

# The social relation to the environment in contemporary capitalism: theoretical reflections and empirical explorations

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AK Young Economists 2019 Conference — Vienna — Tuesday, October 2nd

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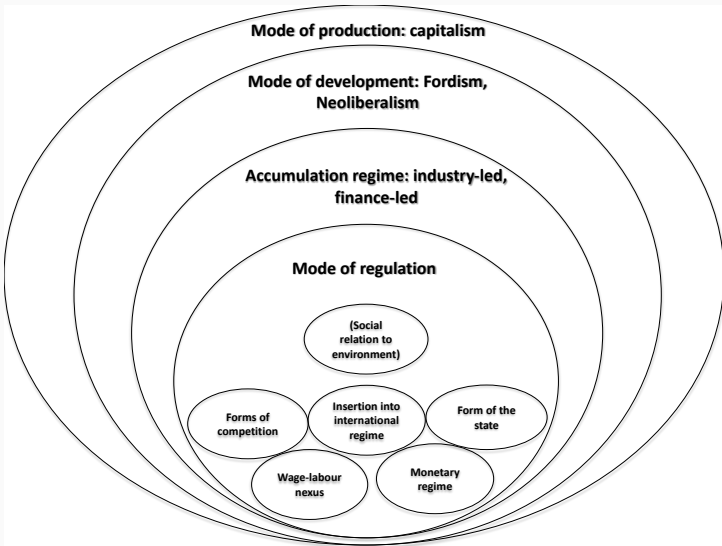
Aim: informing the political economy of environmental policies in the context of contemporary national capitalisms

- Ecological Economics: Filling the lack of consideration for socioeconomic systems in the analysis of environmental policies
- Regulation Theory: Explicitly integrating the social relation to the environment as a *regulation* of capitalism in the analysis of its diversity

What does *regulation* mean in RT ?

- Codification of fundamental social relations
- Set of institutions emerging from power struggles amongst antagonistic classes and embodying socio-economic compromises between them
- Temporary stabilization and normalization of social conflicts and contradictions generated by the accumulation process

=> the set of institutionnalised compromises that produce and stabilize capitalism.



**Figure 1:** The theoretical framework of Regulation Theory

## Structure

1. Clarifying the theoretical framework by adding an explicit environmental dimension to RT
2. Statistical analysis of the diversity of contemporary capitalisms including their social relation to the environment
3. Discussions: *regulations* characterizing capitalisms and implication for a Green New Deal

# Integrating the environment into RT

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## 6<sup>th</sup> form or no 6<sup>th</sup> form?

- The relation to the environment is not specific to capitalism: any kind of society has a relation to the environment
- Brand and Görg (2008); Zuindeau (2007): In capitalism, the relation to the environment takes a peculiar form because nature is commodified and treated as a form of capital.
- Chester (2010); Zuindeau (2007): A specific form of the social relation to the environment within capitalism is defined and shaped by the mode of regulation

## 6<sup>th</sup> form or no 6<sup>th</sup> form?

- Is this relation an institutional form of the mode of regulation in itself or is it encompassed into the five other forms ?



## 6<sup>th</sup> form or no 6<sup>th</sup> form?

1. Boyer (2015); Chester (2010): no autonomous sixth form
  - No such thing as a compromise with the environment
  - The mode of regulation as a whole is a relation to the environment
  - Institutional compromises on the environment are the projections on the space of the economy-environment relations of the five institutional forms

2. The social relation to nature is a sixth, autonomous, institutional form (Becker and Raza, 2000; Cahen-Fourot and Durand, 2016):
  - Socio-technical, cultural and legal apparatus organizing the availability and the demand for natural resources
  - Encompasses (non-)codified interactions between humanity and nature
  - Encompasses the effective modalities of these interactions
  - Encompasses the socio-political conflicts and regularities they produce and the way they distort socio-political regulations of accumulation regimes

## 6<sup>th</sup> form or no 6<sup>th</sup> form?

No compromise with nature ?

- Insights for environmental philosophy: diplomatic cohabitation with nature made of compromises
- Ontological difference: Humans compromise *with* non-human nature in practical ways and compromise amongst themselves *about* ecological issues in political ways.
- No practical compromise without a political compromise
- No political compromise is disembedded from nature: unlikely that small pacific islanders will reach institutionalised compromise under water.

## 6<sup>th</sup> form or no 6<sup>th</sup> form?

Historicity beyond binarity:

- These two polarized positions are not mutually exclusive
- Should be historicized in light of the ecological constraint

## 6<sup>th</sup> form or no 6<sup>th</sup> form?

- Assumption: the social relation to the environment is becoming a *regulation* of capitalism in itself
- Ecological issues become more pressing:
  - Existing institutions progressively unable to normalize increasing ecological conflicts...
  - ... and to embody satisfying compromises regarding the access to and the distribution of environmental costs and benefits.

## 6<sup>th</sup> form or no 6<sup>th</sup> form?

- Ideological and philosophical developments: responsibility principle, natural resources as finite...
- ... laid the ground for emerging social blocs supporting new compromises on environmental issues

## 6<sup>th</sup> form or no 6<sup>th</sup> form?

- The social relation to the environment is not *fully* embedded into the five structural forms anymore...
- ... and is not *only* the projection of the latter on the space of the economy-environment relationships anymore.
- It is becoming an institutional form in itself...
- ... and is increasingly shaping the modes of regulation and accumulation regimes in combination with the other forms

# Investigating the diversity of capitalist systems and their social relation to the environment

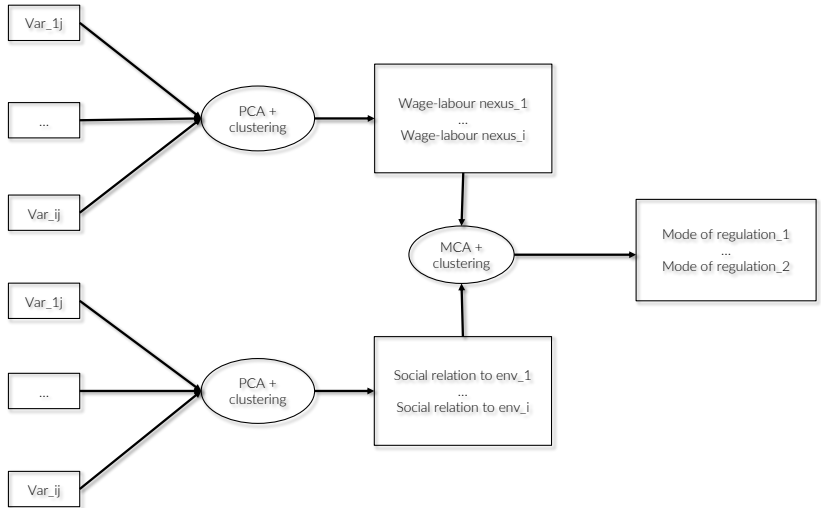
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## Sample and data

- 37 OECD and BRICS countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, UK, US
- 2015 data (or most recent before + related variable or statistical imputation if missing)

# Diversity of capitalism and the social relation to the environment



**Figure 2:** Empirical method: PCA, MCA and hierarchical clustering

Modelling of the institutional forms through synthetic variables:

- **Social relation to the environment:** GHG, energy and material intensity of GDP; share of embodied CO<sub>2</sub>, energy and material in imports; class structure of emissions; environmental conflicts; stringency of environmental regulation; enforcement of environmental reg; environmental treaties; supporters of Greenpeace; IUCN members organizations
- **Monetary regime:** short-term interest rate; CB assets to GDP; Chinn-Itoh index of K account openness; inflation rate; liquids assets to deposits and short-term funding

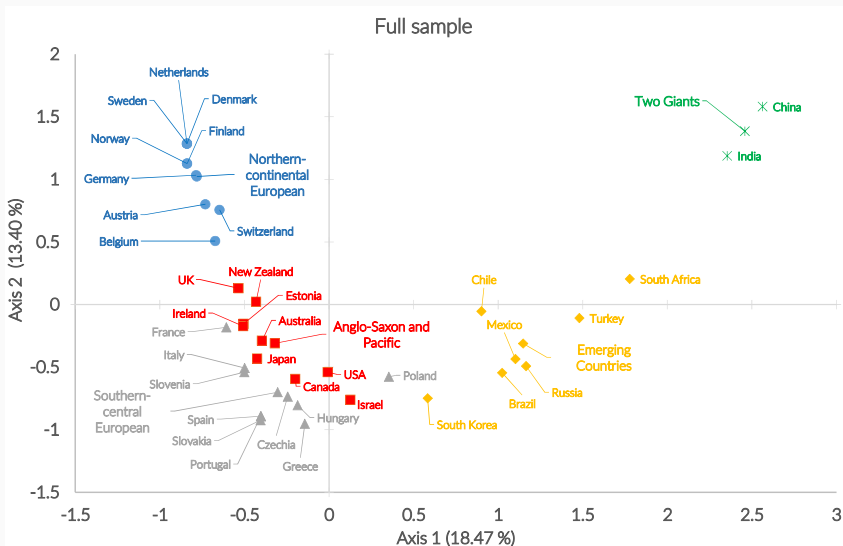
## Diversity of capitalism and the social relation to the environment

- **Wage-labour nexus:** employment protection; collective bargaining coverage; union density; weekly working hours; adjusted wage share; distributed profit; unemployment; income inequality; gender wage gap
- **Competition:** OECD goods and services markets indicators; banking sector competition indicators
- **State:** G; tax; health, educ and military exp in % of GDP and gov exp; index of state control over the economy
- **Insertion in the inter reg:** share of sectors in VA; KOF indexes of *de facto* and *de jure* political, social, trade and financial globalizations

## Empirical strategy:

- **Full sample: Northern-continental European; Southern-central European; Anglo-saxon and Pacific; Emerging countries; Two Giants**
- OECD: Northern-continental European; Southern-central European; Anglo-saxon and Pacific; Emerging countries
- Non-UE: North American; Pacific; Emerging countries; Two giants; singleton
- UE: Northern-continental European; Southern-central European; Eastern-central European, singletons
- Literature based sub-samples: consistent with Amable (2003); Elie et al. (2012); Jahn (2014)

# Diversity of capitalism and the social relation to the environment



Main combinations of *regulations* characterizing full sample capitalisms:

1. Ecology-prone social relation to the environment cohabits with
  - Labour-oriented wage-labour nexus
  - Openness to foreign competitors with mixed competition
  - Welfare-state
  - BUT environmental impact is largely offshore

## 2. Ecology-adverse social relation to the environment cohabits with:

- Capital-oriented wage-labour nexus
- Closeness to foreign competitors with weak competition
- Sovereign and control-oriented State
- AND environmental impact is largely onshore



A confirmation of the Lipietz (1997) hypothesis:

- Ecology-prone countries see environmental regulation as comparative advantage: openness to foreign competitors
- Better involvement of workers in production and workers protection increase human and technological means: labour-oriented wage-labour nexus

Higher rate of distributed profit goes with higher unemployment and ecology-adverse social relation relation to the environment:

- Known to slow down investment and innovation (Lazonick, 2010; Lazonick and O'Sullivan, 2000; Stockhammer, 2006)
- Can indicate less concerns about adopting more sustainable processes through long-term planning and patient capital
- Detrimental to social context favourable to ecological policies

## Implications for a (European) Green New Deal:

- Not only a matter of "green" investments
- Should be comprehended in terms of institutional complementarity
- Revamping of the wage-labour nexus
- Definancialization
- Reconstruction of the developmental and social state
- Investment not as a mean of further accumulation but as a mean of shifting the social relation to the environment towards sustainability (Svartzman et al., 2019)

Vielen Dank für Ihre  
Aufmerksamkeit !

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Paper available at <http://epub.wu.ac.at/6957/>

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