated by the FFL) and rejected the FEL, threatening if unheard to block all Patagonian harbours, depriving the region of fuel supplies. In their view, the Emergency Law constituted 'arbitrary discrimination' between the main industrial fleets operating in the country. CAPECA also demanded the resignation of all the senior officers responsible for the national fisheries administration, and concluded:

The options put forward to the freezer-factory fleet are false, given that there is no hake south of latitude 48°S and it is not possible to harvest shrimp without incurring on incidental hake catches... We demand a solution for all Argentines and not just one sector and remind the government that if approved, the measures adopted will leave over 4,000 workers in Patagonia on the street (*La Capital*, 17/05/1999: 16).

A group of Spanish ship-owners soon endorsed CAPECA's claims. The president of the Ship-owners' Chamber of Vigo contested the restrictions imposed over the *congeladores*, arguing that it was "absolutely unacceptable to sacrifice the interests of the freezer-factory fleet... We call the authorities to reconsider their position or to expect the use of all instruments in the hands of the Spanish ship-owners to protect their interests" (*La Capital*, 20/05/1999: 15). Two days later, the CFP opened its doors to CAPECA but the police evicted a delegation from the MSG, representing the *fresqueros*. During that session, the Council ratified the original plan to implement the closure of the hake fishery until further notice. As an immediate response, the MSG organised a massive mobilisation, blocking the port of Buenos Aires soon after the commemoration of national independence from Spanish rule on 25 May. Fully endorsed by the provincial authorities and several civil society organisations, the demonstration was publicly framed 'as a step towards the reaffirmation of national sovereignty'.

The Fisheries War came to a boil a few months before the October 1999 national elections; a decisive factor that inclined the decision of many politicians in favour of 'national fisheries interests'. Among many others, Carlos Ruckauf, national vice-president and candidate to the governorate of Buenos Aires province, supported to the *fresqueros* as follows:

When the resource is scarce, priority should be given to Argentine fishermen... Factory vessels operate with foreign workers and do not manufacture onshore, they don't generate employment and should therefore be displaced from our sea... As we celebrate the independence of our homeland, we should remember that our wealth is being usurped by foreign fleets... The Emergency Fisheries Law has been approved by

all parties in the senate chamber... now the deputies chamber has the final word (*La Capital*, 26/05/1999: 17).

Considering the key role played by Ruckauf in the administration that had opened up the Argentine Sea to foreign capital, he was severely criticised for his political U-turn. However, by then, the hake crisis had been effectively reframed as a matter of 'national sovereignty', conflating the defence of natural resources and national workers as an indivisible cause. Led by several congressmen and the MSG, over 2,000 workers marched from Mar del Plata to the congress in Buenos Aires city. Over 100 fishing vessels were on the coast of the city ready to block the capital's harbour in a protest known as *El Barcazo*.²³⁶ The protest was endorsed by pickets in Puerto Madryn and Comodoro Rivadavia and received general public support.

Meanwhile, two sectors challenged the mainstream narrative. On the one hand, Greenpeace among other environmental NGOs, warned the public that the FEL was only a smokescreen diffusing a discussion of effective responses to avert the collapse of the hake fishery:

The Law does not focus on the two crucial issues that need to be address to avert the crisis of the sector: the protection of the resource and the necessary economic support to mitigate its social impact. It allows continued harvesting and this might lead to the end of the sector and the collapse of the resource... The government remembered too late to work in defence of the people... they are just thinking about the elections and not the real protection of the sector (*La Capital*, 28/05/1999: 12).²³⁷

With less media coverage, the second challenging voice was that of the excluded workers from the pseudo cooperatives:

We were not invited to the march because they know that our demand is to be regularised. Therefore, we are demonstrating here in the city... everybody talks on behalf of the workers but we are the workers, *en negro* [informal] and forgotten! (*La Capital*, 27/05/1999: 13).

We are about 8,000 workers without any kind of social benefits or protection, we are *parias* [the underdog]... when we work a bit, we bring home peanuts Nowadays we only have a table once or twice a week... If the closure has to be maintained to protect the resource, we ask for some form of subsidy... someone has to take responsibility. (*La Capital*, 28/05/1999: 11).

On 30 May, the MSG congregated the local fleet in front of the harbour and the mayor called all citizens to support their demands 'by land or in the sea', whilst a massive blackout took place as a sign of solidarity. The media reported the demonstration as the biggest social mobilisation ever in the history of the city and of the fisheries sector.

²³⁶ Which roughly translates as 'the fleet strike'.

²³⁷ Interview with J. C. Villalonga, Greenpeace.

Hours before the deputies chambers approved the FEL, Menem enacted an urgent presidential decree²³⁸ (Decree No. 591) suspending the closure of the hake fishery. The decree declared however that the hake fishery was in emergency for an indefinite period and subjected to closed seasons if required. Until the implementation of the ITQs introduced by the FFL, hake catches were to be authorised by the CFP on a case-by-case basis, giving priority to those ship-owners with onshore processing plants established before 1996. The TAC was to be distributed factoring the total number of workers 'employed' by each firm. Soon after the enactment of Decree No. 591, the FEL was approved by the deputies chamber, establishing a slightly different resolution to the conflict. Whilst the news was celebrated as 'a victory for the national fisheries sector', the outcome far from provided any clear solution to the crisis. The co-existence of two national norms ruling over the same situation created a new legal vacuum.

The executive and legislative powers had raced each other to respond to the massive popular outcry, seemingly diffusing the conflict. But while congress restricted the operation of the freezer-factory fleet outside the main hake reproductive grounds, Menem's decree kept the hake fishery open to both fleets. Furthermore, it introduced a TAC allocation system that was almost impossible to implement. How was the CFP to decide on the allocation of the TAC in practice? Could the 'eligible' firms established before 1996 claim those workers hired under the cooperative system as they own employees? If not, was this measure to pitch the cooperative workers against waged workers or to regularise the contractual conditions of the former? If a return to a genuinely salaried work force was the answer, how were firms – now almost fully based on the subcontracting system – going to maintain the flexibility required to respond to fluctuations in the availability of raw materials and in external markets? Furthermore, what was the real quota to be allocated to each company in the light of an unknown TAC? What guarantees were in place that this allocation – if eventually made clear and feasible – was not going to result on the collapse of the hake fishery?

Once more, the fisheries sector was immersed in a chaotic legal framework leading to further inaction. The newspapers soon raised a further question: 'What law rules the Argentine Sea?' (*La Capital*, 04/06/1999: 14). Both the FEL and Decree No. 591 appeared to agree in declaring the fisheries sector – and in particular the hake fishery – in a state of emergency subject to the reorganisation of the framework regulating the activity. However, the two pieces contained significant differences as to whether or not this reorganisation was to alter or reinforce the socio-economic structure consolidated throughout the NEM. While the FEL favoured the

²³⁸ The Argentinean Constitution allows the president to issue urgent decrees that need to be ratified by congress before a certain deadline; if not rejected, urgent decrees become laws.

national *fresqueros*, Decree No. 591 appeared to give priority to those firms operating with onshore processing, regardless of whether these were *fresqueros* or *congeladores*, national, foreign or mixed-capital companies. Thus, while accepting that the system was under risk of ecological collapse, a significant tension remained in the way in which these two pieces of legislation framed the crisis. The FEL called for the re-nationalisation of the sector; Menem's decree called for the protection of the cadre of economic agents solidified throughout the neoliberal restructuring process, paving the way for the full introduction of ITQs.

Menem's decision to link access to the hake TAC to the number of onshore workers hired by each firm could be interpreted as a response to the 'social crisis'. However, this opened a number of legal loopholes. First, it could be assumed that by fixing 1996 as the cut-off year for firms to acquire priority claims over the TAC, the intention was to use the last National Fisheries Census available as a reference. However, given the dynamics of the sector, the information from the 1996 Census was outdated and the effective number of firms still in business in 1999 was unknown. Second, the national labour legal framework had endorsed flexible labour contracts as legitimate, making it difficult to distinguish between subcontracted and waged workers and therefore to establish the number of workers effectively 'employed' by each qualifying firm. Furthermore, the EP decree made it perfectly plausible for those companies hegemonising the harvesting and commercialisation stages – and therefore the subcontracting manufacturing process – to monopolise most of the hake TAC.

In short, both pieces of legislation can be read as the manifestation of a regulation crisis but also as an almost mechanistic reaction activated by the neoliberal *dispositif* to preserve the accumulation process of a reduced pool of economic agents. While accepting the existence of serious ecological limits and of a massive social crisis, both social and ecological considerations were sidelined, either in favour of the *fresqueros* or *congeladores*. Peronist Deputy Héctor Lenze reflected on this deadlock as follows:

Fisheries entrepreneurs are both part of the problem and the solution. They are part of the problem because they need to understand that the viability of a market-led deregulated fisheries sector has come to an end. In fact, the technological 'improvements' that made possible an exponential growth of catches between 1991 and 1996 have led to a serious reduction of the resource that imposes the application of drastic fishing restrictions and a reduction of the fleet... But they are also part of the solution because the restructuring of the sector depends of them, with the support of the national state. Whether the restructuring happens through the harvesting of other species or by adding more value to final products, all firms should understand that such changes will not be translated into economic benefits. In a context of crisis, any support from the state will be geared not to help them to make more profits but to reduce their losses and to retain as many livelihoods as possible... Unlike many

decision-makers and entrepreneurs seem to believe, no single decree could help us to recover the hake stock, only nature and time (*La Capital*, 04/06/1999: 16).

By enacting Decree No. 591 before the approval of the FEL, Menem had gained time to maintain the status quo. The decree was ruling the sector and he still had ten days to reject the FEL, if he wished alleging contradictions with a 'pre-existing norm'. The ambivalence of the legal framework soon opened new internal fractions and divisions. After returning to Mar del Plata, local fishermen went on a massive strike to demand the presidential enactment of the FEL. This opened a fracture within the MSG, as workers decided to keep pressure on the GoA against the call of local authorities, firms and trade unionists to resume normal activity. In a massive public gathering, fishermen questioned their leaders' claiming that the crisis could only be averted if "the grassroots take over the demands to ensure the preservation of the fishery. We won't be used to add numbers to the negotiations of the leaders, we are ready to fight for what we feel is just" (*La Capital*, 08/05/1999: 11). In addition to the strike, fishermen engaged in a number of direct actions, including the occupation of a site to be demolished for a regeneration project in the city. The images were transmitted by all national TV channels; the Fisheries War was by then firmly regarded as a 'national' conflict.

As the workers took over the social mobilisation process, for the first time, fishermen, salaried onshore workers and workers from the cooperatives came together, forming a commission to sustain their claims within the MSG and to put direct pressure on the government. Through this newly formed front, sea and onshore workers proclaimed their union "against a common enemy, personified by President Menem and the head of the Fisheries Under-Secretariat, who are obstructing a real solution to the crisis. The other enemy is the factory fleet because there is no room in the fishery for them to coexist with the ice trawler fleet" (*La Capital*, 17/06/1999: 11). Soon after, a joint public assembly congregating 2,500 workers on 18 July was cancelled by the SOMU; its leader explains why:

That was a difficult day, one among many! If we didn't control the growing solidarity between sea and onshore workers we would have risked the unity of the MSG and what we saw as our best chance to get the FEL enacted by Menem. The workers under the cooperatives were like a 'sleeping dog'... if you kick it and you wake it up, it might bite your hand. Addressing their claims was outside our remit and counterproductive. Whether we liked it or not, the local companies needed to maintain low labour costs, and the cooperative system was the best vehicle for that. By endorsing their claims we would have risked our unity with the entrepreneurs and prompt the economic collapse of the sector (Fieldwork interview with J.D.N., Leader of SOMU, 02/08/2000).

While workers remained on strike, rumours started to circulate about a number of palliative governmental measures to mitigate the social impact of the crisis. Senator Osvaldo Sala announced to the media that the GoA was contemplating the possibility of a 600 million

peso²³⁹ loan to subsidise the restructuring of the sector and to support the most vulnerable workers (*La Capital*, 20 /06/1999: 17). On 24 June Menem finally approved the FEL and enacted Decree No. 678 to make effective its implementation. After a strike of 28 days, the local harbour of Mar del Plata was expected to resume its activity. However, at that stage, the FEL was almost totally ineffectual as a means to avert the crisis; hake catches had already amply surpassed the TAC. As put by a local fisherman: “we are now allowed to fish but there is nothing left to fish” (*La Capital*, 24/06/1999: 12).

Both *congeladores* and *fresqueros* protested against the FEL. Supported by Government of Spain, the former claimed that the law contradicted previous norms protecting their operation in the country. The *fresqueros* argued for the nationalisation of the sector in defence of the constitutional rights of national workers and enterprises. Several environmental NGOs, including Greenpeace, added their claims to the conflict, demanding urgent measures to preserve the hake grounds. The CFP eventually announced an extraordinary hake quota of 50,000 tones to be allocated to the *fresqueros* until the end of 1999, but alerted the public that “this was a political measure without any scientific reassurance of its impact on the resource” (*La Capital*, 24/06/1999: 12). In parallel, Felipe Solá, former head of the SSP and candidate to the vice-presidency in the forthcoming elections, announced that the GoA was going to deliver food boxes to approximately 5,000 fillet workers in Mar del Plata while exploring other subsidies for those workers associated to the SOIP (*ibid.*).

A few days later, thousands of workers from the cooperatives and their families queued for hours outside the headquarters of SOIP to receive a food box. Images of this scene made visible the real face of the social crisis throughout national and local newspapers. The content of the boxes²⁴⁰ was barely enough to feed one family for a couple of days and recipients were told that the next delivery was to take place in one month. The food boxes were meant to reach the most vulnerable workers, those operating under informal conditions in the local cooperatives. However, entrusted with the responsibility of distributing the aid, SOIP only recognised as legitimate beneficiaries those workers officially registered with the trade union, which in practice excluded most informal labourers. A dissident group – the Fisheries Workers Union (UOP)²⁴¹ – set up a soup kitchen and opened a new registry to be presented to the Ministry of Labour for the distribution of further subsidies (*La Capital*, 27/06/1999: 20).

²³⁹ Throughout the life on the Convertibility Plan (1999-2001), the exchange rate was roughly 1 Argentine peso = 1 USD.

²⁴⁰ Each food box contained one litre of cooking oil, a kilo of pasta, rice, sugar, yerba and powdered milk.

²⁴¹ Unión Obrera del Pescado.

Two weeks later, INDEC announced that for the second consecutive year Mar del Plata had recorded the highest level of unemployment among all urban areas in the country, affecting over 16 percent of the local EAP²⁴² (*La Capital*, 14/07/1999: 1). Meanwhile, in order to cope with the scarcity of hake, many local firms further reduced their personnel. Reports of numerous protests by fired and unpaid workers in the local fisheries sector became a frequent feature in the local newspapers throughout the rest of the year.²⁴³ Occupied factories and vessels reflected a similar reality onshore and onboard: with fishing almost fully paralysed, workers resorted to taking over the means of production, albeit without results.

In parallel, the crisis of the hake fishery was affecting other species. CEDEPESCA, among other environmental NGOs, denounced that the hake ice-trawler and freezer-factory fleets were exerting increased pressure over other species, typically harvested by the coastal fleet (*La Capital*, 24/07/1999: 17). By the end of August, the CFP announced a closed season of 15 days, which was counteracted by a demand from the MSG to stagger the closure of the hake fishery, allowing a reduced number of vessels from different firms to fish on alternate dates. The rest of the year was characterised by similar actions and counteractions. By December, the reproductive biomass of hake had shrunk to an unprecedented level, most of the local fleet and the onshore plants were paralysed and the future of the industry was highly uncertain. The void created by contradictory regulations and their lack of implementation meant also that the deep-sea fleet continued harvesting as usual. The judicial system became overloaded with appeals from the freezer-factory fleet to overrule different harvesting restrictions, obtaining in most cases a favourable decision. The conflict had been reduced to fights between the main economic agents for the allocation of whatever was left while the hake fishery was on the verge of its ecological, social and economic collapse.

7.2 Reclaiming order and certainty

In 1999, the World Bank reported that the sector was faced “with a choice between continued revenue, export and employment growth, and complete collapse of the most important

²⁴² According to the Permanent Household Survey (EPH), in 1998 local unemployment had reached 15.5 percent of the local population, while the national unemployment rate was 12.4 percent.

²⁴³ For example, a group of fishermen took over a vessel owned by one of the largest local ship-owners demanding four months of due wages and the restitution of another vessel usually sailed by the protesters, which had been removed from activity until the firm concluded its restructuring. The fishermen presumed that this meant that part of the company’s fleet was being secretly transferred to the south of the country, where harvesting continued as usual. “A factory continues to be occupied” was the title of one among many related to episodes in which workers occupied factories, demanding unpaid wages, raw material and a return to the salaried system (*La Capital*, 20/07/1999: 13; 22/07/1999: 15).

commercial marine species” (World Bank, 1999: 1). Clearly, there was no ‘choice’ implicit in this statement, as revenue, exports and employment growth could not be pursued if the main commercial species was depleted. Without further consideration of the reasons that might have led to this no-choice scenario, the report went on to establish the solution:

Individual transferable quotas are the most effective instrument to achieve the ecological, commercial and social benefits associated with sustainable fisheries management... virtually all stakeholders recognise the need to improve resource management to avoid sectoral collapse, and all support the use of ITQs as a primary management tool. In addition, there is consensus on the need for Government to demonstrate decisive actions in managing the hake crisis so as to build credibility for the new management system” (ibid.: 2).

Towards the end of 1999, the legal framework regulating the sector was more unclear than ever, with various legislation and regulations in open contradiction with each other.²⁴⁴ The structural purging and reorganisation of the sector then became the new focus of disputes. The chair of the senate chamber’s commission dealing with fisheries affairs called all sectors to bring to an end the ‘no-sense chain’ of emergency laws, decrees and resolutions and the plethora of appeals triggered in reaction:

We are facing a crisis; the most optimistic estimates by INIDEP forecast a maximum hake TAC of 80,000 tonnes for the next year. The future of the sector rests on the actual enforcement of the ITQs introduced almost two years ago by the FFL. The Law establishes the possibility of allocating part of the squid quota to those firms severely affected by the hake crisis, who provide jobs for the national workforce (*La Capital*, 05/11/1999: 10).

However, in a political climate marked by the national elections, vote-seeking emergency measures continued to proliferate and Menem continued ‘flirting’ with all sectors. On 6 November he publicly reassured a group of female protesters from Mar del Plata that the hake fishery was not going to be closed, contradicting the measure ratified by the CFP the day before (*La Capital*, 06/11/1999: 12). On 12 November he enacted a new presidential decree (Decree No. 1,285) extending the squid chartering regime for four years, a measure that favoured the *congeladores*, reducing the possibility of reallocating part of the squid TAC to national ship-owners affected by the hake crisis (*La Capital*, 12/05/1999: 1). In this context, the conflict shifted to the allocation of ITQs and the defence of ‘national fisheries interests’ was taken over by the integrated firms congregated under CEPA, who were best positioned to fight against the *congeladores* for the allocation of fishing quotas for alternative species, because of their combined fleet and dual location in Mar del Plata and Patagonia.

²⁴⁴ These included: the Federal Fisheries Law No. 24,922 approved on 9/12/1997; the Fisheries Emergency Law No. 25,109 (23/6/1999) and its regulatory Decree No. 748/99 (14/7/1999); the EP Fisheries Emergency Decree No. 591/99 (01/06/1999) and additional hake quotas approved by Decree 792/99 (22/07/1999).

One year earlier, CEPA had publicly welcomed the introduction of ITQs. Competing with the *fresqueros*, this group also defined itself as ‘the national fisheries sector’, by virtue of the investments they had made in modernising their enterprises and their role in the generation of employment. In a press conference, one of the leaders of CEPA put forward their position:

[ITQs] will change the sector, providing for the first time in history, a clear legal framework... However, we haven’t yet seen the administrative speed required to establish specific allocations and who should benefit. We are concerned but remain optimistic that the GoA will make the right decision. National enterprises should be the ones that receive the quotas, as they are the future of the sector.

We are responsible for a significant volume of employment, we are traditional Argentine enterprises that operate with national workers... and the only ones that can mitigate the serious unemployment crisis suffered by the sector not just in Mar del Plata but nationwide. Today, any of the companies that integrate with CEPA gives work to 700 to 800 workers... Any wrong decision on the quotas will threaten their livelihoods (*La Capital*, 08/12/1998: 13).

However, the enforcement of the ITQs was opposed by various pressure groups operating at different scales and constrained by the political will and capacity of the national authorities. The main conflict was about the weight of each of the five criteria established in the FFL for ITQ allocation. The offshore fleet and land processing plants claimed that fishing allocations should prioritise the generation of employment, demanding exclusive rights over the hake fishery within the EEZ, and limiting the operation of the freezer fleet beyond the 201 miles and south of latitude 48°S. The *congeladores* claimed that the quota system should reward the use of modern technology and certified environmental standards, insisting that quotas should be allocated on the basis of average catches by each fleet between 1989 and 1997. The coastal fleet of Mar del Plata and other Patagonian harbours demanded exclusive rights over the fishing grounds proximate to the coast to avoid competition with the industrial fleet. Furthermore, many feared that rather than reducing the overcapitalisation of the fleet, the ITQ system was highly likely to reinforce the capacity of the industrial fleet to monopolise harvesting in the Argentine Sea. The *fresqueros* argued for the need to reduce the number of active fishing licenses before ratifying usufruct rights through the ITQs:

It is not possible to introduce a quota system in the fishery now, because any allocation will be based on the average performance of the last few years and that will be detrimental to all... The introduction of ITQs is just another mechanism to drive us to extinction, while the *congeladores* can easily shift to commercial species other than hake. Before any further measure is taken, fishing effort should be reduced and the government has to decide who should go and who should stay (Interview with the chairman of the Chamber of Fisheries Processors, *La Capital*, 20/11/1999: 12).

When De la Rúa replaced Menem in December 1999, the MSG demanded ‘a holistic plan for the sector’ and expanded rights of the ice-trawler fleet to harvest species other than hake. The leader of SUPA challenged the real intentions of the MSG by asking: “Why didn’t the

entrepreneurial sector defy Menem when he extended the squid chartering regime? The answer is simple: they are partners with the state in the 'fishy business' of giving the resource away to foreigners and shameful food boxes to the workers" (*La Capital*, 20/11/1999: 12). Still, the MSG managed to survive for a while under the so-called 'Fisheries 2000 Project' by precariously combining the sectoral demands of *fresqueros*, integrated companies and workers. The project was described as an 'Argentine model for the sector' and articulated four key demands: (1) extending the fisheries emergency until the recovery of hake stocks (for an estimated minimum of four years); (2) privileging the fishing rights of the integrated companies among all agents operating south of latitude 48°S; (3) granting a 100,000 tonne quota of squid to the *fresqueros*; and (4) introducing a country-to-country agreement by which fishing quotas could be exchanged to open up commercialisation niches in external markets. The shrimp fishery was to be opened to both *congeladores* and *fresqueros*, while insisting on the need to enforce the use of selective fishing gear and onboard inspectors.

The fifth demand of the project referred to the need to legitimise the right of firms to subcontract the cooperatives' services. Companies within the MSG agreed to consider a return to permanent salaried contracts only in relation to onboard workers, claiming that "it was against the law to change the cooperatives subcontracting system" (*La Capital*, 28/11/99: 11). Thus, with the hake fishery ecologically collapsed, the MSG had become a more overt alignment among the leading ship-owners and processors to participate in the big business of the shrimp and squid fisheries,²⁴⁵ happy to trade fishing rights to foreign vessels in exchange for external market niches. We should remember that the shrimp and squid fleets had a high by-catch incidence affecting in particular hake juveniles, thus any expansion of these fisheries represented a threat to the recovery of hake biomass. On the side of the workers, the unifying demand was the abolishment of precarious contracts; however the deal was clear, to remain in the MSG, onboard workers had to divorce their demands from those of their comrades in the cooperatives. The mayor of Mar del Plata headed 'the move forward to a national fisheries policy', claiming that Fisheries 2000 "promotes an Argentine model and invites the national authorities to implement a real national policy... which will enable the better and more equitable development of the sector in the future" (*La Capital*, 03/12/1999: 15).

CEPA offered an alternative 'integral project', calling for the GoA to support 'for once and for all' an 'ecological modernising vision' for the sector. For the integrated companies, the only solution to guarantee the sustainability of the natural-resource base was to move beyond the antipathy between *congeladores* and *procesadores* through the implementation of the ITQ

²⁴⁵ These two fisheries were at the time dominated respectively by Spanish and Asian companies.

system established by the FFL, and the articulation of a series of measures aimed at protecting the competitiveness of a small pool of innovators. The latter ranged from soft loans, more export incentives, the elimination of distorting taxes, the reduction of services charges and of technological import-duty tariffs.²⁴⁶ In relation to labour, CEPA demanded the ratification of the subcontracting cooperative system to decentralise the processing stage, and the closure of all 'clandestine' plants; the latter representing mostly those independent cooperatives operating outside the plants of the main subcontracting firms. Acknowledging that the restructuring of the sector was inevitably going to attract social costs, CEPA argued that it was the government's responsibility to put in place a social contention programme.

Despite the various proposals on the table, the first measure adopted by the newly appointed head of SAGPyA under the De la Rúa administration, was to extend the FEL, granting a new hake quota of 24,000 tones to the *fresqueros* to mitigate the crisis (Decree No. 189/99). The quota was to last until March 2000; however, by the end of January it had been fully harvested. In parallel SAGPyA's budget was reduced and the Fisheries Under-Secretariat dissolved, while the authorities acknowledged publicly that there was no alternative but to adopt further closed seasons to 'delay' the collapse of the fishery (*La Capital*, 18/12/99). Meanwhile INIDEP revealed that between 1998 and 1999, the total biomass of hake had decreased by a further 16 percent and total number of specimens had declined by 33 percent.

The head of SAGPyA pointed his finger to Menem's administration, claiming that "the fisheries administration [had] inherited a long list of corrupt decisions, with fishing licenses granted on an indiscriminate basis and without rendering any financial benefits, at least to the country" (*La Capital*, 03/01/2000: 5). In this context, the new administration promised to scrutinise all licenses issued throughout the 1990s, with the aim of reducing them and gradually nationalising the sector. By the beginning of 2000, a new wave of factories closed down, further shrinking the local industry. Photo 7.1 shows a group of workers demanding due wages after the firms for which they worked shut down while pretending to close for holidays; an image repeated in subsequent months.

²⁴⁶ The project highlighted that "while international competitors access credit at 5 to 7 percent interest annual rates, we face rates than range from 13 to 17 percent in the best case and of up to 18 to 33 percent in the case of the SMEs" (*La Capital*, 07/12/1999: 14).

Photo 7.1 Ripped-off workers demand due wages



Source: *La Capital*, 07/01/2000: 6. Photo by R. Tamalet.

The Federation of Cooperatives acting in the harbour of Mar del Plata (FECOOAPORT)²⁴⁷ revealed that out of 160 active cooperatives, only 40 were 'legal' establishments, providing employment to about 1,200 workers. FECOOAPORT argued that, sheltered under the crisis, local companies were establishing new pseudo cooperatives, "where the majority of workers are openly exploited, without any form of insurance; and where those injured or sick are simply replaced without any compensation" (*La Capital*, 10/01/2000: 5). CEDEPESCA urged the government to allocate about 50 USD million per year to mitigate the social crisis:

Just as the state now plans to start looking after the natural-resource base, it should also take care of the fisheries' human resources. The amount requested will provide 500 monthly subsidies for about 8,000 workers... a minimum compensation for a crisis generated by the fivefold expansion of the freezer-factory fleet that throughout the 1990s led to the collapse of the hake fishery (*La Capital*, 11/01/2000: 10).

The government's counterargument was that the solution to the crisis was to prioritise those companies who generated the most economic benefits for the country.²⁴⁸ It was on this basis that ITQs were to be introduced, scrutinising applicants on a one-by-one basis (*La Capital*, 12/01/2000: 6). Meanwhile, at the local level, SENASA and OSSE²⁴⁹ became stricter in their controls, applying fines and disrupting the water supply to plants operating with illegal connections (*La Capital*, 31/01/2000). In the following months, stricter controls onboard and onshore triggered multiple claims from all agents from the local to the international sphere. The Spanish government protested the decision of the Argentine authorities, demanding no discrimination between the national fleet and that associated with Spanish companies (*La*

²⁴⁷ Federación de Cooperativas de Trabajo de Actividades Portuarias, Navales, Pesqueras y Afines Limitada.

²⁴⁸ As previously discussed, in addition to the overcapitalisation of the Argentine flagged fleet, over-fishing had also been exacerbated throughout the 1990s by the relaxation of national controls over the boundaries of the EEZ. In March 2000, the general public learnt that about 900 foreign vessels were operating on the 201 mile border on a regular basis (*La Capital*, 23/03/2000).

²⁴⁹ Obras Sanitarias Sociedad de Estado (Sanitary Works State Society).

Capital, 02/02/2000). Local independent ship-owners complained when their vessels were interdicted for fishing within a closure zone, arguing that they had the right to fish in the Argentine Sea (*La Capital*, 03/02/2000: 10). Meanwhile, safeguarded by numerous appeals approved by the judiciary, the freezer-factory fleet resumed its activities north of latitude 48°S²⁵⁰ (*La Capital*, 04/02/2000: 11).

In a renewed climate of anarchy, the authorities decreed the sudden closure of the hake fishery to last until mid-March. Distancing itself from the government, the MSG denounced that in addition to ‘killing the industry’, the GoA had interrupted the food boxes due to reach those worst affected by the crisis (*La Capital*, 12/02/2000: 10). The focus of the claims was just about to shift once more to the social consequences of the crisis. Local workers from the pseudo cooperatives insisted on demanding subsidies from the government, while the MSG continued emphasising the ‘social crisis’ but without recognising the problems associated with labour precarisation. Under increasing pressure, the government lifted the closed season, accepting instead to stagger the closure, allowing local ship-owners to fish on alternate days.

However, local workers from the pseudo cooperatives denounced that the new measure once more threatened the ecological sustainability of the hake fishery. Leaders of the dissident UOP opened another soup kitchen in front of the municipal town hall, demanding a minimum contractual time guarantee, equivalent to 500 pesos per month²⁵¹:

We do not agree with the last accord signed by the MSG, because it only guarantees the continuous depredation of hake and precarisation of workers. For us, staggered closed seasons mean that we will work at best two or three days every fortnight. This is a masquerade to avoid any responsibility for the crisis and we are paying the worst price. The accord does not say anything about the workers, the need to regularise contracts and to stop the cooperatives created to skip taxes and social contributions (*La Capital*, 22/02/2000: 6).

Days later, two male workers shackled themselves to a municipal harbour building and started a hunger strike, claiming that rather than dying from hunger at their homes, they were willing to face their fate in front of the authorities and public opinion (*La Capital*, 04/03/2000: 23).

Meanwhile, CEPA framed the situation in more pragmatic terms:

We don’t look for culprits but for solutions. We have an overcapitalised fleet, which directly or indirectly affects the hake fishery. About 50 percent of the local fishing industry and 40 percent of the national fisheries sector rely on hake. The sector is almost exclusively focused on the international market; exports reached USD 1,200 million a couple of years ago and nowadays about USD 800 millions. Other activities like the canning industry are dying because of cheap imports.

²⁵⁰ In Chubut alone, 34 appeals to avoid fishing restrictions were presented in just one month.

²⁵¹ Equivalent to almost USD 500.

There are no magic answers to the crisis. Either we implement the ITQ system and let the market purge the sector through the trading of quotas or the state buys out a substantial portion of the fleet. As the latter is unlikely to happen, ITQs are the only solution. Those who can compete will stay in business and many will close down, but without any clear reorganisation of the sector, many companies will disappear anyway (Interview with O.F., Chairman of CEPA, *La Capital*, 05/03/2000: 7).

Towards the end of March 2000, INIDEP's latest scientific assessment concluded that the hake fishery should be closed for the rest of the year in order to ensure a minimum recovery in the biomass of reproductive adults (*La Capital*, 25/03/2000). In July, SAGPyA claimed that over 800 vessels were active in the Argentine Sea and about 3,000 abridgments had been issued because of various contraventions, presenting the state with an arduous task to clean up the sector (*La Capital*, 12/07/2000: 10). Meanwhile the GoA denounced the accord with the EU as "highly negative and surrounded by anomalies and corruption" (*La Capital*, 12/07/2000: 10). The national authorities demanded the payment of €6 million due by the EU as part of an international cooperation grant approved with the accord. In response the EU claimed that the funds would continue to be blocked due to the failure of the Argentine government to fulfil its commitment to safeguard the continuous operation of the European fleets who had invested in the country under the letter of the accord (*ibid.*). Throughout the rest of the year the media reported multiple claims for and against the closure the fishery, alternated with random decisions by the fisheries administration. Meanwhile, the MSG continued pressing for the removal of the *congeladores* (Photo 7.2).

Photo 7.2 'The fisheries sector made itself heard'



Source: *La Capital*, 29/04/2000: 19. Photo by O. Luque.

In August, the local and national media revealed that at least 27 foreign vessels had been incorporated by companies operating in Mar del Plata through fraudulent practices (*La Capital*, 11/08/2000). These included the trafficking of fishing licenses between Argentine and EU companies, amounting in all cases to the expansion of fishing effort in the hake fishery. At that

point, the leader of SOMU, who had headed the trade unionist claims in the MSG, declared the group as ineffectual and their cause as lost:

Our mobilisation to confront the crisis failed for two reasons. First, because the protection of the resource through the quota system was never properly implemented. Second, because Mar del Plata failed to expel the factory fleet. The future is painfully predictable, those companies who can afford it will move to the Patagonia region, where the conflict is less overt. Those who are bounded to operate locally will close down. How are we – local trade union and entrepreneurial leaders – going to stop the workers' insurgence in the short to medium term? (*La Capital*, 24/08/2000: 11).

The ITQ system started to be increasingly questioned. In a national press conference, the leader of CEDEPESCA explained some of its risks:

[ITQs] tend to favour the concentration of fishing rights in a few hands; they can be useful but also counterproductive. International experts made clear that to be effective this is an expensive system. An effective control system requires between 3 and 5 percent of the production value generated by the sector, it is a very complex system and the Argentine government is not currently capable of implementing it. A rushed decision could bring about worse consequences than the ones faced today (*La Capital*, 05/05/2000: 12).

By the end of 2000, the fisheries sector continued to be in a deadlock. The hake fishery was depleted, workers continued to struggle under precarious conditions, while more and more SMEs were forced to close down. The only measure proposed by the national authorities was a new emergency law endorsed by the *fresqueros* and resisted by the *congeladores*. Conflict continued to increase, pitching workers against capitalists and the state. In a press communication, CEDEPESCA offered a sobering analysis of the situation, denouncing the responsibility of the state:

The attempts to preserve the resource – even if in response to a crisis inherited from another administration – do not exempt the state from its responsibility to address the current crisis. The problem is that the recognition of a biological emergency is disassociated from its social and economic impacts. To think that the fisheries administration should only attend to the preservation of the resource and at best to the profitability of the enterprises operating in the sector implies a serious misconception, already outdated in contemporary approaches to fisheries management worldwide. The main problem is that this approach ignores the short- and long-term reality of workers, by pitching the social question as an argument to relax any serious attempts to preserve the resource (Personal communication with the director of CEDEPESCA, 27/08/2000).

At the international level, the WWF (2000) reported that unsustainable fisheries management in Argentina had caused the commercial collapse of hake and more than six additional target fisheries and about 20,000 jobs were at risk due to the crisis faced by the sector, a crisis caused

mainly – but not exclusively – by the EU-Argentinean fisheries agreement.²⁵² The WWF called for a ten-year ‘fisheries recovery plan’ based on a scientifically valid and neutral assessment process to determine the financial profitability and the social and ecological benefits of recovered stocks. Science and international expertise once more came to the rescue.

At the local level, while the mayor of Mar del Plata continued to emphasise the need to attenuate the local crisis by granting the local fisheries sector any available quota of hake, the official discourse became more explicit about the need to explore other routes to support the economy of the city. The leader of the municipal council declared in September 2000 that: “the city’s economy should enter a new phase, in which its assets should be sold integrally rather than sectorially, promoting investments that focus on its economic potential, away from manufacturing processes with a new emphasis on the provision of services at competitive prices” (*La Capital*, 02/09/2000: 10). In October of that year, the management of the local harbour was officially transferred to a regional consortium, which adopted a business model that emphasised its economic potential as a tourist and freight harbour and away from its historical role as the epicentre of the local fisheries sector (*La Capital*, 10/10/2000). Consistently, the local fisheries sector was being eradicated from the future development of the city, while the emphasis was on finding new avenues to attract private investors to propel the tertiarisation of the local economy:

Whether we like it or not, we have a new country, too deeply articulated to the global economy to leave the boat now. The current social crisis makes it even more difficult to change the general direction set up throughout the 1990s. With a massive and unprecedented record of people living in poverty and indigence even in our cities, our best bet is to restructure the economy of the main urban agglomerations to the tertiary sector. The fisheries sector is now populated by a tangle of foreign and national interests, who control harvesting and commercialisation without much need to touch land. Let a few enclaves in Patagonia fight for a few bread crumbs, they have no other alternative. But for a city like Mar del Plata the future is somewhere else, not in the fishing industry or indeed in any manufacturing sector (Fieldwork interview with G.P., local councillor of General Pueyrredon Municipality (MGP), 16/08/2000).

At the national level, the official discourse presented some similarities. President De la Rúa visited Mar del Plata and called on entrepreneurs to “join a strategic alliance between the public and the private sector” to “launch together a production system for an integrated country and without 10 million Argentines excluded” (*La Capital*, 14/10/2000: 14). Claiming that the country was not undergoing a ‘governability crisis’, De La Rúa exhorted industrialists to defy pessimistic prospects and to join the state in actively seeking new destinations for national exports and new competitive niches in the world economy. Soon after, the minister of

²⁵² From 31 December 2000 the agreement was not renewed.

economics reassured the nation that apparent fractures between the state, industrialists and trade unions were not threatening national economic instability, the Convertibility Plan was to remain enforced and although new economic policies were needed to avert the crisis, the course followed throughout the last decade was not to be abandoned, prioritising investments and exports as the way forward.

In parallel, the city was hitting one of its lowest points with 9 percent of its population living in indigence, 8 percent below the poverty line, 40 percent with very low incomes and 45 percent earning less than 500 pesos²⁵³ per month (*La Capital*, 17/09/2000). Towards the end of the year, workers' pickets exploded throughout the main urban centres of the country. Mar del Plata experienced its first massive picket on 24 November 2000, with demonstrations throughout the city and blockages throughout all main motorways. This event was not just headed by workers from the fisheries sector but more widely by the unemployed. Their demands included the creation of at least 3,000 jobs through the national programme Trabajar (Work), a minimum monthly salary of 300 pesos, the tripling of food subsidies received at the time and the adoption of social tariffs for all basic services (water, electricity and gas) (*La Capital*, 24/11/2000). Almost one year later, another massive picket brought the city to a standstill but at that stage the demands were becoming more radical. Voiced by a larger number of grassroots organisations, their demands included the "repudiation of national adjustment and its provincial measures... and of the economic groups that steal money from our country" (*La Capital*, 08/08/2001: 13).

By the end of 2000, both the neoliberal model implemented nationwide and the bargaining model promoted by the MSG were showing clear signs of exhaustion, particularly with regards to the possibility of maintaining a 'productive alliance' between capitalists and the state that excluded nature and workers.

7.3 The 'Scream of the Fishery'

A high degree of conflictivity between workers, capitalists and the state rapidly escalated towards the turn of the 21st century. Mar del Plata's harbour was the scene of frequent demonstrations, pickets and riots, although such protests also became a regular feature in other harbours in the Patagonian region.

²⁵³ Equivalent to almost 300 USD.

As previously discussed, the initial phases of the conflict were dominated by the depletion of hake and the allocation of fishing rights. Although workers were part of the cadre of coalitions during such initial phases, the frequency, volume and content of their mobilisation were to increase to unprecedented levels in the following years. Between 1997 and 1999, the conflict was polarized between the interests of the local fisheries sector bourgeoisie against extra-local and mostly transnational agents. Even if this division was less clear cut than initially suggested, local workers found themselves under the umbrella of the MSG, fighting in 'defence of the national fisheries sector'. Underlying this initial alliance was however a pervasive conflict between capital and labour. For this reason, after every peak in the demands of the MSG to the national government, local workers engaged in immediate waves of mobilization, demanding the end of their precarious working and contractual conditions.

Fronting workers as the face of the crisis, the MSG succeeded first in obtaining the sanction of the FEL in 1999 and later its extension until March 2000. Workers had been drawn into the MSG under vague promises of improving their situation. But although the companies succeeded in postponing the closure of the hake fishery for a while, their promises remained unfulfilled. In turn, this created further tensions between the main local trade unions, the MSG and onboard and onshore workers. In an interview with *Puerto*, the leaders of SUPA and SOIP explain why:

When we returned from the famous mobilisation in May 1999, the companies refused to discuss labour issues. At the time, workers were owed over USD 1 million, while most comrades lacked any employment benefits... The bosses are not interested in real change. They want to keep a jamboree where fish is given away and success is regulated by corrupt practices. Once and for all we want clear legislation! (*Puerto*, 2000, No. 10: 8).

One of the main reasons alleged by the trade unionists to join the MSG was its perceived capacity to reach and lobby the government and to place its concerns in the public sphere:

In hindsight, we shouldn't have been part of this alliance. But in the Argentina of the 1990s, the companies had lobbying capacity and we didn't. When we left the MSG we were portrayed by the media as an organization that didn't care for the future of the local fishing industry. Once we were out of the MSG we became voiceless. This is why we were part of the group; because we saw it as the only arena in which the impoverished trade unions of Mar del Plata could have a voice (ibid.: 9).

During the fieldwork, when asked about the conditions of the workers under the cooperative system, the leader of SOIP qualified the system as 'slavery':

More than 80 percent of the cooperatives are illegal and this is an indicator of the failure of the system: a failure for the workers, not the companies. Today the workers

are in a worse situation than in the early 1940s. Out of every ten associates in the cooperatives, nine want to go back to the salaried system... Workers are now treated as 'service suppliers' instead of labourers (Fieldwork interview with C.D., 30/08/2000).

In assessing their relationship with the companies and the state, trade unionists saw themselves locked in a vicious circle. While supporting the MSG to resist the closure of the fishery, they strengthened and legitimised the exploitative system of the cooperatives. In other words, they had been instrumental in giving social content to the economic interests of the firms and while doing that further alienated the workers:

... with our support we gave oxygen to those who have jeopardised the workers in the last decade. They were able to achieve this because the government is their ally but now they are transferring any social responsibility to the state. The end result is that we are not seeing any serious proposal to revert the precarisation of work or to compensate workers. The only way forward is for the state to restore its association with the workers through the trade unions (ibid.).

Regarding the framing of the conflict along the lines of foreign vs. national capital, the position of both leaders was rather pragmatic:

We don't care about the origin of capital; we care for the fishing and processing system. National fisheries should not only be seen in the light of their commercial function because otherwise we are subsidising with our resources unemployment in other countries. A freezer vessel processes fish onboard, without paying real estate taxes or service charges and generating considerably less employment than a land-based factory (Fieldwork interview with J.C.F., 28/08/2000).

The problem is that there is only enough food for two and four people are sitting at the table, thus the four are starving. We have to address the restructuring of the sector and this requires compensation for the workers and the preservation of the resource. The real problem is the lack of a clear legal framework. We need the enforcement of the law and the quota system, those who are working without licence will have to leave the system. We want to work with the serious companies... it does not matter if they are foreigners, if they are Argentinean even better but in my experience this doesn't matter so much (Fieldwork interview with C.D., 30/08/2000).

In contrast, the workers congregated under UOP did not take part in the negotiations and actions of the MSG. They were critical of the measures adopted by this group and saw the participation of the main trade unions as a means to give a social face to corporate interests:

We don't agree with the measures adopted by the trade unions because they are in defence of the employers, as usual. We didn't agree with the *Barcazo* or with the fisheries emergency, but we were ignored. We are 6,000 workers without place in the Multisectorial... [the trade unions were] used by the MSG to expel the freezer fleet so that the *fresqueros* can have the resource for themselves... What about the situation of those workers that depend of the freezer fleet? What will happen to them? We don't want to be involved in this battle, this is only a fight for who controls the fishery. The *congeladores* use their economic power and the *fresqueros* use the workers to win this battle... Subsidies are required as a temporary measure, but our real fight is for returning to the work conditions established under the 1975 collective bargaining agreement (Interview with L.V., leader of UOP, *Puerto* No. 10, 05/2000: 14).

In June 2000, the UOP led the peaceful occupation of one of the municipal buildings, demanding a response to their desperate situation (*La Capital*, 07/06/2000). Subsequently they took over the headquarters of the Chamber of Argentine Shipowners and Processors in Mar del Plata, where two workers declared themselves on hunger strike, while in a public assembly both fishermen and onshore workers discussed a general strike, by which the sector was to be paralysed even after the temporary lifting of the fishery's closure (*La Capital*, 21/06/2000). Meanwhile the head of SAGPyA declared that even under strict restrictions and controls, the recovery of the fishery would require at least five years, a timeframe to “rethink the future of the sector” (*La Capital*, 22/06/2000: 6).²⁵⁴

After two months of complete inactivity and paralysed negotiations, about 300 workers took to the streets of the harbour in a violent demonstration in which several factories and cars were vandalised (Photo 7.4). One day later, workers under the dissident UOP occupied the headquarters of SOIP, questioning the trade union leadership and demanding immediate elections to change their representatives (*La Capital*, 30/06/2000). The local press called on the authorities and entrepreneurs not to underestimate the magnitude of social unrest manifest through these events. The national authorities however declined any responsibility, claiming that this was a ‘local conflict’ between workers, trade unions and entrepreneurs (*ibid.*, page 7).

Photo 7.3 Violence worsened the worrying situation of the fisheries sector



Source: *La Capital*, 29/06/2000: 3. Photo by O. Luque

In July 2000, a new national trade union organisation²⁵⁵ affiliated to the Argentine Confederation of Workers (CTA)²⁵⁶, was created to represent the interests of all workers within the fisheries sector, “with autonomy from the entrepreneurs, the state and political parties”

²⁵⁴ In parallel, budget cuts also affected the technical and scientific personnel of INIDEP, prompting strikes and disrupting the monitoring of the hake and other fisheries (*La Capital*, 22/06/2000).

²⁵⁵ Sindicato de Trabajadores del Pescado y Afines de la República Argentina (SIPES).

²⁵⁶ Central de los Trabajadores de la Argentina.

(*La Capital*, 16/07/2000: 6).²⁵⁷ At that time workers in the onshore plants were by far the most numerous group within the local fisheries sector, congregating an estimated 8,500 women and men; out of which, almost half worked in cooperatives on a casual-pay basis; 3,000 were still presumed to be employed under waged contracts and about 1,500 as casual workers.²⁵⁸ Due to the almost total paralysis of the sector, about 80 percent of onshore plants had been inactive for over three months (*La Capital*, 30/07/2000). Acknowledging the desperate situation affecting a sizeable portion of workers in the informal sector nationwide, towards the end of July 2000, the National Central Bank (BCN) authorised all banks (private and public) to grant personal and mortgage loans to applicants without sufficient formal wages or without guarantors.²⁵⁹ Meanwhile, at the local level, the UOP leaders denounced that the food bonus granted a few months earlier by the provincial and national authorities to support those worst affected by the crisis was not reaching the intended beneficiaries but being diverted by SOIP to maintain clientelistic relations with registered workers or simply for their own illicit gain (*La Capital*, 18/09/2000).

Towards 2002, under a new monetary regime characterized by the devaluation of the peso, the fisheries sector experienced another growth cycle linked to increasing exports and the maintenance of a favourable exchange rate. In this context, workers struggles took a rather institutionalised shape and were mostly characterised by negotiations and strikes by those still in salaried employment and channelled through SOIP. This phase of the conflict was also characterized by active efforts by SOIP to regain its original constituency by 'regularising' the cooperative workers. Although such attempts were fruitless and negotiations rejected by the patrons, wittingly or unwittingly, this had the effect of diffusing (at least temporarily) direct actions by those disenfranchised under the cooperative system. As explained by one of them:

Comrades were getting tired of the pickets and questioning who was going to feed their families... and then SOIP approached us as a repentant organization; full of apologies for abandoning us when we were forced into the cooperatives. They were also full of promises: they were going to improve our working conditions and guarantee a minimum contract with the patrons... many saw this as the only way forward and we reduced the tone of our demands and for a while we listened and negotiated... but nothing really changed (Fieldwork interview with M.D., 15/08/2000).

²⁵⁷ A few days later, the headquarters of SOIP were the scene of another violent episode in which a worker was injured by a bullet. The incident took place as the leaders of SOIP and UOP discussed the implementation of a provincial subsidy to be distributed among those workers in most need.

²⁵⁸ Dock workers numbered about 580, out of which about 200 were jobless. Sailors numbered about 380 workers and fishermen about 3,500 people, out of which 400 were unemployed.

²⁵⁹ BCN Communication No. 38,039. Until that point, the BCN forbade loans to those with low and irregular monthly incomes, who were therefore forced to borrow from informal moneylenders known to charge monthly interest rates of over 100 percent.

Following recurrent cycles of protest and negotiation in the following years, in 2005, the fisheries sector experienced another long period of complete paralysis, driven by intermittent closed seasons, the scarcity of hake and frequent labour strikes.²⁶⁰ The conflict between labour and capitalists was widely extended from the onshore plants to the sea. In 2005 local fishermen went on a 45-day strike, demanding the enforcement of a number of agreements signed in 1998 and 2000, 'dollarising' wages.²⁶¹ The fisheries administration then reported that with the coastal and local ice-trawler fleets paralysed, hake landings were expected to decrease by over 50,000 tones in that year. The ramifications of the strike were expected to seriously affect the onshore processing plants and to trigger higher prices in the domestic commercialisation of fish. According to the Argentine Chamber of the Fishing Industry (CAIPA),²⁶² during the strike, Mar del Plata lost about USD 1 million per day in terms of the sector's exports (*La Nación*, 14/09/2005). At the time, the local fisheries sector was estimated to account for about 40 percent of Mar del Plata's GDP, employing about 20,000 workers directly and another 60,000 indirectly.

In November 2005, a new grassroots collective emerged in Mar del Plata. Self-denominated as 'The Scream of the Fishery'²⁶³ it attracted local neighbourhood associations, slum and homeless federations, students and artists together with informal workers operating in the pseudo cooperatives. On 5 November 2005, The Scream of the Fishery congregated in the main public square in the local harbour for an alternative celebration of the Americas Summit.²⁶⁴ This event was marked by the presence of the internationally known artist Manu Chao, who sang in defence of the resource and the informal workers of the local fishing industry. The collective triggered several creative public events and a number of films that were widely disseminated throughout grassroots networks in Latin America²⁶⁵ (Photo 7.4).

²⁶⁰ By October, one of the main national newspapers reported that the national fisheries sector had lost in the course of 2005 over USD 100 million due to numerous labour conflicts without eminent resolution either in Mar del Plata or the Patagonian region (*La Nación*, 12/10/2005) [online] [<http://www.lanacion.com.ar/746677-por-los-conflictos-laborales-la-pesca-perdio-us-100-millones>][Last accessed: 23/06/2011].

²⁶¹ In 2002, Law 25.561 established that all labour contracts were to be in Argentine pesos, and this meant in effect a growing gap between salaries and the increasing cost of living.

²⁶² Cámara de la Industria Pesquera Argentina.

²⁶³ El Grito del Caladero.

²⁶⁴ The official IV Americas Summit was held in Mar del Plata on 4-5 November 2005 and was attended by all the premiers of the continent with the exemption of Cuba. The summit's central theme was 'The generation of work to confront poverty and strengthen democratic governance'. However, the deliberations focused on the creation of a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), an initiative promoted by Mexico and the USA.

²⁶⁵ Including: *El Grito del Caladero* (2005), *No te hagas el Pescado* (2006) ('Don't act like a fish', meaning 'don't be indifferent') and *Sin Horario* (2007) ('Without timetable').

Rather than protest or negotiation, the main objective of this collective was to produce new narratives from the grassroots, exploring their historical roots and social, cultural and natural consequences, while creating alternative means of communication and reflection outside the mainstream media. The narratives were created through horizontal associations, establishing connections over time across different workers' groups facing similar struggles all over the country and the region.

Photo 7.4 Films produced by the collective 'The Scream of the Fishery'



Source: All videos viewable online at: [<http://elgritodelcaladero.wordpress.com/about/>]

The Scream of the Fishery gave visibility to the daily struggles of workers in the local fishing industry operating under precarious conditions. Across its various products, its message was consistent: it denounced the exploitation to which workers and nature had been equally subjected and rejected the sectorial claims and alignments polarising the conflict between *fresqueros* and *congeladores*, or foreign and national capitalists. Through simple and ingenious visual means the neoliberal restructuring process was deconstructed through the daily experiences of workers from the sea to the onshore plants, from the streets to the household. Although one of the above films was produced to support the meeting of a delegation of workers from the pseudo cooperatives with the minister of work in 2007, in general terms the collective was non-instrumental in its action. As explained by one of its members:

Of course we wanted to see changes, changes to the way in which we work, changes in the area where we live and belong to, changes in the way in which the wealth of the sea is exploited. However, what got us together was different. It was not about creating some visuals or propaganda for our cause, but rather to trigger an internal and collective reflection and wider vision. We kept on asking, why did this happen and

what made it possible? Many could see this as pointless but I experienced the power of talking and listening to women and men who, like me, were voiceless, confused and frustrated. Working with the children of the comrades in the cooperatives was particularly eye-opening. I realised through them that this was not just about fighting for a change in contractual conditions but that their (and our) sense of pride for living in the harbour and being members of its community needed to be restored (Skype interview with R.R., female worker in the pseudo cooperatives and member of The Scream of the Fishery, 12/11/2007).

The above statement resonates the essence of the interviews I conducted with another five members of this collective, all women and men in their late 20s, most of whom had been associated with UOP from its inception and eager to seek alternative means of social mobilisation. By their own non-instrumental position, The Scream of the Fishery did not achieve mainstream status in the negotiations, neither did it contribute any observable breakthroughs to the improvement of the material conditions in which workers from the pseudo cooperatives operated. However, this was not an isolated movement in the Argentina of the post-neoliberal era. Across the country, similar collectives emerged, suggesting the incipient birth of a new identity not exclusively rooted on belonging to the working class but rather to 'the disenfranchised', a discussion to which I return in the next chapter.

Towards the end of 2006, the media reported 'another record year for the fisheries sector', with national hake exports surpassing USD 311 million and Mar del Plata's exports accounting for almost USD 89 million (*La Capital*, 27/12/2006). However, a few months later, the leadership of SOIP announced that the scarcity of raw materials was affecting the operation of many local plants and hitting worst "those who don't have enough to eat, because they work in fake cooperatives" (*La Capital*, 26/04/2007: 12). From that point onwards, the shortage of hake brought a new wave of workers' protests. Towards mid-July about 700 workers operating in eight pseudo cooperatives blocked the harbour, impeding the flow of traffic into or out of the area, demanding the regularization of their contracts and a minimum monthly wage of 314 USD. The strike was soon endorsed by most cooperatives and lasted for 18 days.²⁶⁶

Once more, the limited availability of hake had resulted in a drastic reduction of the number of hours effectively worked and therefore earnings received by those in the cooperatives. In August 2007, the Argentine Confederation of Workers (CTA)²⁶⁷ released a press communication, supporting the local strike and demanding "the end of the fraudulent

²⁶⁶ As a result of the strike, 2,700 tonnes of fish were wasted in trucks and warehouses with financial losses surpassing 6.4 USD million (*La Nación*, 28/07/2007).

²⁶⁷ The Central de los Trabajadores de la Argentina is a labour union established in 1991 as a result of a split among a group of unions originally congregated under the CGT. The split resulted from a disagreement over the neoliberal direction taken by Menem's government.

contractual practices applied through the pseudo-cooperatives".²⁶⁸ CTA's demands were twofold: to enforce the collective agreement sanctioned in 1975 (161/75) and to protect the constitutional right to trade-union freedom.

As the conflict progressed, SOIP raised its voice not just in defence of those workers under salaried contractual conditions but also of those working in the pseudo cooperatives, estimated at the time to number about 4,500 women and men. The picket was lifted after the establishment of a 100-day truce to reach an agreement. However, this time passed without any proposals put forward by the subcontracting companies. Consequently, workers resumed their protests and on 11 September they occupied the headquarters of SOIP. This event was a response to the divisions between the demands put forward by the most radical sectors of the cooperative workers movement – supported by the CTA and underlined by a significant presence of left-wing activists – and the solutions sought by the leadership of SOIP to the resolution of the conflict. The former fought for the full restoration of the 161/75 collective agreement protecting salaried contracts that had been abolished soon after the 1976 *coup d'état*. SOIP instead negotiated with the entrepreneurs to establish a new collective agreement that recognised the cooperatives as SMEs.

Although the leadership of SOIP was by then in the hands of those workers who had initially championed the claims of the cooperative labourers through UOP, a deep sense of mistrust had undermined the capacity of the trade union to lead any genuine negotiation on behalf of the workers. This led to an internal division among those who favoured the intervention of institutionalised workers' channels and those who feared their co-option and fought to keep their claims outside any institutionalised vehicle of negotiation with the patrons. On 28 September 2007, the conflict reached a new peak, when a fish worker was shot in a confusing incident, while several factories were attacked, cars burnt down and shops stoned by about 200 protesters calling for a general strike in the harbour (*La Capital*, 28/09/2007).

Far from affecting just Mar del Plata, conflict in the sector extended to other national harbours. Days before the strike in Mar del Plata, a group of workers in Patagonia had burned down the onshore facilities of six firms in Puerto Deseado; three of them owned by Spanish ship-owners. The conflict soon expanded from the onshore plants to the sea. The owner of one of the firms reported the situation to the Spanish press as follows:

²⁶⁸ [<http://argentina-socialista.blogspot.com/2007/08/conflicto-pesquero-en-mar-del-plata.html>] [Last accessed: 03/01/2011].

The vandalism of the last few days is dwindling. However, the onshore trade unions continue to exert pressure, threatening to paralyse our activities in the sea. Labour demands could extend to the docks and the fleet's crew... We are disappointed with the Argentine authorities because they did not support us until Spanish diplomats put pressure on them. We feel defenceless but we are not going to take drastic decisions. We are the engine of prosperity of this forgotten region. (Interview with E.V., Leader of Vierasa, *La Voz de Galicia*, 23/07/07: page unknown)²⁶⁹

Through the rest of 2007, a large number of conflictive episodes led by the cooperative workers took place on the streets of Mar del Plata. The actions ranged from pickets obstructing access to the local harbour to the occupation of public buildings such as the local headquarters of the Ministry of Work and the municipal council. These events were underpinned by the continuity of the economic structure and production model of the fisheries sector forged during the neoliberal restructuring process. In parallel, the city continued to be immersed in a crisis affecting large segments of the popular sectors.²⁷⁰

Comparing the 2007 cycle of protests with the one that took place in previous years (particularly in 2000) two key differences can be highlighted. First, the actions undertaken in 2007 were not endorsed by other workers and trade unions in the fisheries sector. Second, entrepreneurs under the '*fresqueros*' sector had become a solid economic front in their demands and negotiations with the state. Unlike before, the entrepreneurial demands in 2007 acquired a more corporate structure, and were conducted without recourse to any form of alliance with the onshore workers. In this context, the demands of the most vulnerable and pauperised sectors became increasingly isolated. Even if more widely supported by other social groups, including other groups of the unemployed, slums dwellers and university students congregated under The Scream of the Fishery, the 2007 protests were judged by other institutional actors as threatening the precarious stability of the sector.

Nieto et al. (2010) rightly argue that it would be erroneous however to read the difference between the 2000 and 2007 cycles of protest as a simple confrontation between workers and the 'trade union bureaucracy'. Underlying these disputes were growing contentions over the leadership of workers' mobilisation within and outside institutionalised means. Thus, while in 2000 workers demands were clearly unsupported by the leadership of SOIP, this situation changed in 2002 when the UOP list of candidates won the trade-union elections and replaced the previous leadership. However, even the new leadership – which explicitly addressed the

²⁶⁹ Reproduced by *NuestroMar* blog [<http://nuestromar.org/>] [Last accessed: 03/01/2011].

²⁷⁰ According to INDEC, in December 2007 almost 11 percent of the local EAP was unemployed and the city was ranked nationwide as the urban centre with the third highest rate of unemployment (Nieto et al., 2010: 188). These statistics reveal the difficulty experienced by the workers of the cooperatives to find alternative jobs when the scarcity of hake paralysed the onshore manufacturing plants.

situation of workers in the cooperatives – was perceived by many as being too closed to the corporate institutional structure of the sector to deliver any radical changes.

7.4 Epilogue: Post-neoliberal realism?

Local versus national government, national versus foreign capital, formal versus informal workers and land-based factories versus factory ships, were some of the many contentions that emerged throughout the multiple conflicts referred to by the media as the 'Fisheries War'. This 'war' articulated three main and deeply imbricated storylines. The first and most obvious one focused on the collapse of the hake fishery and how to avert it, encapsulating conflicts over the preservation of the resource and capitalists' access to and control over the hake fishery. The second storyline was built around the attempts deployed to protect and sustain the accumulation process resulting from the NEM, encompassing conflicts among different capital interest groups. The third storyline was articulated around the precarisation of labour and the disenfranchising of workers from their collective institutions and engendered by conflicts over the distribution of benefits and risks. Underlying all, there was a conflict over the governance and regulation of the sector, featuring the state at the centre of disputes.

Similar conflicts continued to affect the national fisheries sector in the subsequent years. In November 2008, the head of the SSP presented his resignation alleging that the crisis of the hake fishery and of the sector as a whole 'did not have any possible resolution' (*La Nación*, 17/09/2008). According to INIDEP, the reproductive biomass of hake had experienced a 85 percent reduction in the previous 20 years and was close to irreversible collapse (*La Nación*, 08/11/2008). Nevertheless, the value of total national fisheries exports reached USD 1,200 million in 2007 and continued to increase in 2008 (*ibid.*). In 2008, the Bureau of Foreign Trade Statistics estimated that most of the companies active in the Argentine Sea earned between USD 20 and 40 million annually, with some exceeding USD 50 million; more than half of these firms were owned by foreign capital (*Clarín*, 10/09/2008). Despite the risk of collapse, hake continued to be the main sea product exported. By then, the Federal Fisheries Law approved in 1997 was not yet fully implemented. The main obstacles were still described as the lack of an effective monitoring and enforcement system to control catches onboard and the task of 'purifying' all fishing licenses as a prerequisite to reorganisation of the sector.

In the five maritime harbours of Chubut, annual fish and crustacean landings decreased from over 200,000 tonnes in 2003 to less than 74,000 tonnes in 2009.²⁷¹ The number of workers operating in the onshore processing plants of these five harbours shrank from 1,200 in 2008 to 620 in 2010.²⁷² This dramatic decrease responded to the closing down or withdrawal of a large number of firms operating in the area and a reduction in the volume processed by those surviving. While landings fell, catches in the south of the Argentine Sea remained constant or increased, as many firms reduced their onshore operations while keeping their factory fleet active. In June 2010, in a dispute with several firms in Patagonia, maritime workers unionised under SOMU brought fisheries exports to a halt for over a month by blocking freight containers waiting to be shipped to several destinations in the harbour of Buenos Aires. The leaders of CEPA and other entrepreneurial chambers claimed that for Mar del Plata alone, the blockage implied losses equivalent to USD 30 million and beyond this, the risk of losing market niches.²⁷³ At the time, total annual fisheries exports from Mar del Plata amounted to over USD 350 million. According to the president of the entrepreneurial board representing all cold storage exporters – CAFREXPORT²⁷⁴ – about 4,000 families in Mar del Plata were at risk of losing their livelihoods and 40 firms were on the verge of bankruptcy as a result of the strike, repeating a pattern that had become familiar to all in the last two decades.

Environmental NGOs such as the Wild Life Foundation Argentina (FSVA)²⁷⁵ insisted on demanding a reduction of the fleet operating in the Argentine Sea, the control of discards and the enforcement of selective fishing gear as crucial and basic measures to avert the crisis. Instead, a random emergency closed seasons continued to be implemented year after year, sustaining in between by a business as usual scenario, albeit with less ‘businesses’.²⁷⁶

²⁷¹ [<http://www.estadistica.chubut.gov.ar>] [Last accessed: 03/01/2011].

²⁷² *La Tecla Patagónica* (01/09/2010) “Deepening crisis in the fisheries sector” No 5. [online] [http://www.lateclapatagonia.com.ar/2/nota_1.php?noticia_id=1281] [Last accessed: 11/06/2011].

²⁷³ *ProfesionalCom* (04/06/2010) “Companies in the fisheries sector have already lost 30 USD millions due to another trade union conflict” [<http://www.iprofesional.com/notas/99521-Empresas-pesqueras-ya-perdieron-us30-millones-por-otro-conflicto-gremial.html>] [Last accessed: 04/01/2011].

²⁷⁴ Cámara de Frigoríficos Exportadores de la Argentina.

²⁷⁵ Fundación Vida Silvestre Argentina. See FVSA video: Hunger for Tomorrow [http://www.vidasilvestre.org.ar/que_hacemos/nuestra_solucion/cambiar_forma_vivimos/conducta_responsable/pesca/_cual_es_el_problema/_crisis_merluza/] [Last accessed: 04/05/2011].

²⁷⁶ Many marine populations are currently being exploited beyond acceptable biological limits, while catches are primarily exerting pressure on juvenile specimens. The situation is particularly serious for demersal species such as hake and Patagonian toothfish (drop in biomass and fishing of the juvenile), which has led to these fisheries almost disappearing. The chaotic management of the shrimp fishery paralysed over 100 vessels for much of 2005. INIDEP scientists report that if current trends continue, many of these populations will decrease their biomass values and their exploitation will cease to be economically viable, with consequent environmental problems and loss of jobs, while the owners of ships and factories will have gained immense profits.

As discussed above, since 1999 Argentine hake had been managed under the ‘Necessity and Urgency’ Decree No. 189/1999. Only ten years later, this decree was replaced by an ITQ Catch Management Regime (Resolution CFP No. 24/2009), which in addition to ITQs, introduced catch authorisations (CAs) for those species that had not yet been allocated a quota, literally expanding the commodification of the sea to all commercial species.²⁷⁷ The ITQ system relies on INIDEP’s reports, which in theory are the basis on which a TAC for each species is defined by the CFP. However, in the last decade, INIDEP has often been unable to complete its annual research schedule because of insufficient budget or strikes.²⁷⁸ Regardless of the problems faced by the monitoring and evaluation system, TACs continued to be set by the fisheries administration at higher levels than those recommended by scientific advisors. In fact, 12 years after the “emergency” framework arising from EP Decree 189/99, the hake fishery is still primarily regulated under this framework. For both the southern and the northern stock of hake, annual individual quotas are distributed in quarters to avoid the fishing of the entire TAC early in the year, and to avoid social pressures for higher quotas.

At the time of writing (July 2011) the situation has not changed, with numerous strikes and financial losses affecting most of national harbours. The post-neoliberal government of Cristina Kirchner has continued favouring exports, with increased reimbursements granted to the sector since 2008.²⁷⁹ During the first trimester of 2011, fisheries exports continued surpassing those of beef, with nine out of every ten kilos of landed fish and seafood being exported (*Clarín*, 13/06/2011). Although little statistical information is available beyond national landings and export volumes and values, the structure of the fisheries sector appears to still be dominated by a few economic groups, with over half of national exports controlled by a few companies of mixed capital in the Patagonian region.²⁸⁰ The hake fishery is still affected by alternated closed seasons but remains the main commercial species. In Mar del Plata, SMEs continue to decrease in number and the integrated firms under CEPA dominate the sector. Their dual location in the city and the Patagonian region allows them to sail through closed

²⁷⁷ [<http://www.cfp.gov.ar/index.php?inc=publicaciones&lang=es>] [Last accessed: 07/06/2011].

²⁷⁸ The assessment for the southern stock of Argentine hake is currently carried out using virtual population analysis (VPA) combined with extended survivors analysis (XSA). The model is calibrated with abundance indices estimated during global surveys and with indices estimated during juvenile surveys carried out in the breeding zone. Standardized CPUE for the ice-trawler fleet is also used for calibration. Natural mortality is considered the same for every age and constant throughout the period.

²⁷⁹ In 2008, the government issued Resolution 137, restoring export reimbursements to levels that in some case cancel out the revenue that could potentially be collected by the state. The measure was described by the head of SSI as unavoidable in order to confront the ‘economic crisis of the sector’.

²⁸⁰ In April 2010, the GoA reported that INDEC was to conduct the ‘first national fisheries census’ covering all fishing fleets and onshore factories across the country [<http://www.argentina.ar/>] [Last accessed: 28/07/2011]. However, at the time of writing, there is no public record of this census.

seasons by operating in more than one fishery; a bad season for hake is compensated for by a good season in the squid or shrimp fisheries.

As for the local workers of Mar del Plata, the sector continues to be dominated by two clearly differentiated groups: those who are employed under the framework of collective agreements (the 'stables') and those working under the cooperative system as self-employed, nowadays usually referred to as the 'precarious' or 'unstable'. Workers sustain the same forms of protest and direct action that emerged throughout the previous years, alternating strikes with rioting and pickets. A further development is that some of the biggest local companies have regularised a small number of workers as a means to contain the conflict. However, they still operate with subcontracted pseudo cooperatives, to lower production costs and to remain in competition with those firms operating with onboard processing in the south of the country. The local fisheries sector continues working well below its operational capacity, either because of prolonged workers' strikes or due to the scarcity of the main commercial species. Even in a context of national economic recovery, the word 'crisis' appears in almost all national and local media reports related to the fisheries sector, revealing the endurance of an endemic crisis in which the sector is still fully immersed one decade after the post-neoliberal turn.

In the light of the previous analysis, it is pertinent to ask: How and why did the conditions of scarcity and vulnerability produced by the neoliberal *dispositif* survive and even be reproduced under a new political regime that expressly sought to reverse the legacy of the previous regime? This final chapter examines a number of responses to this question, articulated throughout the previous chapters. The discussion is structured around the main preoccupations that informed the development of this thesis, as presented in the Introduction.

Differential sustainability and sustained accumulation

As argued in Chapter 2 a *dispositif* can be understood as a machinery but also as a moving matrix that captures the political, economic, socio-cultural and environmental possibilities of capitalist accumulation across the macro, meso and micro levels. This matrix is produced through spatial and discursive means that re-produce inter-subjective meanings at multiple scales: securing institutional stability, structuring socio-economic and environmental agency, and “selecting and retaining new ‘economic imaginaries’ for state intervention” (Jones, 2008: 378), among others. Throughout the narratives and counter-narratives converging in the conflict emerging in the aftermath of the neoliberal restructuring process, it is possible to identify a number of distinctive storylines displaying key elements and tensions within the neoliberal *dispositif*.

The first storyline weaves an account of the crisis of the resource as a consequence of the conflict between *fresqueros* and *congeladores* or, in other words, between national and foreign capital. As capitalist accumulation in the fisheries sector became increasingly transnational and hierarchically organised, both distinctions became in fact progressively more irrelevant. While in the first stages of the conflict, this collusion was exploited by the self-proclaimed ‘national’ fisheries sector to obtain a number of emergency quotas and to delay the distribution of ITQs, the spectrum of the socio-economic agents active in the sector kept on shrinking in the subsequent years, expelling in particular SMEs. Thus, the socio-economic structure established throughout the NEM enjoyed a self-defensive capacity that eventually almost emptied the system of those firms who were not connected to foreign capital or firmly anchored in the export market. Beyond its social consequences, this process did little in terms of reducing over-fishing but instead allowed the concentration of fishing rights in a handful of firms responsible for the overcapitalisation of the Argentine Sea. In this context, the collapse of the hake fishery continued to be periodically averted through

intermittent closed seasons, paradoxically aided by intermittent strikes. Some of the surviving socio-economic agents were resilient to the recurrent crises of the hake fishery thanks to their dual fleet and geographical locations, which allowed them to alternate between hake and other species when and where required, and thanks also to their role in re-producing the precarisation of labour.

The second storyline seeks to stabilise the crisis by 'rationalising' the exploitation of nature through the privatisation of usufruct rights. This is clearly manifested throughout the contested attempts to allocate ITQs. Since their legal introduction in the late 1990s, ITQs were systematically advocated by the largest capitalist agents in the sector as a means to bring a 'rational' solution to 'irrational' fishing. Without exception, advocates adopted an EM discourse, unwittingly adhering to Hardin's *Tragedy of the Commons* prescription. The problem then became framed as the absence of clear property and/or usufruct rights to incentivise sustainable fishing. Such incentives were expected to deliver a modern fisheries sector, capable of competing with other firms in international markets. However ITQs were also highly resisted. One of the most conflictive aspects concerned the transferability of the quotas, feared by many as a means to facilitate a monopoly of fishing rights by a handful of large enterprises. The legal framework explicitly banned the transference of fishing quotas to the freezer-factory fleet, a clause contested by the ship-owners of this fleet and the provincial governments of the Patagonia region, where the majority of this fleet operates. A second issue of contention was that the enforcement of the quota system relied on the monitoring capacity of the national state, perceived by most as weak, inefficient and corrupt. This raised concerns over the likelihood of the ITQs becoming an effective means to curbe fishing efforts and restore critical levels of reproductive biomass to sustain capitalist accumulation. Thus, though the full implementation of the system was regarded for over a decade as too politically sensitive, throughout the NEM and post-NEM periods the state continued to support increasing export revenue by actively encouraging the further capitalisation of the sea through export reimbursements, the chartering regime and the allocation of quotas for additional commercial species.

The economic structure inherited by the post-neoliberal regime had become too reliant on exports and foreign investments to introduce a real U-turn. Before winning the presidential elections in October 2007, Cristina Kirschner promised the country 'economic accumulation with social inclusion'. Despite the re-distributional tone of her discourse, when pushed in a public media conference to define her agenda to tackle social exclusion, she asserted that: "the social crisis cannot be addressed through social policies but rather through economic

ones” (*Clarín*, 24/06/2008: 8). Throughout the first decade of the 21st century, once more Argentina became projected as the ‘breadbasket of the world’ under a macro-economic equation characterised by a positive trade balance, stable debt level and low country risk. In this context, the post-neoliberal regime has been reluctant to alter the reprimarisation of the economy enforced throughout the NEM, and the fisheries sector is just one component of this. Meanwhile, bio-economic fisheries theory has become fully deployed as a means to maximise fisheries revenue, concerned with the potential to expand economic gains rather than the preservation of nature.

The third storyline articulates the narratives and counter-narratives of workers and trade unionists, through which the social dimension of the crisis was either flagged as a means to legitimise the need to preserve the status quo or to challenge and denounce the imbricated social and environmental costs imposed to support the capitalist accumulation project consolidated through the NEM. As workers found it more and more difficult to voice their claims through institutionalised channels, violent mechanisms increasingly became perceived as the most effective – or indeed only – way to be heard. This was reinforced by the unwillingness of entrepreneurs to accept labour demands as originating from ‘workers’ rather than ‘subcontracted service providers’. This distinction was also pervasive in the framing of the conflicts endorsed by the trade unions and the government. The latter repeatedly treated workers in most cooperatives as informal or even ‘illegal’ labourers, resorting to punitive measures to ‘fight the black labour market’. By sustaining workers’ invisibility, the government managed to engage sporadically and vaguely with the ‘social dimension of the crisis’ but without assuming responsibility for reversing or even attenuating the impact of such crisis. The distribution of food to those most in need is a clear example of this ambiguous approach to social containment. Those most in need were to be assisted through the institutionalised arms of workers’ collectives – i.e. trade unions – while the conditions that positioned them as structurally vulnerable continued to be ignored.

In summary, throughout the NEM and post-NEM periods, the crisis of the resource became solidly framed within a limits-to-growth narrative, reinforced by subsequent attempts to manage scarcity with more clearly defined property rights. In this context, vulnerability became framed as a consequence of scarcity and uncertainty; a social construction that sustained the protection of the neoliberal accumulation regime, subordinating workers’ claims to the limits of what was possible and practical within this regime. Beyond obvious continuities and discontinuities, the neoliberal restructuring *dispositif* continued operating after the post-neoliberal shift. Although this does not mean that the *dispositif* managed to

stabilise the crises manifested through cyclical manifestations of scarcity and vulnerability, it succeeded in limiting the boundaries of possible and desirable socio-environmental change, focusing on coping rather than on structural measures. Thus, even when once more the fisheries sector produced substantial economic gains, these continued to be unevenly distributed and obtained at the expense of nature. Paradoxically, the acknowledgement of increased conditions of economic and bio-physical uncertainty in the first decade of the 21st century, further legitimised the impossibility of altering the economic structure of the sector, despite its recognised problematic social and ecological consequences.

The above discussion points to the effectiveness of the neoliberal *dispositif* in producing and re-producing conditions of scarcity, uncertainty and vulnerability even in the midst of a seeming shift to a post-neoliberal era. However, this conclusion should not be interpreted as charging the neoliberal *dispositif* with endless efficacy to sustain capitalist accumulation at the expense of nature and workers. A deeper examination suggests an open crisis of regulation, in which either social or ecological conditions continued to threaten the development of the activity. In other words, capitalist accumulation and the necessary socio-environmental relations to support it had become deeply inscribed within the production and reproduction of differential sustainability.

***Dispositif* continuities and discontinuities during and after the neoliberal turn**

Several authors argue that the crisis of convertibility and massive social upsurges experienced in Argentina at the beginning of the 21st century marked the transition to a new phase in the development of national capitalism, or more precisely the exhaustion of the neoliberal programme.²⁸¹ This phase can be characterised as ‘post-neoliberal’ in so far it is structured over the previous political process, configuring a new form of stabilised peripheral capitalism (Féiz, 2007). Thus, the term implies the recognition of structural continuities manifested in the pattern of national capitalist accumulation but also of a number of substantial discontinuities.

The continuities of the neoliberal project can be interpreted as its success in establishing and consolidating the class power of the dominant sectors. A first continuity is manifested in the enduring structural precarisation of labour as a key condition for the reproduction of capital. Throughout the 1990s, neoliberal restructuring consolidated a pattern of persistent and

²⁸¹ See among others, the work of Schuster et al (2006); Dumenill and Levy (2006) and Féiz and López (2010).

extended labour precarisation with features of super-exploitation.²⁸² In the case of the fisheries sector, conflictivity reached a peak precisely over the issue of reversing the precarisation uncovered in the cooperatives of services. However, this proved to be an irreducible hard core of the neoliberal *dispositif*. Even in the face of sustained financial losses due to strikes, generalised social unrest and violent demonstrations, the reversion to a salaried contractual regime remains non-negotiable. Milder forms of reduced precarisation, such as those proposed by the trade unionists, have not been successful either. Industrialists insist that higher labour costs would make the sector economically unviable. In other words, capitalist accumulation has become so deeply dependent of labour precarisation that it is regarded by almost all sectors as irreversible.

A second feature of structural continuity refers to the transnationalisation of the production system mostly geared towards the extractive-rentier agro-mining complex; thus, highly dependent on the enduring reprimarisation of the economy. In the 1990s, foreign capital deeply penetrated the ownership structure of productive capital.²⁸³ However, the end of the neoliberal phase did not lead to a re-nationalisation of the social control of the means of production.²⁸⁴ Instead, the transnationalisation of capital was firmly linked to the plundering of natural resources. All together, the different branches of primary production represented 6.7 percent of the GDP in 1998 and 12.5 percent in 2008 (Féliz and López, 2010).

The third factor of continuity is the regressive distribution/appropriation of income. The persistence of labour precarisation meant that workers continued to receive a structurally reduced portion of the value produced through their labour.²⁸⁵ In parallel, a small segment of the national population continued accounting for high levels of sumptuary consumption. In 1993, non-workers accounted for 52.7 percent of total consumption and in 2007 for almost 50 percent (Féliz and López, 2010). In short, continuity is also manifest in the reproduction of a structure of income distribution and appropriation based on wage compression and a highly uneven pattern of consumption.

²⁸² In 2008 about 60 percent of workers were experiencing such features (Rameri et al., 2008) and towards the beginning of 2010, 40 percent of jobs were remunerated below the minimum wage (Féliz and López, 2010).

²⁸³ In 1992 the largest 500 economic conglomerates owned 32 percent of productive capital and by 1998, almost 49 percent (Féliz and López, 2010).

²⁸⁴ In 2007, 66 percent of the largest corporations were controlled by transnational capital (ibid.)

²⁸⁵ In the private sector of the economy, workers received 28.1 percent of GDP in 2007, while in 1993 they appropriated 32.3 percent (ibid.).

The above features are complemented by an increasingly extroverted pattern of capitalist accumulation. While in the early 1990s exports made a low contribution to GDP (6.9 percent in 1993) by 1998 they represented 10.4 percent and by 2008 almost 25 percent (Félic and López, 2010). Thus, although the end of convertibility implied an important change, the post-neoliberal economic structure was still characterised by the consolidation of a dependent pattern in the production of value (Barrera and López, 2010). In this sense, the current accumulation cycle is still permeated by the regressive de-industrialisation initiated in the mid-1970s. Although the manufacturing sector maintains a stable contribution to national GDP,²⁸⁶ those firms that survived the restructuring and are currently more profitable and competitive are closely associated with the production of commodities (Aspiazu and Schorr, 2010). Among the largest-scale capital, those operating in the primary sector concentrate the greatest share of external surplus and profit.²⁸⁷

In summary, at the macro level, the neoliberal *dispositif* was articulated through three enduring pillars that continued to shape the future of the fisheries sector and of Argentina in the post-neoliberal era through: (1) the consolidation of a peripheral position in the global economy based upon the plundering of nature and the hegemonic role of large transnational capital; (2) the erosion of the Great Compromise that regulated the relationship between capitalists, workers and the state, prior to the neoliberal turn; and (3) the regression of the previous process of urban-based upward social mobility. These three elements manifest the continuity and consolidation of the dependency cycle established through the neoliberal restructuring process.

However, throughout the neoliberal regime the emergence of a new social hegemony was rivalled by new social forces that actively contested the neoliberal paradigm. The constitution of a second Trade Union Confederation (CTA), the blooming of new forms of social mobilisation, the cycle of occupied factories²⁸⁸ and the development of a myriad of grassroots movements born out of the mobilisation of the disenfranchised and unemployed, all conformed to a new and multiple social subject. Ciesa (2006) argues that the multiplicity of

²⁸⁶ At 18.2 percent in 1993, 17.8 percent in 1998 and 19.5 percent in 2008.

²⁸⁷ In 1998, when the national economy experienced a deficit of almost USD 5,000 million, such firms recorded a total surplus of USD 7,244 million; the non-primary largest firms recorded a surplus of USD 4,700. In 2003, the surplus achieved by each group of firms was USD 13,680 and USD 1,256 million respectively. In terms of profits, in 1998 those branches of the national economy dedicated to the production of primary commodities accounted for 32.3 percent of the total profits appropriated by the largest firms while in 2004 they absorbed over 77 percent of the profits (Félic and López, 2010).

²⁸⁸ During the 1999-2001 economic crisis, many business owners and foreign investors drew their capital out of the Argentine economy and sent it overseas. As a result, many SMEs closed due to lack of capital, thereby exacerbating unemployment. In this context, many workers took over several factories and decided to reopen businesses on their own, as self-managed cooperatives.

this social subject as a potential trigger of social transformations is in line with a fragmented society, where workers represent a heterogeneous and constantly changing whole that can only be partially linked with the reality of those who have a job in the formal sector. This new subject, embodied in the '*pueblo trabajador*' (working people), has demanded in the last decade a new resolution to the contradiction between capitalist accumulation and legitimation needs.

Another key element in the neoliberal *dispositif* concerns the transformation of the state. The neoliberal turn limited the action of the state by diminishing its capacity to intervene to achieve social inclusion and to control the directives of the development process. These two capacities that had characterised the Argentine state prior to the neoliberal restructuring process were significantly limited throughout the 1990s. However, peripheral states still have a degree of room for manoeuvre by virtue of their very nature, which condenses all relational forces between social classes and class fractions (Poulantzas, 1979). Thus, while the capitalist state is restricted by the need to reproduce in its own geographical space the capitalist relations that support it and give it content, it also expresses – through its concrete political interventions – the social struggles between classes and fractions of classes in each specific historical moment. In other words, the post-neoliberal state responds on the one hand to the conditions imposed by the structure of capital but, on the other hand, is the result of social conflict in so far as such conflict materialises in the state institutions. At the same time, even if subordinated to structural conditions, state interventions respond to the political project of those who run the state apparatus and those who are able to hegemonise state actions. In short, it is through the combined historical transcendence of neoliberalism and the emergence of contesting dialectical forces that is possible to read the resilience and cracks of the neoliberal *dispositif*.

According to Jessop (2007), the condensation of social relations and forces expressed through the state can be analysed through the notion of 'structurally inscribed and strategic selectivity'. This notion refers to the way in which specific state institutions allow certain social forces to use the power of the state for their own material and ideological interests in conflict with other social forces. Through this notion, it is possible to understand why certain state institutions – primarily macro-economic policies – respond to the interests of powerful groups, while social and labour policies are more closely linked to the demands mobilised by the working class. The state's selectivity is also discursive and manifests "through extra-economic practices and the production of ideologies and the filtering of messages to secure hegemony" (Jones, 2008: 383). In the 1990s, the Argentine state materialised through its

concrete institutions the rise, consolidation and hegemony of a neoliberal model. What is new about the post-neoliberal state is that its strategic selectivity has changed.

In macro-economic terms, the main features of the post-neoliberal period are the maintenance of a 'competitive' exchange rate, fiscal surplus and subsidies and a policy of (de)indebtedness. The first feature is a direct outcome of the strategic positioning of large agro-extractive capital and within this of transnational capital. As explained before, the increased reliance of the national economy upon those capitalists sectors linked to extractivist-rentier activities places these sectors in a stronger position to negotiate the strategic selectivity of the state *vis-à-vis* other sectors of the economy and the working class. In this context, the state has reinforced their structural position through its devaluation policies, keeping a real exchange rate that favours exports and jeopardises working class income.²⁸⁹ At the same time, this has significantly improved the accumulation of fiscal surplus, giving the post-neoliberal state the opportunity to appropriate part of the income of the dominant sectors to subsidise other activities through the introduction of export duties and cross-subsidies, an innovation from the previous decade.

The restructuring of the external debt marks another important feature of the post-neoliberal scenario. Following the 1999-2002 recession the country defaulted on part of its external debt prompting foreign investment flight and capital inflows to a cease. In this context, the restructuring of the debt was largely needed to maintain some degree of stability in the inherited economic structure and to reinsert the country into the international financial market. In January 2006, taking advantage of a large and growing fiscal surplus due to rising commodity prices, President Néstor Kirchner liquidated the remaining debt to the IMF, in a single payment. The policy has been criticised for diverting large amounts of money that could have been used for productive purposes, and also for trading cheap IMF credit for new public debt at higher interest rates. However, it managed to restore the confidence of international investors while deepening the dependency of economic stability on the acquisition and accumulation of foreign currency reserves brought to the country through international trade.

In parallel, non-extractive capital currently confronts a structural limitation, as its competitiveness is not based on real productivity increases but rather sustained through the precarisation of labour and through state subsidies. As a result of social pressure, the former

²⁸⁹ The real structural exchange rate for these sectors was on average 46.4 percent higher in the 2002-2009 period than in the middle of the previous decade (1993-1998) (Féiz, 2007; Féiz and López, 2010).

strategy has been partly affected by the recovery of income levels at least in the private formal sector, which were in 2010, about 12 percent higher than in 2001 (Feliz and López, 2010). In a context of relatively low investment capacity, increases in the productivity of the manufacturing sector are low; as a consequence, labour costs per unit of production increased on average by 54.6 percent between 2003 and 2010 (Féliz, 2009). While the hegemonic blocks within the dominant sectors of the economy have been able to sustain a relatively high degree of structural competitiveness expressed through their commercial surplus, other sectors – in particular manufacturing – confront increasing difficulties to compete internationally as their commercial deficit continues to increase. The deterioration of the competitiveness of non-hegemonic segments of the economy within the dominant block has triggered a number of policies that highlight the selectivity of the state to guarantee the reproduction of capital as a whole. Thus, non-hegemonic economic sectors have managed to obtain a sustained increase in the transference of resources in the form of subsidies and public spending on economic services.²⁹⁰

However, a systemic contradiction confronts the state's decisions on how to prioritise public spending. On the one hand, the increasing capital flows required to keep the non-extractive sectors of the national economy afloat, lead the state to exert growing pressure on the appropriation of resources generated by the primary sector. Maintaining the structurally competitive position of the latter so as to subsidise the low global competitiveness of domestic capital in the secondary sector is therefore a difficult balancing act in which the state is caught, trying to sustain both political stability and the reproduction of capital.

The above trends partly explain why, in the fishing industry, the reversal of the cooperative system of precarious work to salaried work continues to be highly resisted by most firms. However, capitalists within the fisheries sector benefit from a favourable exchange rate and public subsidies through export reimbursements, the latter made possible through the new emphasis of the state on increasing the appropriation of rent through increased taxes on agricultural exports.²⁹¹ The position of firms in the sector is however still appraised as 'vulnerable' due to instability driven both by the crisis of the resource (scarcity) and the crisis of labour (precarisation). In other words, the fisheries sector is firmly inscribed in a short-term maximising strategy at the expense of nature and labour, with the blessing of the state.

²⁹⁰ Between 2003 and 2008 public spending on economic services increased from 1.4 to 4.0 percent of the GDP and from 9.3 to 21.6 percent of total national expenditure. In 2010, subsidies to large firms reached almost USD 1,872 million via exemption taxes (Féliz and López, 2010).

²⁹¹ Between 1998 and 2009 the GDP share of national and provincial tax revenue increased from 21.2 percent to 31.6 percent, a change linked to the increase of export duties in the primary sector.

The situation is however heterogeneous; transnational firms operating almost exclusively with onboard processing are barely affected by the labour crisis but maintain as much as possible the flexibility of subcontracted cooperatives when and where needed. Those firms who are more deeply rooted in onshore manufacturing depend on this strategy to remain competitive. Furthermore, in contrast with the 1990s, in the subsequent decade both blocks of capitalists became united in their demands to the state. As more and more SMEs were forced out of business, *congeladores* and integrated firms benefited from the complementarity of their claims. The former lobbying for favourable macro-economic policies to sustain exports, the latter for subsidies for the sector and the social control of the labour crisis, and both for the expansion of the quota system to additional species so as to be able to continue to fish when the hake fishery is closed to help recover its reproductive biomass.

Maximised access to the state and its resources by the pool of dominant firms consolidated by the NEM can be interpreted as a result of the successful discursive assemblage of various narratives. This assemblage is however strategically selective in the sense that it exploits and combines certain aspects of the 'crisis', while suppressing others. Thus, the crisis is framed in bio-physical terms as a means to reassert and sustain usufruct rights over the Argentine Sea fisheries stocks; it is framed in economic terms as a means to protect the competitiveness of the sector in a volatile global economy, and in social terms, as a means to attract cross-subsidies and other state measures aimed at protecting livelihoods (regardless of how precarious they might be). Furthermore, the framing of the crisis as a social question is also an effective means to keep the labour question under control.

In terms of its macro-economic policies, it is evident that the state has played a key role in guaranteeing and synthesising the reproduction of capital as a social relation. Nevertheless, the neoliberal and post-neoliberal eras are differentiated by a new assemblage of the hegemonic and non-hegemonic economic agents consolidated throughout the restructuring process but also by the ideological project of the current government, much closer to a developmentalist doctrine than to the neoliberal one. The latter means that the post-neoliberal state has become more open to channel through institutionalised means the collective demands of those disenfranchised by the previous regime.²⁹²

²⁹² To examine how this process extends to other sectors, see the work of Dinerstein et al. (2008).

The high level of social conflictivity experienced towards the end of the neoliberal cycle forced the state to implement massive social assistance programmes.²⁹³ However, the subsidies received remained constant, even in the face of growing inflation and some of the most extensive programmes were transformed into targeted assistance between 2005 and 2008. Subsequent grassroots mobilisations were successful in generating a number of state responses to those disenfranchised from the labour market, such as the introduction of a universal payment per child, reaching 3 million informal and unemployed workers. In parallel, labour policies for the waged labour force became more aligned with the reconstruction of some form of compromise between workers and capitalists, mediated by the state. In this context, trade unions regained their previous status as the 'transmission belt' between the state and at least part of the salaried mass, through the reopening of joint negotiations, the renegotiation of collective labour agreements and increments in the minimum wage, among other measures. It is in this area where state action regained a more active role in the stabilisation of a conflictive pattern of capital accumulation.

In summary, since 2003 state intervention in the fields of social and labour policies has become 'more receptive' to the claims and demands of the masses, partly due to the impossibility of sustaining capitalist accumulation without re-establishing its social and political legitimacy. Nevertheless, the post-neoliberal project is confronted with a number of limitations inherent to a peripheral and dependent process of capitalist accumulation based on the plundering of natural resources in the context of a transnationalised economy. The neoliberal legacy constrains the possibility for substantial socio-environmental change because it involves a solid correlation of social forces in favour of the dominant bourgeoisie block and its associated transnational component. It is on the basis of these structural conditions that a number of contradictions continue to be actively produced and re-produced between capitalists and nature, between capitalists and workers, between extractive and non-extractive production forces and between the state and the disenfranchised.

Nevertheless, the *pueblo trabajador* has managed to dispute (but not necessarily to displace) the strategic selectivity of the state, at least as far as labour and social policies are concerned. Within the dominant block, extractivist and non-extractivist economic segments have managed to achieve a sort of precarious equilibrium that protects primary commodity exports at any cost, as long as these remain a source of transferred subsidies to domestic capitalists via redistribution through fiscal policies. In short, in its post-neoliberal phase

²⁹³ For instance, the national plan Unemployed Female and Male Household Heads (Plan Jefas y Jefes de Hogar Desocupados) reached 3 million beneficiaries, while social programmes in the two previous decades reached only 10 percent of that number.

Argentina has managed to readapt itself to sustain the accumulation pattern introduced through the neoliberal restructuring process. However, the two contradictions deepened throughout the neoliberal phase remain firmly rooted, challenging the medium- to long-term continuity of sustained accumulation.

Justice to nature? The limits of bio-economic theory and ecological modernisation

Following the above discussion, a further issue to be discussed concerns the 'liberation' of nature from the neoliberal *dispositif*. Chapter 7 revealed that in the midst of the conflict workers' counter-narratives were equally focused on the vindication of their rights and the preservation of the natural-resource base. However, this should not be interpreted as driven by the objective of bringing justice to nature but rather through nature. Whether instrumental or not in their approach, the articulation of nature and workers' struggles has been eroded through the economisation and professionalisation of the management of and control over nature, thus making it more difficult to simultaneously challenge the first and second contradictions of capitalism.

Even within the instrumental view of nature that predated the NEM, nature's pulses could be closely felt by a relatively small community. Onboard and onshore firms and workers were able to experience, share and react to bio-physical changes without much assistance from a formal fisheries management system. However, as argued by one of the interviewees, throughout the 1990s the sector became 'a remote and transnationalised game'. The modernisation of the sector not only brought about a dramatic expansion of fishing capacity but was also successful in disarticulating the informal monitoring and conflict resolution networks and practices amassed throughout previous decades. As the activity became vertically integrated and controlled by a handful of firms, those networks and practices became increasingly alienated in their experience of nature. Instead, an economised nature permeated the material and discursive practices of all agents across the neoliberal and the post-neoliberal phases. By and large, this economised nature has been co-produced by science and science-informed fisheries management, both highly instrumental in sustaining the second contradiction of capitalism and therefore the erosion of the very basis on which the structure of the sector as a whole ultimately depends for its reproduction.

The experience of the Argentine's fisheries sector is not an isolated one. Thorpe et al. (2000) argue that the emergence of new fisheries conflicts in the 1990s related to the adoption of NEM policies was common to many Latin American countries. In the case of Mexico, for instance, conflicts over the Pacific-coast shrimp fisheries emerged in that decade with the

displacement of the cooperative sector through expanded fishing rights for the private sector. Until the mid-1970s, Mexican marine resources were underexploited and it was only after the adoption of the 1977-1982 National Fisheries Plan that Mexico became one of the main fishing countries in the region and the world. The fisheries sector was traditionally based on the cooperative sector, which enjoyed exclusive access to a number of inshore fisheries. Among them, the shrimp fishery was the most significant in terms of employment. In the 1990s a series of policies were introduced that significantly cut state support to the cooperative system, reduced the cooperatives' fishing rights and opened the fisheries to private investors through permits and concessions. These policies led to the rapid overcapitalisation of the fleet, the expansion of the private sector and the marginalisation of the cooperative sector, and consequently to a conflict in the inshore shrimp fisheries between the cooperatives and private firms, as competition over the resource increased.

In the late 1990s, the Mexican government attempted to introduce a co-management regime to gain the commitment of both parties to enforce closed seasons and other preservation measures. However, as in the case of Argentina, the reconciliation of interests between traditional and new stakeholders in the fisheries was unworkable. On the one hand, meeting the demands of the cooperatives – favouring the domestic local and regional domestic markets in which they now operate – would have a positive socio-economic effect in terms of safeguarding local and regional livelihoods, but would be at odds with the rationale implanted by the NEM. On the other hand, consolidating the rights of the private companies that now control the export-led shrimp sector would maintain export revenues, although at the expense of increased pressure on the natural resource and the further loss of livelihoods. In short, through a new system of rights allocation, the NEM policies prompted the consolidation of conflicting interests that threaten the social and natural sustainability of the shrimp fisheries. The resolution of the conflict has since become framed as dependent upon the re-allocation of rights, a costly solution – both socially and economically – which is unlikely to be implemented.²⁹⁴

The experience of Chilean fisheries evolution in the 1990s does not differ much from the Mexican case, even if the details are different. Since 1974 NEM policies promoted the expansion of the export-led fisheries business at a very fast rate. Following the privatisation of the northern fleet between 1974 and 1978, additional fishing capacity entered the arena and by 1980 Chile had become Latin American's leading fish exporter. In the early 1980s, the

²⁹⁴ For a detailed analysis of the Mexican shrimp fisheries see: Vásquez León, M. (1994) and Vasquez León and McGuire (1993).

expansion of the fleet led to over-fishing of the main commercial species whilst the promotion of new fisheries, supported by the IDB, spread the problem of over-fishing from the north to the south of the Chilean maritime jurisdiction. After repeated signs of alarm were raised by the scientific community about the critical condition of some of the main commercial species, the government decided to introduce a new regulatory framework.

The Fisheries Law was introduced in 1989 – almost a decade earlier than in other Latin America countries – but it was only approved in 1991 after heated resistance from the industry. The opposition of key stakeholders and consequent delay in the approval of a new legal framework were also characteristic of the experience of many other countries in the region, including Argentina. It is not surprising but rather paradoxical that the same regimes that promoted the expansion and overcapitalisation of the fisheries were the ones who struggled less than a decade later to introduce a tighter regulatory framework. Chile was the first country in the region to replace open access with an ITQ system aimed at controlling over-fishing and reducing conflicts among different stakeholders. Until 1993 over-fishing continued because of the failure of the government to monitor the fleet but also to enforce sanctions when illegal fishing was identified. After 1993, the improvement of enforcement through monitoring devices resulted in two unexpected outcomes. First, it encouraged part of the fleet to relocate to Uruguay and Argentina, where toothfish quotas were only introduced later. Second, it displaced marginal firms who sold their quotas, therefore facilitating the control of the fishery by a handful of firms.²⁹⁵

Underlying all these disputes is the assumption on the side of governments, international development organisations and economic agglomerates that the allocation of private property rights would be the most, if not only, appropriate response to control overcapitalisation, over-fishing and conflict. As nature becomes exclusively conceptualised as a commodity, social and environmental values are subordinated to economic efficiency. Thus, economic efficiency marks the line where social costs should be beard by workers and local communities, even determining when and how much the state should pay for the ‘economic cost’ of mitigating social and environmental impacts. It is also economic efficiency that defines how much fishing effort should be decreased or increased below or above nature’s regenerative capacity.

²⁹⁵ In 1997, the main purchaser Pesca Chile acquired almost 34 percent of the annual quota (Thorpe et al, 2000: 1698).

Not just in Latin America but across the global south, the tale of unsustainable fisheries travelled from country to country at a fast speed throughout the 1990s. Yet, in another example of ‘asymmetrical ignorance’, the expertise generated to manage the crises faced by the industrialised fisheries of the north was to come to the rescue of emerging troubled fisheries in the global south. However, several differences characterise the crises faced in both contexts. Whilst the former had shifted over time from being labour- and natural-resource intensive to become ‘capital intensive’, in Argentina and other countries in the global south the exponential growth of the fisheries sector harboured the overcapitalisation of industrial fleets from the north. The ‘modernisation’ of southern fisheries did not just happen as a ‘spontaneous reaction’ to international markets but through the disarticulation of ISI policies and the radical adoption of neoliberal policies, often imposed by international financial institutions such as the World Bank and IMF.

Throughout the neoliberal turn, the Argentine fisheries sector was deeply restructured following a similar pattern to that of other adjusted nations in the south. As scarcity and depletion become more intense in the context of the north, new policies were adopted to develop the ‘under-exploited’ fishing grounds of the south. In a context of economic crisis and instability characterised by significant financial and external constraints, expanding fisheries production and increasing seafood export revenues became two leading imperatives. It was only when these fisheries become overcapitalised that nature’s ‘limits to growth’ came to the fore. The advocated solution then was to regulate access to the fisheries through market mechanisms, assumed to bring a rational and sustainable exploitation regime to the system. However, this is typically followed by conflicts between local and transnational interests, conflicts among traditional and new agents for the distribution of rights.

By contrast, fisheries crises in the context of advanced capitalist economies were heavily assisted by the state through subsidies earmarked towards the building and maintenance of the sector’s infrastructure and fisheries research, development and monitoring.²⁹⁶ A significant part of these transfers also went into reconversion programmes, in which the state assumed responsibility for reducing fishing effort in jurisdictional waters, but also – as discussed in previous chapters – by facilitating the encroachment of the EEZs of peripheral countries in the global economy. The main reconversion mechanisms adopted include buying fishing licenses from private operators, subsidies to dismantle vessels and social compensation for displaced workers. By contrast, crises prompted by over-fishing and

²⁹⁶ For instance, within OECD countries, public subsidies represented 17 percent of the total catch value in 1996 (OECD, 2010).

depletion in the global south are confronted with scarce or null state financial resources. Typically, the adjustment of the fisheries sector in these countries is often worst felt by artisanal and coastal fisheries and has a highly localised impact on specific communities.

I highlighted previously that in Argentina, fisheries research and fisheries management became institutionalised at the beginning of the neoliberal turn. Over time, these modest institutions were respectively attributed the role of explaining nature – or bio-physical change – and deciding what to do with nature. Thus, wittingly or unwittingly, fisheries science and management became the reference framework of the possibilities for capitalist accumulation, or in other words, the ‘expertocracy’ (Gorz, 1993) that thinks nature through markets.

Numerous criticisms have been raised in recent years about the fact that fisheries management is stock-based rather than habitat-based. Furthermore, current methods have been criticised for their narrow emphasis on single-species rather than multi-species fisheries and for describing past events rather than accounting for the uncertainty in their predictions. However, bio-economic theory continues to dominate the field. Whether responding or not in time to negative (and positive) stock trends, fisheries management has become deeply functional to the commodification of nature, sustaining capitalist accumulation in the midst of scarcity. Even if apparently neutral in its objectives, the latest generation of fisheries economic instruments (i.e. ITQs) does so by articulating the foundations upon which differential sustainability becomes the only way to extend the economic life of the sea. Whether engendered from the centre or re-produced through multiple emerging peripheries, the management of scarcity (re)makes nature as the ultimate expression of the needs of capitalist accumulation. Control is however asserted at the expense of deepening the second contradiction of capitalism, by eroding the material basis on which the seemingly dematerialised accumulation of wealth ultimately depends.

The ‘scientific community’ plays a pivotal role in this process because of its ‘privileged’ position in dealing with a problematic characterised by a high level of complexity and uncertainty. In other words, without experts’ help it would be impossible for ordinary citizens to grasp the materiality of concepts such as ‘declining reproductive biomass’, ‘maximum sustainable yields’ and so on. In this context, the environmental problematic is ostensibly moulded by the contributions of an ‘epistemic community’ of experts bonded by “their shared belief or faith in the verity and the applicability of particular forms of knowledge or specific truths” (Haas, 1992: 3). To the extent that such truths explain ‘uncertainty’ and ‘scarcity’ as inherent conditions in the management of contemporary environmental affairs at a global scale, the regulation of

such conditions becomes more dependant on knowledge elites and the latter become more prominent in shaping the plausibility of basing socio-environmental regulation on the premises of EM. This is not to suggest that 'knowledge elites' have an overriding voice in controlling the negotiation of regulation but increasingly they do so in terms of producing meaning over nature, in establishing extractive thresholds, in modelling new moral imperatives and in framing the terms under which such negotiation takes place.

The tale of Argentina's fisheries restructuring, like the tales of many other countries subjected to similar processes all around the global south, reminds us of a fundamental flaw in the EM discourse. EM's pursuit of sustainable 'green' capitalist accumulation at the global level – either through the de-materialisation of production or the market propagation of environmentally benign practices and self-regulating mechanisms – is only able to deliver at best pockets of differential sustainability celebrated as 'global', insofar as one is ready to put the rest of the world to one side.

Workers' struggles through the conceived and the lived

The analysis of social conflictivity and of workers' struggles gained new prominence in Argentina from the early years of the 21st century, after a decade in which the bulk of studies on social mobilization were characterized by the 'disappearance' of workers. As argued by Nieto and Colombo (2009) a scrutiny of the agenda of social scientists' concern with social conflict in the country reveals that this 'disappearance' persisted even immediately after the widespread conflicts that shook the country in 2001 and was characterised by the re-emergence of workers' voices only from 2003 onwards. This impasse needs to be interrogated both in analytical and empirical terms.

The analysis in previous chapters suggests that although disrupted by the 1976-1983 military dictatorship, some forms of the workers' repertoire of labour mobilisation proved to be resilient throughout the economic and political crises faced by the fisheries sector and more widely by the country, through its democratisation since 1983. As discussed in Chapter 3, the bargaining capacity of working-class organisations in Argentina was historically built on the strength of iterated cycles of struggle. In the second half of the 20th century, "social conflicts were projected from the factory and specific regions of society to the political relations on Argentine society as a whole" (Sidicaro, 2002: 157).²⁹⁷ A key factor in this transformation was the emphasis in Perón's doctrine on giving the working class privilege access to the state

²⁹⁷ Original in Spanish. Author's translation.

through their trade union organisations, with the latter expected to act as “transmission belts between the state and the workers” (Farinetti, 2010: 110).²⁹⁸ From that point onwards, labour mobilisation was embodied through their institutionalised channels, and became deeply linked to political struggles throughout the following decades, both during democratic and non-democratic regimes.

However, with the dismantling of formal working conditions and the cooperativisation of the labour force in the 1990s, the trade union lost its ‘clients’ and bargaining power. Furthermore, workers not only experienced a deterioration of their working conditions but were also evicted from the political spaces through which they were historically able to activate and sustain their rights. Thus, as trade union membership decreased as a consequence of de-industrialisation and unemployment throughout the 1990s, workers’ privilege access channel to the state also deteriorated. Labour mobilisation therefore suffered an impasse until new forms of collective action were slowly reconfigured in the second half of the 21st century. Meanwhile social scientists focused their attention on seemingly new forms of mobilisation emerging in reaction to the neoliberal restructuring process, such as social protests and pickets (road and street demonstrations).²⁹⁹ In this context, organisations constituted by popular assemblies and unemployed workers’ movements throughout the whole country were unified by the following slogan: ‘Nothing of importance for the people is decided in voting booths’, pressing outside conventional channels for their social and political rights to be included.

For many, the outbreak of contentious mobilisation outside trade unionism indicated that urban-based labour mobilisation had been displaced by other forms of protest, different both in terms of their social claim-makers and their territorial expression. As argued by Auyero (2004) pickets soon became spaces of daily sociability and political articulation, seeking the media as the immediate space of recognition and visibility. In this context, some segments of the nationwide unemployed workers’ movements that emerged during this period played a key role in the gestation of the political legitimisation crisis of the neoliberal regime in Argentina, precipitating the exhaustion of Menem’s administration and the fall of De La Rúa.

The political construction of these movements was firmly routed in the realms of work and territorial organisation. The fight for social programmes and unemployment subsidies operated as the initial ‘glue’, attracting the masses directly or indirectly disenfranchised from

²⁹⁸ Original in Spanish. Author’s translation.

²⁹⁹ Between 1989 and 2003, almost half of protests were led by trade unions, but from 1999 onwards pickets soon outnumbered trade union demonstrations (Schuster et al., 2006).

the labour market. Picket movements typically used such demands to address the most immediate practical needs of their constituencies through soup kitchens, collective kitchen gardens, micro enterprises and the like. These practices linked to the subsistence sphere were however associated with other practices geared towards the constitution of new spaces for direct democratic action. Although highly heterogeneous in their ideology, the new social subjects strongly questioned the neoliberal programme and the deepening social inequalities it generated.

As discussed in Chapter 7, throughout the first decade of the 21st century, the local fisheries sector continued to be immersed in a high degree of conflictivity, with the media regularly reporting occupied factories, strikes and public demonstrations paralysing the industry. However, comparing these with the ‘Fisheries War’ of the late 1990s, the conflict had changed in a number of ways. The workers from the pseudo cooperatives were firmly placed at the front of demands and the epicentre of the conflict was now between workers and capitalists. Rather than an ‘invisible force’, their claims were officially represented by the sector’s trade union and recognised as legitimate by the state and public opinion. But paradoxically, workers’ claims were devalued as they became once again voiced through their institutional channels. The administrations of Nestor and Cristina Kirchner were committed to restoring the original alliance between the state, workers and capitalists engendered in the 1940s by Perón. Although this did not imply a full return to pre-neoliberal labour contractual conditions, the new official discourse opened at least the perception of a renewed political space for the trade unions.

Trade unions continued to be wittingly and unwittingly caught in the schism between ‘legitimate workers’ and ‘disenfranchised workers’. This schism produced and re-produced multiple divisions among workers and institutionalised and non-institutionalised leaders, prompted by the constant calculation of the impact that reversing the precarisation of labour conditions could have on a seemingly highly unstable economic sector. When looking at the contents of the workers’ claims – even in their more radical expressions – these are far from being subversive.³⁰⁰ By the end of the period analysed, organised local workers’ struggles had become almost entirely focused not on rejecting the exploitative model of the cooperatives but on ameliorating its negative impact through contracts guaranteeing a minimum number of hired hours. In other words, while radicalism emerged as the means of asserting claims, the contents of such claims became gradually inscribed within the limits of what was

³⁰⁰ For a wider discussion of the conceptual and methodological challenges of understanding labour struggles in Argentina, see Izaguirre (1994).

perceived as possible without challenging the structural architecture of the capitalist-labour relationship articulated by the neoliberal *dispositif*.

Not only in the fisheries sector but widely across all economic sectors, precarisation transverses the whole Argentine working class today. Although the struggles of the disenfranchised to regain the attention of the state are still incipient, their potential lies in the fact that such struggles directly tackle a highly sensitive aspect of the fragmenting neoliberal capitalist strategy. Furthermore, by bypassing institutionalised channels, the disenfranchised sustain a space for political resistance that, even if seemingly disorganised and spontaneous, threatens to destabilise the 'Great Compromise', whether in its reductionist neoliberal expression or in its less exclusionary post-neoliberal manifestation.

Throughout the analysis of workers' narratives and counter-narratives, I have made reference to a number of material and discursive practices through which workers confronted the double drama of vulnerability and scarcity. Such practices ranged from successful and unsuccessful efforts to take over workers' institutionalised channels, to hunger strikes, riots and the occupation of factories and vessels. Among these, I dedicated some space to examine the emergence and practices of *The Scream of the Fishery*. This collective constitutes the most insightful experience that I came across throughout my research.

As explained before, *The Scream of the Fishery* was less instrumental than other forms of workers' mobilisation, yet profoundly critical and creative, as it constitutes a public practice, committed to communicative action or rather communicative activism. This is because it recreates an opposition culture through means conceived to resist inevitable attempts of co-option, articulating not only new inter- but also intra-subjectivity meanings. These opened the space for female and male workers to reflect on the full extent of labour precarisation, not just in terms of socio-economic conditions but in their experience and construction of the 'lived'. It denounced and even satirised what Holmes (2002) calls the 'flexible personality', the ultimate expression in the internalisation of flexible accumulation. As discussed in Chapter 6, for women and men in the cooperative system being a precarious or unstable worker implies not just queuing long hours to get a table to fillet or no work at all, or living without any other timetable than that of uncertainty, but also internalising the flexibility required by firms as essential to operate into all spheres of life and sociability. However, the struggles of a reconstituting working class (outside class boundaries) are not taking place in a vacuum but rather creating new social and spatial tensions. It remains to be seen whether or not such tensions have the potential to subvert the super-exploitation of labour and of nature.

Revisiting the urban condition

In the introduction, I argued that my intention was to look at the 'urban' not just as the context where the neoliberal *dispositif* displays its full effectiveness and contradictions but as a 'condition' that might help us to understand both the resilience of the *dispositif* and the cracks that challenge its endless re-production.

In his seminal book *The Production of Space* (1991) Lefebvre argues that space should be seen as the site of ongoing interactions of social relations rather than the mere result of these interactions. Such interactions can be read through the lived, the perceived (pure materialism) and the conceived (pure idealism). Within Lefebvre's triad, the 'lived' can be interpreted as a space of experience, imagination and feeling, of people's sense-making. As argued by Zhang (2006: 221) "[i]n so far that our experiences always take place in pre-fabricated physical spaces, and that what we think may not coincide with what we do, the lived space embodies both conceived and perceived spaces without being reducible to either". In this sense, the *Scream of the Fishery* recreates the lived in a deeply emancipatory way, shifting the politicality of space beyond the limits of the materiality of an urban-based struggle (the perceived) and beyond appealing to the conceived ideal of integration in the urban fabric through integration in the salaried proletariat. This suggests a further dimension of the urban condition, not just as a space of discipline but also of insurgence, the latter understood as 'plurality in being' (in its dual expression in Spanish as '*ser*' and '*estar*'). Given the overpowering transmission effect of the neoliberal *dispositif* at multiple scales, it is in the interstices of the lived that corrosive alternatives are likely to mushroom through new inter-subjective meanings and relational practices.

A second way in which the urban condition has been reconstituted through the neoliberal restructuring process concerns the interplay between what Castells (1996) distinguishes as the 'space of flows' and the 'space of places'. The former refers to the spatial structures shaped by flows of information, resources, capital, symbols and so on; the latter, to the lived material spaces of human territoriality. Most studies on the impact of neoliberalism on 'the urban' seem to accord privileged importance to the space of flows through which neoliberalism structures new networks "composed of nodes and hubs hierarchically organised according to the importance of the functions they perform for the network" (Escobar, 2008: 270). Referring explicitly to the 'information society' and 'the city', the French urban theorist Paul Virilio (1993: 10) argues that "the archaic 'tyranny of distances' between people who have been geographically scattered" increasingly gives way to the "tyranny of real time. The city of the past slowly becomes a paradoxical agglomeration in which relations

of immediate proximity give way to interrelationships over distance". As argued by Bauman (2000), globalisation encapsulates a shift towards a liquid modernity where capital and social elites enjoy an increasing mobility but the urban poor don't. In short, for many scholars, the experience of time and space has become highly stratified as "[s]patial differentiation goes hand in hand with social differentiation" (Abrahamson, 2004: 171).

Acknowledging significant differences in their interpretation, for Castells and Bauman, the space of flows is organised to perform dominant functions in the internationalising global economy and commands the multiple space of places to perform fragmented subordinated functions. As put by Castells (1997: 477), this means: "[n]ot that people, locales, or activities disappear. But their structural meaning does, subsumed in the unseen logic of meta-network where value is produced, cultural codes are created, and power is decided". However, from this perspective, power resides almost exclusively in or with the space of flows. Bauman and Tester (2001: 89) go as far as to argue that in its liquid phase, contemporary society has entered an "era of disembedding without re-embedding". But, if this is the case, does this mean that liquidity is an irreversible condition?

Looking at Bauman's hypothesis, Lee (2011: 651) rightly argues that "ultimately, liquidity itself can be considered an impermanent process and therefore its limits can be identified" but if so, "[w]hat are these limits and can they account for the re-solidification of social ties?". In other words, Bauman's liquidity metaphor – just like Castells' theory of the network society – remits us to view the progression from solid to liquid modernity as an irreversible process that diminishes or even cancels the scope of agency in driving political and socio-environmental change. Taking this debate to the case study analysed in this thesis, does this mean that the urban condition has become irreversibly reframed by the neoliberal *dispositif*? Even if the increasing commodification of the sea appears to regulate the pulses of urban-based manufacturing, even if the urban working class has been turned into the non-included, even if local governments are seeking a strategic way out of the local crisis by entering less material forms of urban production, does this mean that the urban as the space of places has lost all meaning and agency?

To answer this question, a number of conclusions can be advanced that challenge this irreducible outcome. First, as previously discussed, the efficacy of the neoliberal *dispositif* in permeating and moulding the relationship between capitalists, workers, nature and the state has been remarkable. However, when unfolding within an urban scenario, the limits of the *dispositif* have also become evident. The urban 'solidities' materialised through previous

cycles of development of the fisheries sector as an urban-based activity have made explicit the impossibility of successfully reducing the space of places to the dictates of the space of flows. The centrality of the former has been made explicit through multiple irreducible, incommensurable physical and socio-cultural persistences, even if at times these have ended up as seemingly (and provisionally) subordinated to the neoliberal requirements of an internationalised process of capitalist accumulation. For instance, the harbour of Mar del Plata had been configured over more than a century as the place where social upward mobility and political integration through work was possible; as the place where the Italian humble origins of the local fisheries community are still celebrated year after year; as a place where onboard and onshore workers have formed ties of solidarity and a shared experience where the sea meets the city and the city meets the sea.

Even after going through cyclical reconfigurations, local fisheries workers kept on asserting their agency through the space of place. Unlike Castells' prediction, this did not happen outside the production of meaning but precisely through it. The occupation of factories, vessels, governmental buildings and trade union headquarters should not be reduced to simple acts of protest, driven by the instrumental logic of calling attention to the voices of the unheard. More profoundly, throughout the conflicts analysed, these practices kept on producing new meanings, subverting mainstream narratives and in doing so reclaiming the political space of their agency. Scarcity and vulnerability were not fought as independent realities that could be addressed by separate means (e.g. ITQs for the former and food boxes, social subsidies and alternative livelihoods for the latter). As put by one of the workers interviewed: "it is not just about bread for today and fish for tomorrow. Even less about letting the activity die while being relocated to other jobs. We *are* the fishing industry, not *part of* it. In being so, we have gained more than a livelihood, but dignity, self-esteem and aspirations, we are the soul of the harbour and of a Mar de Plata that works".³⁰¹ This worker thus refers to the dual identity of the city as also a popular tourist centre, the 'city of leisure'.

Don't be a fish – one of the films produced by *The Scream of the Fishery* – plays precisely with the duality of the 'city of leisure' and the 'city of work', by satirically placing animated fish filleting themselves on the beach, whilst other fish sunbathes. This takes us to a second conclusion concerning the role of the urban condition in reminding us of the contingency of the different cycles that seem to reshape the city once and for all. The urban is also the domain of physical infrastructures, objects and landscapes that cannot be simply reassembled in the image and for requirements of capitalist accumulation. Places tell us stories that

³⁰¹ Fieldwork interview with R.F., 25/07/2001. Emphasis added.

transcend the contingency of today's functions and refer to historical complex formations, to the juxtaposition of different projects and experiences of what the city is. For instance, walking through the streets of Mar del Plata, one can witness the vestiges of incomplete projects. A European villa from the 19th century isolated among high-rise buildings erected in the 1960s as the second homes of the proletariat and middle class in the downtown area, reminds us of Mar del Plata as the leisure centre of the national oligarchy and of the social upwards mobility of vast segments of the urban popular sector. Similarly, the harbour of the city replays its Italian origins through the main features of its popular architecture, overlaid with warehouses and bulky infrastructural additions to accommodate the growing cycles of the manufacturing sector during the ISI period. The smell of fish populates every inch of the experience of the harbour, fish offloaded on the dock, transported in trucks and crates throughout the area, fish filleted and stored in the ice-chilling factories and pseudo cooperatives, rotten fish being turned into meal or fresh fish putrefying in crates and trucks because of the latest strike.

The inertia of these urban techno-infrastructural layers but also the ephemeral sensorial experience of the city today also remind us of the way the urban as a second nature sets limits to remodelling flows of capital. Cities don't just adapt overnight to the whims of the market, but rather capitalists often have to adapt their practices to them. In the case of the fishing industry, flexible production might have changed contractual relations but local firms were bounded by the infrastructure of the working space. Thus, careful calculations about what to produce, how much and where are always forced to factor in not just the pulses of the availability of fish or market demands, but of being made while making the city.

Urban landscapes also have the power to activate agency, the will to change the future through the memory of what the city was in the past. At the turn of the 21st century, the harbour of Mar del Plata became a scene of decaying and closed factories but this landscape was not just a testimony to what the local fisheries sector had been but also to what it could be. As explained by another interviewee:

... the harbour says no to regeneration projects that call it to be something else: a tourist destination, a hub for transporting passengers and freight. It is not just the people who live and work here but also the buildings, the names of the streets, the smell; the vocation of this place to be a fisheries centre is inscribed all over the place (Fieldwork interview with M.C., male worker and member of UOP, 10/09/2000).

The above account should not be dismissed as a nostalgic remark. The neoliberal shift decreed all the necessary conditions to declare the local fisheries sector as defunct and yet Mar del Plata continued to be the national epicentre of the activity, even in the face of scarce

resources, longer trawling hours and frequent closed seasons, and despite the adoption of multiple measures leading to the relocation to the sector to the south of the country.

In summary, the urban condition constitutes much more than the material reality that can be moulded in the light of capitalist accumulation dictates, as capitalists firms and governments “cannot escape place in the structuring of the practices of everyday life” (Harvey, 1985: 305). The urban therefore constitutes the battlefield where the tensions between what Harvey calls ‘fixity’ and ‘motion’ materialise in open conflict and where new relational practices are not just the social product of such tensions. As argued by Stephen Read (2006: 341):

The fact that the world, and our cities, are becoming ever more mobile, may have forced some of this rethinking, but it is at least possible that the world has always been constituted this way. The neglect, even negation, of the city as a factor of social production may have to do with the neglect of the matter of the production of our sociality in situation.

In other words, the increased need for ‘motion’, mobility and global circulation of information, money, capital, services and commodities might have made more apparent the inherent clashes between the liquidity of capital and the solidity of the urban but there is nothing final in either; just as modern liquidity produces spatial and social relations, so does the urban, through a capacity to open or constrain change that is irreverent to totalising control projects, whether driven by market forces or by state-led planning.

The intersection of a structuralist and a PE approach has been fruitful to uncover the irreducible transformative capacity of both primary and secondary nature. Applying a retrospective look at this thesis, I acknowledge that keeping the focus on the urban – a neglected subject of analysis by both approaches – has been challenging. A diverted attention to other dimensions such as the transformative capacity of workers’ agency and of nature has probably meant that I have only managed to sketch the transformative capacity of the urban, at best opening further prospective hypotheses to be explored by future research.

Regulation theory and political ecology: A productive articulation?

From the onset of this thesis, I set out to articulate and apply an analytical framework that aimed to bridge what I regard as the most productive contributions of regulation theory and PE. I did so by roaming through the macro, meso and micro levels of analysis, seeking regularities and irregularities to identify both the features that make possible the implantation and normalisation of a new PE regime and those that in one way or another reject its disciplining power. Following the regulationist methodology, I explored the cycles of

capitalist accumulation of the fisheries sector *vis-à-vis* those of the country, adding through this process an increasingly complex set of relations. In doing so, I expanded the repertoire of the actual institutions and practices often acknowledged in the making of a mode of regulation (i.e. the wage relation, the monetary relation, the relationship among capitalists and the role played by the state in synthesising all these forces) by exploring the role of the social economy and of nature in the architecture of capitalist regulation. Furthermore, I articulated and developed the notion of '*dispositif*' to free the analysis from becoming over-focused on the structural and therefore missing the contingent. This decision was essential to theorise the local structures and processes that create and are created by everyday experiences and struggles.

A PE approach has been applied through the construction (and deconstruction) of chains of explanation. A focus on socio-environmental change has been fruitful to push the analysis beyond the consideration of social and environmental impacts and into the imbricated relationship between the social and nature in framing, mediating, facilitating and obstructing change. Thus, nature and workers have not been treated as the mere recipients of justice or injustice but explored in their agency. The analytical instruments of structuralist PE have been useful to identify the transmission belt between the macro and the meso levels. The conceptualisation of the latter as a 'business environment' or 'governability framework', through which the appropriation of nature is framed both by structural conditions and by the agency of firms and workers, has been valuable to apprehend the socially constructed and dialectical processes that regulate capitalist and survival strategies within and outside the bio-physical resilience of nature.

The adoption of a post-structuralist PE approach has been insightful in revealing at the micro level the emergence of new inter-subjectivities and frame alignments embedded in the experience of place, but with capacity to transcend the household, the factory, the streets, the local. Furthermore, this perspective has been valuable to free – at least analytically – subaltern subjects (female and male workers) and objects (nature) not only from purely economic explanations but more fundamentally from structuralist explanations that exclude any possibility for political contestation within a prevailing mode of socio-environmental regulation. As argued by Jessop (1990: 51), it is possible to “deny the existence of a simple micro-macro split and just argue that there are many different sites of regulation and that they can be articulated in various ways and at different levels”. Throughout the analysis I have aimed at avoiding this macro-micro split by unveiling the diversity and contingency of

multiple sites of regulation throughout the macro, meso and micro levels, avoiding placing too much emphasis on the explanatory capacity of one site at the expense of others.

I do not claim to have been always successful in the above endeavour. Reading this thesis for the last time – at least before exposing it to others – I am left with the feeling that at points, I have inevitably looked at certain sites of regulation and resistance as predetermined by structural forces. I hope anyhow I have provided a convincing argument for the need to engage with a more dialectic understanding of socio-environmental change that questions both what appears to be structural and contingent in transforming the world. Somehow, the process of producing this thesis resembled that of breaking a mirror and putting its pieces back together afterwards. In breaking the mirror, I have attempted to deconstruct the prevailing explanations that see the neoliberal restructuring process of the fisheries sector in Argentina through either an economic, ecological or social light. In putting it back together, I have consciously juxtaposed and contrasted a myriad of statistics, policies, practices and narratives seeking to construct not a totalising explanation but one that opens the way for further interrogations and explorations.

Will the neoliberal *dispositif* articulated in the 1990s overcome the open crisis of socio-environmental regulation in which capitalists, workers, the state and nature are currently immersed? My informed guess is probably not, though the efficacy of differential sustainability – which I would argue is the most enduring element of the neoliberal *dispositif* – should not be underestimated. Using a biological metaphor, differential sustainability could be seen as a virus, with the strength to reproduce itself, to penetrate all parts of the anatomy of society and to resist policy treatments. Will the emerging sites of resistance be able to eventually produce a shift to a more socially and environmentally just *dispositif*? My answer is hopefully yes. However, this is unlikely to be without further and deeper struggles. Furthermore, the post-neoliberal shift is likely to extend the life of the neoliberal *dispositif* by accommodating more explicit measures of social contention while preserving exploitative capitalist accumulation. This in turn is likely to delay the deepening of the crisis and contradictions on which this accumulation pattern relies.

While the above answers might be for many too open or incomplete, my aim has not been to put together a 'definitive' mirror that can explain what happened and why without explanatory ambivalences and uncertainties but rather to problematise both the *explanandum* (the phenomenon explained) and the *explanans* (the explaining framework). In discussing the impasse of critical-progressive theory to recharge development theory in the light of the

neoliberal shift, Buttel and McMichael (1991)³⁰² argue that the problem has been partly scholars' focus on the *explanans*, rather than on revisiting the conceptualisation of the Third World as an *explanandum*. In their view, the impasse could be overcome by modifying the *explanandum* (the 'Third World'), focusing on its diversity rather than its homogeneity. Schuurman (2004) has reacted to this proposition, contending that keeping a focus on the 'Third World' – or for the matter, on the 'developing world', 'peripheral economies' or 'global south' – assumes by definition that the phenomenon to be explained still has some common features. He goes on to argue that a redefinition of the *explanandum* requires a focus not just on 'diversity' but on 'inequality', the latter defined as inequality in power, in access to and control over resources, a list to which I add the even more fundamental right 'to be', in its double Spanish meaning (right to *ser* and *estar*). With modesty, I am confident that this thesis has shed new light on the empiricity of the case study analysed but I also hope it has offered some challenging thoughts on how to redefine the *explanandum* as an urgent subject of socio-environmental inequality and change and how to open some fruitful routes to oxygenate the *explanans* by articulating regulation theory and political ecology.

³⁰² Cited in Schuurman (2004). First published in 1993.

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Clarín (10/09/2008) 'Ganancias millonarias en el sector pesquero', page 21.

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La Capital (14/12/1997) 'Cooperativas y peuso-cooperativas', page 14.

La Capital (08/12/1998) 'Alientan la cuotificación pesquera', page 12.

La Capital (07/05/1999) 'Esperando la respuesta del CFI', page 15.

La Capital (08/05/1999) 'Pesca: No se renovará el acuerdo con la Unión Europea', pp. 1 and 11.

La Capital (12/05/1999) 'Menem postpone el cierre del caladero', pp. 1 and 13.

La Capital (13/05/1999) 'Lo que quede, será para los fresqueros', page 12.

La Capital (16/05/1999) 'Cauteloso respaldo al acuerdo', page 13.

La Capital (17/05/1999) 'Pesca: Una solución para todos', page 16.

La Capital (20/05/1999) 'Desde España por los derechos de los congeladores', page 15.

La Capital (26/05/1999) 'La pesca se moviliza hacia el Congreso', pages 1 and 13-17.

La Capital (27/05/1999) 'El Barcazo', pp. 1 and 11.

La Capital (27/05/1999) 'En negro y olvidados', page 13.

La Capital (28/05/1999) 'No se descarta hacer un paro', pp. 1 and 11-14.

La Capital (04/06/1999) '¿Qué Ley rige en el mar argentino?', pp. 16.

La Capital (17/06/1999) 'Unidos contra un enemigo común', page 11.

La Capital (17/06/1999) 'Congeladores en oposición', page 16.

La Capital (20 /06/1999) 'Armadores españoles reclaman', page 17.

La Capital (24/06/1999) 'Promulgó Menem la ley pesquera', pp. 1 and 12.

La Capital (27/06/1999) 'Tortuosa espera para una escasa caja de alimentos', page 20.

La Capital (14/07/1999) 'Triste récord para la ciudad', page 1.

La Capital (20/07/1999) 'Tomaron un barco por falta de pago', page 13.

La Capital (22/07/1999) 'Siguen ocupando el buque pesquero', page 15.

La Capital (24/07/1999) 'Preocupa la irregular pesca de la caballa', page 17.

La Capital (05/11/1999) 'El senador Osvaldo Sala exige urgente cuotificación', page 10.

La Capital (06/11/1999) 'Menem promete no cerrar el caladero', pp. 1 and 11-13.

La Capital (20/11/1999) 'Los armadores quieren un plan certero para el 2000', page 12.

La Capital (28/11/1999) 'Pesca: consenso de armadores, procesadores y gremialistas', page 11.

La Capital (03/12/1999) 'Recibe De la Rúa el proyecto pesquero', page 15.

La Capital (07/12/1999) 'CEPA ofrece su plan integral', page 14.

La Capital (18/12/1999) 'Berhongaray, con medidas para el campo y la pesca', page 10.

La Capital (03/01/2000) 'En pesca hemos recibido una herencia de corrupción', page 5.

La Capital (07/01/2000) 'Trabajadores de una pesquera denuncian ser estafados', page 6.

La Capital (10/01/2000) 'De 160 cooperativas existentes, solo cuarenta son legales', page 5.

La Capital (11/01/2000) 'Reclaman subsidios para trabajadores de 50 millones', page 10.

La Capital (12/01/2000) 'Con la campaña del Holmberg se definirá la política pesquera', page 6.

La Capital (31/01/2000) 'Rechazaron amparo de una pesquera contra OSSE', page 31.

La Capital (02/02/2000) 'En material de pesca, España pide trato sin discriminación', page 18.

La Capital (03/02/2000) 'Pescadores denuncian por "injusta" la medida de paralizar sus barcos', page 23.

La Capital (04/02/2000) 'Congeladores vuelven a pescar al norte del 48', page 11.

La Capital (12/02/2000) 'Elaboran documento común', page 10.

La Capital (22/02/2000) 'Olla popular frente a la comuna', page 6.

La Capital (03/02/2000) page 10.

La Capital (04/03/2000) 'Dos trabajadores de la pesca en huelga de hambre', page 23.

La Capital (05/03/2000) 'Denuncian las consecuencias del Acuerdo con la CEE', page 10.

La Capital (23/03/2000) 'En la milla 201 operan 900 buques pesqueros extranjeros', page 14.

La Capital (25/03/2000) 'INIDEP: hay que cerrar la pesquería hasta fin de año', page 10.

La Capital (29/04/2000) 'La pesca se hizo oír', page 19.

La Capital (05/05/2000) 'Vision de un especialista sobre el futuro de la pesca' page 12.

La Capital (07/06/2000) 'Trabajadores del pescado tomaron calidad de Vida', page 10.

La Capital (21/06/2000) 'Sigue ocupada la sede de Armadores y Procesadores', page 6.

La Capital (22/06/2000) 'En cinco años vamos a recuperar la merluza', page 6.

La Capital (29/06/2000) 'La violencia ahondó la preocupante situación pesquera', pp. 3-4.

La Capital (30/06/2000) 'Trabajadores del pescado tomaron la sede del SOIP', pp. 3-7.

La Capital (12/07/2000) 'No habrá mas acuerdos pesqueros con Europa', page 10.

La Capital (16/07/2000) 'Nuevo sector pesquero', page 6.

La Capital (30/07/2000) 'La pesca en crisis', page 21.

La Capital (11/08/2000) 'Investigan el otorgamiento de permisos de pesca', page 12.

La Capital (24/08/2000) 'Incierto futuro para la industria pesquera loca', page 11.

La Capital (02/09/2000) 'Podrá pescarse merluza común hasta fin de año', page 10.

La Capital (17/09/2000) 'Sombrío panorama', page 11.

La Capital (18/09/2000) 'Sería denuncia de la dirigencia del SOIP', page 14.

La Capital (10/10/2000) 'El puerto se transferirá en breve', page 16.

La Capital (14/10/2000) 'De la Rúa pidió colaboración a los industriales', page 14.

La Capital (24/11/2000) 'Cortes de calles y rutas paralizaron la ciudad', pp. 1 and 6-7.

La Capital (08/08/2001) 'Piquete contra el ajuste', pp. 1 and 11-13.

La Capital (27/12/2006) 'Otro año récord para la pesca', page 9.

La Capital (26/04/2007) 'SOIP denuncia el fraude de las cooperativas truchas', page 12.

La Capital (28/09/2007) 'Violencia en el Puerto', page 10.

La Nación (12/02/1998) 'Record exportador en la pesca', page 23.

La Nación (12/10/2005) 'La industria sigue paralizada. Por los conflictos laborales, la pesca perdió US\$ 100 millones', page 10.

La Nación (14/09/2005) 'Informe de la CAIPA' [page 28]

La Nación (28/07/2007) 'Perdidas millonarias por el conflicto pesquero', page 18.

La Nación (17/09/2008) 'Renuncia el Sub-secretario de Pesca de la Nación', page 23.

La Nación (08/11/2008) 'Informe del INIDEP: colapso de la merluza', page 17.

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Introduction

While methodological considerations have been explained throughout the thesis *vis-à-vis* the discussion of the research findings, this section outlines a number of further reflections and observations in relation to the methodological approach adopted in the development of this thesis.

The proposed analytical framework (the *explanans*) and the process under investigation (the *explanandum*) required the examination of a vast number of variables, including changes in the state of fisheries resources, fishing and processing technology, the economic performance of a wide spectrum of agents and the specific working and living conditions of female and male workers, among others. Therefore, the research underpinning this study drew on a combination of complementary methods and approaches, mostly of a qualitative nature, whose choice was based on the following considerations.

First, the deconstruction of the *explanandum* and first building blocks of the *explanans* required the simultaneous collection and analysis of longitudinal statistical data and archival information in order to reconstruct the longer process within which the neoliberal turn was inscribed. These two data sources also provided a wide appreciation of the singularities and commonalities of the case study under analysis, both in relation to the changes experienced by other economic sectors throughout the neoliberal turn and across different geographical contexts (i.e. Mar del Plata *vis-à-vis* the emerging harbours in the Patagonian region).

Second, while the above step was essential to map provisional chains of explanation at the macro level as well as to identify changes in the key pressures shaping the meso-level business environment of the fisheries sector before and after the neoliberal turn, their causality was also tested and theorised using specific practices and experiences at the micro level. This was done through the adoption of a case study approach, which allowed an in-depth immersion into a relatively contained microcosm.

Third, once the *explanandum* was re-examined in the light of multiple primary and secondary data sources and across the macro, meso and micro levels, a further methodological decision consisted of the adoption of *dispositif* analysis to assemble the neoliberal apparatus normalising capitalist accumulation. *Dispositif* analysis was supported by two complementary

research methodologies: (1) the content analysis of a large volume of grey literature, including relevant laws, decrees and regulations and of print news media during episodic peaks of conflictivity; and (2) the analysis of everyday practices (discursive and material) performed through in-depth interviews with workers and observations at work, home and public assemblies. These two combined approaches were highly useful to scrutinise the effectiveness of the institutionalised forms of socio-knowledge and power relations implanted by the neoliberal *dispositif vis-à-vis* the deployment of hegemonic and non-hegemonic practices by local firms and workers, through a detailed contextualised analysis.

As outlined in the Introduction, the research underpinning this study was developed over a decade, while primary data collection was spread over three fieldwork periods. The first fieldwork period comprised almost two months and took place between December 1999 and January 2000. It provided above all an opportunity: (1) to update the characterisation of the case study based on the collection of relevant grey documents; (2) to gather more detailed statistical sources than those examined in the desk study preceding the fieldwork; (3) to start systematic process of data gathering from newspaper archives; and (4) to identify and approach the key informants interviewed in the second phase of the fieldwork. The second phase took place for a six-month period between August 2000 and the end of January 2001 and comprised the bulk of primary data collection through two main mechanisms: semi-structured interviews with key informants across the whole range of key agents involved directly or indirectly in the fisheries sector, and a survey of all active establishments in the hake industry of Mar del Plata, details of which are provided later. The third phase of the fieldwork took place between mid-June and mid-August 2001 and was an opportunity to follow up with a series of informal discussions with previous interviewees and a few additional key informants – particularly workers.

The three fieldwork periods constituted phases of intense primary data collection and were combined with phases of desk data processing and analysis in between. This staggered approach allowed the gradual construction of the three building blocks (at macro, meso and micro level) explained in Chapter 2, and also the iteration of the research's methodological approaches outlined above. Thus, each building block was provisionally built and further developed in the light of the insights provided by subsequent steps in the research.

The research case study

The bulk of the primary research underpinning the development of this thesis focused on the hake or *merluccia* industry in the city of Mar del Plata, approached through a detailed contextual analysis. This decision was based on and supported by a number of considerations. First, as explained in the Introduction and Chapter 3, soon after the beginning of national commercial maritime fishing at the turn of the 19th century, Mar del Plata became the nationwide recognised centre of the fisheries sector. This role was consolidated during the ISI period, when the city became home to a variety of industrial manufacturing processes. Despite losing its hegemonic role throughout the neoliberal restructuring process, by the turn of the 21st century Mar del Plata still concentrated a sizeable proportion of the main socio-economic agents operating in the sector and the largest number of processing plants and onboard and onshore workers in the country. Second, within the fisheries sector, the hake fisheries and manufacturing industry was historically the focus of commercial maritime harvesting and processing. As such, the hake circuit was a key to understanding the deepest and most far-reaching changes experienced by the sector throughout the period analysed.

Although the research conducted during the fieldwork was mostly qualitative, the central role of the case study within the national fisheries sector meant that not only was feasible to contrast the fieldwork findings with robust national statistical series but also to study a sizeable portion of the sector, its trends and changes through a localised case study. This in turn contributed to testing the generalisability of the findings, by zooming in and out of the case study, while seeking connections across the micro, meso and macro levels.

The research methodology approach

The articulation of regulation theory and PE required the assembly of complex causality webs rather than linear cause-effect links. In methodological terms this implied the articulation of multiple methods, objectives and agents, including: (1) data gathering and multi-scale analysis of social and bio-physical changes and power relations through policies, practices and effects; (2) empirical observation and data gathering at the work place and household level; (3) content analysis of the narratives and counter-narratives reinforcing or resisting the disciplinary power of the neoliberal *dispositif*; and (4) the construction and deconstruction of chains of explanation combining structure and agency.

A *case study approach* was used to pursue a detailed examination of two key components in the primary research: (1) 42 semi-structured interviews with key informants, covering the whole spectrum of pressure groups actively engaged in the shaping of the PEST business environment; and (2) a survey of all active manufacturing establishments operating within the hake industry of Mar del Plata in 2000/2001. In addition, in the third fieldwork phase, ten additional in-depth interviews were conducted, four with some of the previous key informants and the rest with female and male workers. In some cases these in-depth interviews were conducted over more than one encounter and were complemented by observations at work, at home and at public meetings. All interviews were conducted in Spanish.

In the case of the key informants, I personally conducted all interviews using a semi-structured questionnaire (Appendix B)³⁰³ with a few variations depending of the organisational affiliation of the interviewee (e.g. trade unions, entrepreneurial associations, governmental and non-governmental bodies and informal organisations of workers). Most interviews were tape-recorded, subjected to the consent of the respondent, and then transcribed for their subsequent analysis.

As regards the survey, following a characterisation of the sector based on statistical series available, a list of local manufacturing establishments in the hake industry of Mar del Plata was built through the triangulation of the 1996 National Industrial Fisheries Census with other municipal records (i.e. a municipal industrial census and a record of all cooperatives registered with the municipal IAC). Following the United Nations SIC, three specific categories of establishments within the hake industry were selected for further analysis: (R1) cooperatives of services dedicated to the processing and filleting of fresh and chilled finfish and shellfish; (R1) establishments owned by SMEs dedicated to the same type of production processes; and (R3) establishments owned by larger firms dedicated to processing, filleting and freezing of finfish and shellfish. Of a total of 154 establishments identified through the listings of various official records, 50 percent were found to have closed down by the time of the fieldwork in 2000/2001. Out of the 77 active establishments, 24.7 percent refused to take part in the survey, a percentage not too dissimilar from the rejections recorded for the 1996 National Industrial Fisheries Census (21.2 percent). For a detailed disaggregation of the total number of establishments in each of the three categories analysed that were enlisted, closed, active and effectively interviewed by the 1996 Fisheries Census and 2000/2001 fieldwork survey see Table 6.1 in Chapter 6.

³⁰³ Appendix B presents the structure and content of the actual questionnaire and Appendix C gives a list of all key informants interviewed in the second and third phases of the fieldwork.

In total, 75.3 percent of all active establishments at the time of the fieldwork survey were interviewed using questionnaire 1, and almost 60 percent responded to questionnaire 2 (Appendix D).³⁰⁴ All respondents were male and in a senior position within the plants (e.g. owners and managers in R1 and R3 establishments, and workers who occupied leading managerial roles in the case of R1 cooperatives). Questionnaire 1 was structured to obtain a full characterisation of each plant within the fisheries circuit, including the type of organisation that ran the plant, its access to and control over raw material supply sources, type of processing activities and products (processing capacity and volume), number of manual and non-manual workers, their contractual arrangements, subcontracting links with other plants, and main commercialisation channels.

All establishments who agreed to a second interview responded to questionnaire 2. This questionnaire involved a deeper examination of a number of variables concerning the restructuring process, including: the identification of key events or milestones in this process at different scales; the evaluation of key policies adopted during the restructuring process; the identification of external PEST factors shaping the business environment; the strategies adopted by the plant in response to a changing business environment; the assessment of internal resources and degree of control by the plant; and the assessment of collective and institutional responses to the restructuring process.

The key variables specified in questionnaires 1 and 2 were identified and refined through a focus group conducted during the first fieldwork phase, with three members from each of the three types of establishments analysed. Questionnaire 1 also adopted most of the variables included in the 1996 National Industrial Fisheries Census in order to allow meaningful comparisons between both sources. Questionnaire 2 was further refined in the light of the analysis of grey literature and printed media after the completion of the first fieldwork phase.

The survey as such was conducted in the second fieldwork phase with the help of four female research assistants, recruited from the last year of a social work BA at the National University of Mar del Plata. During the first two weeks of the survey, I accompanied each of them to three interviews. This was followed by a workshop in which the five of us collectively reflected on the interactions with interviewees, sharing the most useful but also any problematic

³⁰⁴ Appendix D shows the content and structure of questionnaires 1a and 2a, applied to R1 and R3 establishments, and questionnaires 1b and 2b applied to the R1 cooperatives of services. Although the questionnaires are mostly similar, some sections were specifically adapted to the different conditions faced by each of these categories of establishments in the local hake industry.

experiences and discussing any necessary adjustments to the terminology used to introduce each question. From that point onwards, I continued supervising the arrangement of all interviews and monitoring their quality once completed, while also conducting a large number of interviews on my own. All results from the application of both questionnaires were transcribed, coded and then entered into a database designed for the purpose of the survey.

Discourse analysis was applied to examine regularities and irregularities both at the level of: (1) institutionalised discourses (e.g. flexible productivism, ecological modernisation, scientific rational management) that legitimised the implementation of certain values and knowledge at the expense of others; and (2) the everyday discursive practices producing specific narratives and counter-narratives around specific contentious issues. At an operational level, the identification of contentious claims about change, conflict and crisis by a dense web of claim-makers was approached through the application of *content analysis* throughout the most conflictive episodes in the so-called Fisheries War.

Content analysis was applied not only to scrutinise grey reports and relevant pieces of legislation but to the systematic analysis of news in the print media.³⁰⁵ This involved three key stages. During the first fieldwork phase, I examined the archive records of the main local newspaper in Mar del Plata (*La Capital*) between 1997 and 1999. This allowed an initial identification of the hegemonic and subaltern 'voices' (organisations and individuals) converging in discussing the past, present and future of the fisheries sector (locally and nationally). It also led me to scrutinise the archives of two national newspapers (*La Nación* and *El Clarín*) around key specific events and policy changes. This phase was essential to refine the list of key informants interviewed during the first and second fieldwork stages and to start building a web of apparent coalitions and collusions. A second news search was pursued during the second fieldwork stage, coinciding with a peak period of conflictivity. Further updates were made online in subsequent years, making use of the fact that from 2006 the archives of *La Capital* became available online, which enormously facilitated subsequent searches. The articles were first scanned through a number of key words and once selected, a hard copy was stored for further reference while a summary of key points was entered in a database created for that purpose (Appendix F). Unlike the most common applications of content analysis, my purpose was not quantitative but rather qualitative, in the sense that the emphasis was not just on scrutinising the most frequent claims and claim-makers but also

³⁰⁵ Appendix E includes a list of the archives and documentation centres consulted throughout the fieldwork research.

those who appeared to be rarely represented in the media (e.g. workers in the pseudo cooperatives and informal collectives).

Dispositif analyses added a third layer to the methodological approach described above, allowing the interrogation of the findings resulting from the application of the aforementioned methods. This approach allowed me to identify the formative networks that constitute the neoliberal *dispositif*, the synchronic regularities and irregularities and diachronic continuities and discontinuities mediating between normative orders of knowledge and socio-environmental power relations, as well as their impacts on social-exchange patterns, and on the formation of new modes of subjectivation and objectivation. While the details of how *dispositif* analysis was implemented were presented in the last section of Chapter 2, I should add that as an analytical device, this approach was nurtured by the *analysis of everyday practices*. These practices were understood as an imbricated set of discursive and material practices, the former involving historically and culturally specific sets of rules, the grammar that organises institutionalised forms of producing and organising knowledge – the latter involving non-verbal, material ways of doing and experiencing. The main sources for this part of the analysis were the in-depth interviews with a number of female and male workers and the observation of their routines at home, at work and at public meetings in which they participated. While the interviews were also tape-recorded – after of course seeking the consent of all interviewees – these were complemented by a fieldwork log in which I systematically recorded my observations and reflections.

Ethical considerations

The research involved the gathering of data around areas of high conflictivity. Therefore, throughout the thesis the key informants interviewed have been anonymised and their views referred to by offering a characterisation of their identity and relative position within the fisheries sector (e.g. gender, organisational affiliation and position, years of engagement with the sector, and so on). All interviewees (key informants and establishments reached through the wider survey) completed a consent form, agreeing to the public disclosure of their views for academic purposes.

Issues of bias and subjectivity

As highlighted in the Introduction to this thesis, as someone who was born in Argentina and lived and worked in the country until my early 30s, I enjoyed a great degree of familiarity with the context under analysis, national idiosyncrasies and the underlying meanings of what is said and not said. This familiarity extended more specifically to the geographical contexts were the

research focused, as I was born in a harbour town in the Patagonian region and lived most of my life in Mar del Plata city. Furthermore, throughout my life I have retained close professional links with both Patagonia and Mar del Plata, and in particular with the fisheries sector.

While familiarity with the context analysed can be perceived by some as a condition that could potentially deepen biases and subjective judgements, my view is that in any situation a researcher faces the challenge of keeping a self-reflective aptitude on how she or he approaches the research subjects, is perceived by them and makes sense of certain narratives while ignoring others. In short, I do not see familiarity as a hindrance to the research process but rather as a strength.

Furthermore, my own position as a researcher was coloured by a peculiar duality. On the one hand, I was perceived by research subjects as someone familiar with their context, history and expressions. On the other hand, they were also aware that I had been living and working abroad for almost a decade at the time of the fieldwork. This positioned me as someone who was both internal and external to the situation under analysis, freeing research subjects to share their views in the understanding that we were talking a common 'language', but also reassuring them that as someone somehow external to the ongoing conflicts and contentions, I could listen to their views without an instrumental agenda or predetermined judgement of their own positions.

As a woman researching an activity often perceived as a 'male-dominated setting', I often faced initial constraints in the process of gaining access to, establishing and maintaining rapport with respondents. This was partly counteracted by my proficiency in talking the 'technical' language of the fisheries sector (e.g. commercial species, fishing gear, manufacturing processes, fisheries management policies and so on). Choosing the setting of the first interview was essential for that purpose and involved ice-breaking sessions in which I would for instance walk through a manufacturing establishment with the owner or manager of the plant, engaging in a casual conversation as they toured me around the plant. Furthermore, the fact that most key informants were interviewed on more than one occasion, allowed me to overcome any negative attitudes based on first perceptions and to gain the respect, trust and willingness to cooperate of all interviewees.

As highlighted above, the four research assistants that supported me in carrying out the most extensive fieldwork component were also female, all with a solid track record in interviewing. Prior to and during a pilot of the survey we reflected together on the responses and attitudes

generated by the informants and also discussed how to address them. Similar approaches to the one described above – starting the interview with a walk around the plant – were in most cases successful. The fact that such a large proportion of the cooperatives and R1 and R3 establishments surveyed agreed to respond to a second in-depth questionnaire (46 out of 58) testifies to this. In all cases, the research assistants were instructed to avoid being opportunistic by merely snatching time and information from the interviewees, to instead seek to pre-arrange a suitable time and date to conduct the interview after an initial visit in which the purpose of the survey was explained and a brief written outline was handed out.

0. Information of the interview

- 0.0 Number:
- 0.1 Name of the interviewer:
- 0.2 Date:
- 0.3 Started at:
- 0.4 Finished at:
- 0.5 Observations:
- 0.6 Desk revision:

A. Information of the interviewee

- A.1 Name of the interviewee:
- A.2 Institutional affiliation:
- A.3 Address:
- A.4 Telephone / fax:
- A.5 Gender:
- A.6 Position and profession or trade:
- A.7 Since when are you linked to the fisheries sector and in what capacity?

B. Profile of the institution / organisation for whom the interviewee works or is affiliated to

[In the case of independent key informants skip this section]

[In the case of entrepreneurial associations and trade unions, ask for details of those affiliated]

C. Characterisation of the current situation of the fisheries sector

- C.1 How would you characterise the current situation of the national fisheries sector?
- C.2 Who is responsible in your view for this situation?

D. Characterisation of the neoliberal restructuring process

- D.1 When did the restructuring of the fisheries sector begin and how?
- D.2 Why was the sector restructured?
- D.2 What are in your view the key events that mark the restructuring of the sector at the international, national and local levels?

E. Policies and strategies

- E.1 What is your opinion about the shifting of manual workers to the cooperative system?
- E.2 Why was this mechanism adopted?
- E.3 Why did some firms start to operate with freezer and factory vessels?
- E.4 What do you think about the reimbursement regime adopted to favour fishing exports from the Patagonian harbours?
- E.4 What is your opinion about the Fisheries Agreement signed with the European Union?
- E.5 What are in your view the main causes leading to the depletion of hake and to the current crisis affecting the sector?

F. External factors shaping the business environment

- F.1 Considering the main external factors shaping the business environment in which the fisheries sector operates, specify what factors have changed since the restructuring process and how do they shape the business environment (positively or negatively). Explain why.
 - F.1.1 Political factors
 - F.1.2 Economic factors
 - F.1.3 Socio-cultural factors
 - F.1.4 Technological factors

G. Responses to the restructuring process and current situation

- G.1 Considering the restructuring process and current situation of the local fishing industry, how would you characterise the position and reaction of the entrepreneurial sector?
- G.2 How would you characterise the position and reaction of the trade unions?
- G.3 How would you characterise the position and reaction of the government
 - G.3.1 At the national level?
 - G.3.2 At the provincial level?
 - G.3.3 At the local level?
- G.4 Considering the following list, what mechanisms have been adopted by the establishment to ensure that the interests of the fishing industry are heard?
 - G.4.1 Protest and mobilisation
 - G.4.2 Lobby and pressure on the legislative power
 - G.4.3 Lobby and pressure on the executive power
 - G.4.4 Association and negotiation with other organisations of the fishing industry (Specify)
 - G.4.5 Development and dissemination of technical reports
 - G.4.6 Awareness rising through the media
 - G.4.7 Legal instruments (e.g. judicial appeals)
 - G.4.8 Other (specify)
 - G.4.9 None
- G.5 Which of the above mechanisms were in your opinion more effective? Why?

H. Solutions

- H.1 Considering the following list, establish in priority order the objectives that should lead the policies and actions adopted to confront the current situation faced by the fisheries sector
 - H.1.1 To ensure the ecological sustainability of the targeted species
 - H.1.2 To facilitate the technological and operative upgrading of the firms
 - H.1.3 To improve the access of local producers to the international market
 - H.1.4 To improve the access of local producers to the domestic market
 - H.1.5 To improve the social distribution of profits between entrepreneurs and workers
 - H.1.6 To improve the participation of the fishing industry establishments in the definition of policies.
 - H.1.7 Any other? (Specify)
- H.2 What measures should be adopted to achieve the objectives prioritised?
- H.3 Who should be responsible for their implementation?

Appendix C

List of key informants interviewed

Governmental and para-statal bodies

- G.P., local councillor Municipalidad de General Pueyrredón, Mar del Plata, 16/08/2000 (male)
- C.K., head of the Municipal Under-Secretariat for Environment Management, Municipalidad de General Pueyrredón, Mar del Plata, 17/08/2000 (male)
- A.R.G., national fisheries inspector, Dirección Nacional de Pesca – Mar del Plata District, Mar del Plata, 30/08/2000 (male)
- M.A.A, SENASA inspector, Mar del Plata, 01/09/2000 (male)
- O.T., district leader of Dirección Nacional de Pesca, linked to the fisheries sector since 1986, Mar del Plata, 06/09/2000 (male)
- D.J.S., head of the Secretariat of Production, Municipalidad de General Pueyrredón, Mar del Plata, 14/09/2000 (male)
- C.E.E., engineer and coordinator of the environmental management department of OSSE, Mar del Plata, 19/12/2000 (male)
- S.P., biochemist and water quality manager at OSSE, working for this organisation in various capacities since 1972, Mar del Plata, 19/12/2000 (female)

Research organisations

- M.L.S., economist and senior researcher at Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata, Mar del Plata, 11/08/2000 (female)
- M.I.B., senior researcher INIDEP and Fisheries Economy Group, Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata, Mar del Plata, 23/08/2000 (female)
- A.Z., chemical Engineer and research associate at CITEP (Centro de Investigacion Pesquera y Alimentaria Regional) since 1975, Mar del Plata, 28/08/2000
- R.P.S., doctor in biological sciences and director of INIDEP, Mar del Plata, 17/12/2000 (male)

Entrepreneurial associations

- A.R., senior manager of Consorcio Regional de Puertos, Mar del Plata, 02/08/2000 (male)
- R.A., president of Cámara Argentina de Armadores de Buques Pesqueros de Altura, Mar del Plata, 19/08/2000 (male)
- J.A.B., general secretary of the Asociación Argentina de Capitanes y Patrones de Pesca, Mar del Plata, 28/08/2000 (male)
- G.P., economist and senior member of the directive committee of UDIPA since 1995, formerly linked to the Fisheries Economy Group, Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata, Mar del Plata, 29/08/2000 (female)
- O.F., president of CEPA, active in the sector since 1968, former national director of SSI (1985-1987) and owner of one of the largest integrated firms in the city, Mar del Plata, 31/08/2000 (male)

Trade unions

- J.D.N., sailor since 1977 and leader of SOMU since 1989, Mar del Plata, 02/08/2000 (male)
- E.G., general secretary of SICONARA, active in the sector since 1965 and in the trade union since 1982, Mar del Plata, 16/08/2000 (male)
- J.M.L.S., sailor since 1967 and member of the directive committee of SOMU, Mar del Plata, 18/09/2000 (male)
- A.B. and C.S., leaders of SAON (Sindicato Argentino de Obreros Navales y Servicios de la Industria Naval), Mar del Plata since 1990, 19/08/2000 (male)
- D.O., sailor since 1977 and leader of the Centro de Patrones y Oficiales Fluviales de Pesca y Cabotaje Marítimo since 1990, Mar del Plata, 22/08/2000 (male)
- L.M.I., president of Sociedad de Patrones Pescadores, formerly researcher at INIDEP (1983-1987), Mar del Plata 25/08/2000 (male)
- J.J.B., manager of Asociación de Pesca Costera, Mar del Plata, 28/08/2000 (male)

- J.C. F., leader of SUPA, Mar del Plata, 28/08/2000 (male)
- C.D., member of the directive committee of SOIP since 1971 and fillet worker since 1970, Mar del Plata, 30/08/2000 (male)

Independent experts

- G.N., journalist and editor of Revista *Puerto*, Mar del Plata, 14/08/2000 (male) [Interviewed again on 22/06/2001]
- C.M., journalist at *La Capital*, covering the fisheries sector since 1998, Mar del Plata, 17/08/2000 (male)
- P.C., Lawyer and advisor of several trade unions within the local fisheries sector, Mar del Plata, 26/08/2000 (male)
- D.J.C., ship-owner of one of the oldest firms in the city, founded in 1949, Mar del Plata, 10/08/2000 (male)
- C.L., lawyer specialised in maritime and fisheries law, advisor to various firms and governmental bodies since 1975, Mar del Plata, 14/08/2000 (male) [Interviewed again on 12/07/2001]
- E.C., fisheries manager, manager of two large firms since 1978, Mar del Plata, 19/08/2000 (male)
- E.G., engineer specialised in fisheries management, founder of CEDEPESCA and advisor to SAGPyA, Mar del Plata, 25/08/2000 (male) [Interviewed again on 30/07/2001]
- R.V.M., fisheries technician, worked in the fisheries sector since 1976, Mar del Plata, 01/09/2000 (male)
- F.M.R., lawyer and advisor to several firms in the fisheries sector since 1984, Mar del Plata, 10/09/2000 (male)

Workers and grassroots organisations

- M.D., leader of UOP and manual worker in the local fishing industry since 1992, Mar del Plata, 15/08/2000 (female) [Interviewed again on 28/06/2001]
- R.M., fillet worker in a pseudo cooperative and leader of UOP, formerly affiliated to SOIP (1976-1992), Mar del Plata, 15/08/2000 (male)
- M.S.V., member of a collective of wives of local sailors and fishermen (Asociación de Mujeres de Pescadores Embarcados), linked to the activity through her husband since 1970, Mar del Plata, 16/08/2000 (female)
- A.R., administrator at FECOOAPORT since 1997 and dock worker since 1991, Mar del Plata, 16/08/2000 (male)
- M.N., president of SOS Pesca, daughter and wife of local fishermen, Mar del Plata, 24/08/2000 (female)
- M.C., fisherman and manual worker in the local fishing industry since 1976, Mar del Plata, 10/09/2000 (male)
- A.C., member of a collective of wives of local sailors and fishermen (Asociación de Mujeres de Pescadores Embarcados), Mar del Plata, 13/09/2000 (female)

Additional workers interviewed in June-August 2001

- R.R., female worker in the pseudo cooperatives, member of UOP and later of The Scream of the Fishery, Mar del Plata, 30/06/2001 [also interviewed by skype on 12/11/2007]
- M.B., female fillet worker, Mar del Plata, 16/07/2001
- A.O., female fillet worker, Mar del Plata, 17/07/2001
- M.G., female fillet worker and political activist, Mar del Plata, 24/07/2001
- R.F., male fillet worker in the pseudo cooperatives, Mar del Plata, 25/07/2001
- C.M., male fillet worker and member of UOP, 26/07/2001

QUESTIONNAIRE 1a (R1 and R3 establishments)

0. Information of the interview

- 0.0 Number:
- 0.1 Name of the interviewer:
- 0.2 Date:
- 0.3 Started at:
- 0.4 Finished at:
- 0.5 Status: (1) closed, (2) rejected, (3) completed Questionnaire 1, (4) willing to complete Questionnaire 2.
- 0.6 Observations:
- 0.7 Desk revision:

A. Information of the interviewee

- A.1 Name of the establishment:
- A.2 Legal owner (firm):
- A.3 Address:
- A.4 Telephone / fax:
- A.5 Name of interviewee:
- A.7 Gender:
- A.8 Position:
- A.9 Working in the establishment since:
- A.10 Previous experience in the sector:

B. Characteristics of the establishment

- B.1 Production heading (R1 / R3)
- B.2 Opened since (year):
- B.3 Plant tenancy
 - B.3.1 Owned by the firm running the plant
 - B.3.2 Rented by the firm running the plant
- B.4 Does the plant have a license to operate and environmental certification? If yes, what type of license / certification? Issued by whom?
- B.5 In terms of ownership, how would you define the firm running the plant?
 - B.5.1 Single owner of national capital
 - B.5.2 Family enterprise of national capital
 - B.5.3 Various partners of national capital
 - B.5.4 Various partners mixed capital (national and foreign) (Specify the latter)
 - B.5.5 Various partners foreign capital (Specify)

C. Supply of raw material

- C.1 Main species processed
 - C.1.1 Percentage of hake over all raw material inputs
 - C.1.2 Percentage of other raw material inputs (specify species)
- C.2 How does the plant obtain the raw material processed? [Specify percentages in each category]
 - C.2.1 Buying it directly from others
 - C.2.2 Provided by the fleet of the firm
 - C.2.3 Other [Specify]
- C.3 If the firm who owns the establishment operates with its own fleet (C.2.2)
 - C.3.1 How many offshore vessels (ice trawlers)? When were they acquired?
 - C.3.2 How many freezer trawlers and factory vessels? When were they acquired?
- C.4 Does the firm have subsidiary establishments and/or vessels in the Patagonian region?
 - C.4.1 Number and name of subsidiary establishments
 - C.4.2 Number and type of vessels
- C.5 If yes (C.4.1) what percentage of the total production of the firm is processed in the Patagonian region?

D. Production

- D.1 What percentage of the production corresponds to each of the following headings?
 - D.1.1 Fresh products (R1)
 - D.1.2 Fresh and frozen products (R3)
 - D.1.3 Other products (Specify which)
- D.2 Potential production capacity measured in tones of raw material per day
- D.3 Potential production capacity measured in tones of final products per day
- D.4 Estimated percentage of the production capacity actually used in the last 12 months
- D.5 How many days did the establishment work in the last 12 months?
- D.6 How many plants does the firm run in Mar del Plata? (Specify names)
- D.7 If the firm operates with factory vessels (C.2.2) does it reprocess in land-based factories?

E. Personnel

- E.1 How many permanent waged employees does the establishment have?
 - E.1.1 How many men and women are administrative personnel?
 - E.1.2 How many men and women are manual workers?
 - E.1.3 Have there been any significant variations in the number of manual workers employed since 1990 / or since the creation of the plant if established later than in 1990? Why?
- E.2 Are the workers organised under a cooperative?
 - E.2.1 No
 - E.2.2 Yes
 - E.2.2.1 Since when?
 - E.2.2.2 Why?
- E.3 Does the plant employ casual labour?
 - E.3.1 No
 - E.3.2 Yes
 - E.3.3 If yes (E.3.2), why?
 - E.3.2.1 How many and how often?
 - E.3.2.2 What is the percentage of female and male casual labourers hired?
 - E.3.2.3 How are casual workers paid?

F. Subcontracting links

- F.1 Does the firm running the plant subcontract services from cooperatives?
 - F.1.1 No
 - F.1.2 Yes
- F.2 If yes (F.1.2), with what type of cooperatives does the firm operate and what percentage of the production is subcontracted in each case? (Specify the name of the subcontracted plants)
 - F.2.1 Subcontracting the services of one cooperative in the firm's plant (permanent and exclusive contract)
 - F.2.2 Subcontracting the services of 1 or 2 cooperatives in their own plants
 - F.2.3 Subcontracting the services of various cooperatives through short-term contracts
 - F.2.4 Subcontracting the services of pseudo cooperatives
 - F.2.5 Subcontracting the services of R1 establishments (non-cooperatives)
- F.3 Does the plant subcontract its own personnel and services to others?

G. Commercialisation

- G.1 Does the establishment commercialised part or the whole of its production directly?
 - G.1.1 No
 - G.1.2 Yes
 - G.1.3 If yes (G.1.2), what percentage of the production is sold in?
 - G.1.3.1 The domestic market? (Specify %, channels and destinations)
 - G.1.3.2 The international market? (Specify %, channels and destinations)

H. Constraints assessment

- H.1 What are in your opinion, the main constraints faced by the establishment in the light of the current situation of the fisheries sector?
- H.2 Would you agree to answer an in-depth questionnaire?
 - H.2.1 Yes
 - H.2.2 No

QUESTIONNAIRE 2a (continues from questionnaire 1a)³⁰⁶

O. Information of the interview

- 0.0 Number:
- 0.1 Name of the interviewer:
- 0.2 Date:
- 0.3 Started at:
- 0.4 Finished at:
- 0.5 Status: N/A
- 0.6 Observations:
- 0.7 Desk revision:

A. Information of the interviewee

- A.1 Name of the establishment:
- A.2 Legal owner (firm): [Recorded in questionnaire 1]
- A.3 Address: [Recorded in questionnaire 1]
- A.4 Telephone / fax: [Recorded in questionnaire 1]
- A.5 Name of interviewee:
- A.7 Gender:
- A.8 Position:
- A.9 Working in the establishment since:
- A.10 Previous experience in the sector:

B. Key events

- B.1 Considering the situation of the fishing industry in the last twenty years, when does the so called 'restructuring process' start?
- B.2 Considering the decade of the 1990s, what events had in your view a significant in the life of the establishment?
 - B.2.1 At the international level?
 - B.2.2 At the national level?
 - B.2.3 At the local level?
- B.3 How did the establishment react to these events?

C. Resources of the establishment

- C.1 Considering a ranking from 5 (excellent) to 1 (very poor), how would you assess the position of the establishment in terms of access to and control over the following resources and why?
 - F.1.1 Financial resources (capital and access to credit)
 - F.1.2 Human resources
 - F.1.3 Knowledge and know-how (production quality and innovation)
 - F.1.4 Physical resources (Technology, equipment and infrastructure)
 - F.1.5 Raw materials
 - F.1.6 Access to markets
 - F.1.7 Political capacity to influence the national policies regulating the sector

D. Strategies

- D.1 Which ones of the following strategies did the establishment adopt to face the restructuring process?
 - D.1.1 Expanding the number of firms to whom it sells its services
 - D.1.2 Obtaining fish supplies directly from independent fishermen
 - D.1.3 Hiring non-associate workers to absorb fluctuations in the demand of services
 - D.1.4 Investing in technological improvements
 - D.1.5 Diversifying its production
 - D.1.5 Improving the capacity of its workers
 - D.1.6 Seeking channels to commercialise its production without intermediaries
 - D.1.7 Other strategies (Specify)
 - D.1.8 None

³⁰⁶ Details in sections O and A only to be completed if different from those in Questionnaire 1.

E. Policies

- E.1 What is your opinion about the shifting of manual workers to the cooperative system?
- E.2 Why was this mechanism adopted?
- E.3 Why did some firms start to operate with freezer and factory vessels?
- E.4 What do you think about the reimbursement regime adopted to favour fishing exports from the Patagonian harbours?
- E.4 What is your opinion about the Fisheries Agreement signed with the European Union?
- E.5 What are in your view the main causes leading to the depletion of hake and to the current crisis affecting the sector?

F. External factors (business environment)

- F.1 Considering the main external factors shaping the business environment in which the establishment operates, specify what specific factors have changed since the restructuring process and how do they shape the business environment (positively or negatively). Explain why.
 - F.1.1 Political factors
 - F.1.2 Economic factors
 - F.1.3 Socio-cultural factors
 - F.1.4 Technological factors

G. Responses to the restructuring process and current situation

- G.1 Considering the restructuring process and current situation of the fishing industry, how would you characterise the position and reaction of the entrepreneurial sector?
- G.2 How would you characterise the position and reaction of the trade unions?
- G.3 How would you characterise the position and reaction of the government
 - G.3.1 At the national level?
 - G.3.2 At the provincial level?
 - G.3.3 At the local level?
- G.4 Considering the following list, what mechanisms have been adopted by the establishment to ensure that the interests of the fishing industry are heard?
 - G.4.1 Protest and mobilisation
 - G.4.2 Lobby and pressure on the legislative power
 - G.4.3 Lobby and pressure on the executive power
 - G.4.4 Association and negotiation with other organisations of the fishing industry (Specify)
 - G.4.5 Development and dissemination of technical reports
 - G.4.6 Awareness rising through the media
 - G.4.7 Legal instruments (e.g. judicial appeals)
 - G.4.8 Other (specify)
 - G.4.9 None
- G.5 Which of the above mechanisms were in your opinion more effective? Why?

H. Solutions

- H.1 Considering the following list, establish in priority order the objectives that should lead the policies and actions adopted to confront the current situation faced by the fisheries sector
 - H.1.1 To ensure the ecological sustainability of the targeted species
 - H.1.2 To facilitate the technological and operative upgrading of the firms
 - H.1.3 To improve the access of local producers to the international market
 - H.1.4 To improve the access of local producers to the domestic market
 - H.1.5 To improve the social distribution of profits between entrepreneurs and workers
 - H.1.6 To improve the participation of the fishing industry establishments in the definition of policies.
 - H.1.7 Any other? (Specify)
- H.2 What measures should be adopted to achieve the objectives prioritised?
- H.3 Who should be responsible for their implementation?

QUESTIONNAIRE 1b (R1 COOPERATIVES OF SERVICES)

0. Information of the interview

- 0.0 Number:
- 0.1 Name of the interviewer:
- 0.2 Date:
- 0.3 Started at:
- 0.4 Finished at:
- 0.5 Status: (1) closed, (2) rejected, (3) completed Questionnaire 1, (4) willing to complete Questionnaire 2.
- 0.6 Observations:
- 0.7 Desk revision:

A. Information of the interviewee

- A.1 Name of the cooperative:
- A.2 Legal owner:
- A.3 Address:
- A.4 Telephone / fax:
- A.5 Name of interviewee:
- A.7 Gender:
- A.8 Position:
- A.9 Working in the cooperative since:
- A.10 Previous experience in the sector:

B. Characteristics of the establishment

- B.1 Production heading (R1 / R3)
- B.2 Opened since (year):
 - B.2.1 Why was the cooperative created?
 - B.2.1.1 Proposal by the firm for whom the cooperative members worked previously as waged employees
 - B.2.1.2 Previous '*fasoneros*' turned into a cooperative
 - B.2.1.3 Labour strategy adopted by the cooperative members
 - B.2.1.4 Adherence to cooperative principles
- B.3 Plant tenancy
 - B.3.1 Owned by the cooperative
 - B.3.2 Rented by the cooperative
 - B.3.3 Owned by the main subcontracting firm
- B.4 Does the cooperative have a license to operate? If so, what type of license and issued by whom?

C. Supply of raw material

- C.1 Main species process
 - C.1.1 Percentage of hake over all raw material inputs
 - C.1.2 Percentage of other raw material inputs (specify species)
- C.2 How does the cooperative obtain the raw material processed at the plant? [Specify percentages in each category]
 - C.2.1 Buying it directly
 - C.1.2 Provided by the subcontracting firm
 - C.1.3 Other [Specify]

D. Production

- D.1 What percentage of the production corresponds to each of the following headings?
 - D.1.1 Fresh products (R1)
 - D.1.2 Fresh and frozen products (R3)
 - D.1.3 Other products (Specify which)
- D.2 Potential production capacity measured in tones of raw material per day
- D.3 Potential production capacity measured in tones of final products per day

- D.4 Estimated percentage of the production capacity actually used in the last 12 months
- D.5 How many days did the cooperative work in the last 12 months?

E. Personnel

- E.1 How many members does the cooperative have?
 - E.1.1 How many men and women are engaged in managerial / administrative roles?
 - E.1.2 How many men and women are manual workers?
 - E.1.3 Have there been any significant variations in the number of associated members since the creation of the cooperative? If, yes, why?
- E.2 How are cooperative members paid?
- E.3 Do they have any social benefits?
 - E.3.1 If so, which ones [Specify]
 - E.3.2 How are these social benefits paid for?
- E.4 Does the cooperative employ non-associated members (casual labour)?
 - E.3.1 No
 - E.3.2 Yes
 - E.3.3 If yes (E.3.2), why?
 - E.3.2.1 How many and how often?
 - E.3.2.2 What is the percentage of female and male casual labourers hired?
 - E.3.2.3 How are casual workers paid?

F. Subcontracting links

- F.1 Does the cooperative subcontract services from cooperatives?
 - F.1.1 No
 - F.1.2 Yes
- F.2 If yes (F.1.2), what are the main modalities by which the cooperative services are subcontracted? (Specify the name of the subcontracting plants)
 - F.2.1 Subcontracted by one firm and operating in the firm's plant (permanent and exclusive contract)
 - F.2.2 Subcontracted by 1 or 2 firms in the cooperative's plant
 - F.2.3 Subcontracted by various firms in the cooperative's plant and by short-term contracts
 - F.2.4 Operates independently from other firms
 - F.2.5 Other [Specify]

G. Commercialisation

- G.1 Does the cooperative commercialised part or the whole of its production directly?
 - G.1.1 No
 - G.1.2 Yes
 - G.1.3 If yes (G.1.2), what percentage of the production is sold in?
 - G.1.3.1 The domestic market? (Specify %)
 - G.1.3.2 The international market? (Specify %)

H. Constraints assessment

- H.1 What are in your opinion, the main constraints faced by the cooperative in the light of the current situation faced by the sector?
- H.2 Would you agree to answer an in-depth questionnaire?
 - H.2.1 Yes
 - H.2.2 No

QUESTIONNAIRE 2b (continues from questionnaire 1b)³⁰⁷

O. Information of the interview

- 0.0 Number:
- 0.1 Name of the interviewer:
- 0.2 Date:
- 0.3 Started at:
- 0.4 Finished at:
- 0.5 Status: N/A
- 0.6 Observations:
- 0.7 Desk revision:

A. Information of the interviewee

- A.1 Name of the cooperative:
- A.2 Legal owner: [Recorded in questionnaire 1]
- A.3 Address: [Recorded in questionnaire 1]
- A.4 Telephone / fax: [Recorded in questionnaire 1]
- A.5 Name of interviewee:
- A.7 Gender:
- A.8 Position:
- A.9 Working in the cooperative since:
- A.10 Previous experience in the sector:

B. Key events

- B.1 Considering the situation of the fishing industry in the last twenty years, when does the so called 'restructuring process' start?
- B.2 Considering the decade of the 1990s, what events had in your view a significant in the life of the cooperative?
 - B.2.1 At the international level?
 - B.2.2 At the national level?
 - B.2.3 At the local level?
- B.3 How did the cooperative react to these events?

C. Resources of the establishment

- C.1 Considering a ranking from 5 (excellent) to 1 (very poor), how would you assess the position of the cooperative in terms of access to and control over the following resources and why?
 - C.1.1 Financial resources (capital and access to credit)
 - C.1.2 Human resources
 - C.1.3 Knowledge and know-how (production quality and innovation)
 - C.1.4 Physical resources (Technology, equipment and infrastructure)
 - C.1.5 Raw materials
 - C.1.6 Access to markets
 - C.1.7 Political capacity to influence the national policies regulating the sector

D. Strategies

- D.1 Which ones of the following strategies did the cooperative adopt to face the restructuring process?
 - D.1.1 Expanding the number of firms to whom it sells its services
 - D.1.2 Obtaining fish supplies directly from independent fishermen
 - D.1.3 Hiring non-associate workers to absorb fluctuations in the demand of services
 - D.1.4 Investing in technological improvements
 - D.1.5 Diversifying its production
 - D.1.5 Improving the capacity of its workers
 - D.1.6 Seeking channels to commercialise its production without intermediaries
 - D.1.7 Other strategies (Specify)
 - D.1.8 None

³⁰⁷ Details in sections O and A only to be completed if different from those in Questionnaire 1.

E. Policies

- E.1 What is your opinion about the shifting of manual workers to the cooperative system?
- E.2 Why was this mechanism adopted?
- E.3 Why did some firms start to operate with freezer and factory vessels?
- E.4 What do you think about the reimbursement regime adopted to favour fishing exports from the Patagonian harbours?
- E.4 What is your opinion about the Fisheries Agreement signed with the European Union?
- E.5 What are in your view the main causes leading to the depletion of hake and to the current crisis affecting the sector?

F. External factors (business environment)

- F.1 Considering the main external factors shaping the business environment in which the cooperative operates, specify what specific factors have changed since the restructuring process and how do they shape the business environment (positively or negatively). Explain why.
 - F.1.1 Political factors
 - F.1.2 Economic factors
 - F.1.3 Socio-cultural factors
 - F.1.4 Technological factors

G. Responses to the restructuring process and current situation

- G.1 Considering the restructuring process and current situation of the fishing industry, how would you characterise the position and reaction of the entrepreneurial sector?
- G.2 How would you characterise the position and reaction of the trade unions?
- G.3 How would you characterise the position and reaction of the government
 - G.3.1 At the national level?
 - G.3.2 At the provincial level?
 - G.3.3 At the local level?
- G.4 Considering the following list, what mechanisms have been adopted by the cooperative to ensure that the interests of the fishing industry are heard?
 - G.4.1 Protest and mobilisation
 - G.4.2 Lobby and pressure on the legislative power
 - G.4.3 Lobby and pressure on the executive power
 - G.4.4 Association and negotiation with other organisations of the fishing industry (Specify)
 - G.4.5 Development and dissemination of technical reports
 - G.4.6 Awareness rising through the media
 - G.4.7 Legal instruments (e.g. judicial appeals)
 - G.4.8 Other (specify)
 - G.4.9 None
- G.5 Which of the above mechanisms were in your opinion more effective? Why?

H. Solutions

- H.1 Considering the following list, establish in priority order the objectives that should lead the policies and actions adopted to confront the current situation faced by the fisheries sector
 - H.1.1 To ensure the ecological sustainability of the targeted species
 - H.1.2 To facilitate the technological and operative upgrading of the firms
 - H.1.3 To improve the access of local producers to the international market
 - H.1.4 To improve the access of local producers to the domestic market
 - H.1.5 To improve the social distribution of profits between entrepreneurs and workers
 - H.1.6 To improve the participation of the fishing industry establishments in the definition of policies.
 - H.1.7 Any other? (Specify)
- H.2 What measures should be adopted to achieve the objectives prioritised?
- H.3 Who should be responsible for their implementation?

Governmental bodies

- INDEC, Buenos Aires
- SAGPyA, Buenos Aires
- INIDEP, Mar del Plata
- Municipality of General Pueyrredón, Mar del Plata
- Museo del Puerto, Mar del Plata
- SENASA, Mar del Plata
- OSSE, Mar del Plata
- IAC, Mar del Plata

Trade union and entrepreneurial associations

- CAPeCA, Buenos Aires
- SOIP, Mar del Plata
- CEPA, Mar del Plata

Specialised magazines and newspapers

- *Revista Puerto. La Otra Cara de la Pesca*, Mar del Plata (1999-2010)
- *Revista Redes*, Buenos Aires (1984-2011)
- *Diario La Capital*, Mar del Plata (1997-2011)
- *Diario El Atlántico*, Mar del Plata (1997-2011)
- *Diario La Nación*, Buenos Aires (1997-2011)
- *Diario El Clarín*, Buenos Aires (1997-2011)

Database variables

- Heading
- Source
- Date
- Pages
- Key claim-makers (organisations and institutions)
- Coalitions
- Collusions
- Key claims
- Key metaphors and rhetorical devices
- Selected quotes (if applicable)
- Images (if applicable)