



Ocean privatisation: the ‘processes of property’ occurring in the world’s maritime domains

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Abstract

That actors - whether individuals, corporations, organisations, or states - are claiming property rights over the oceans and coasts is by no means a new phenomenon. However, it appears that the phenomenon is currently achieving new shapes and intensities. It is therefore receiving special attention from marine social scientists, as evidenced by the rising number of publications on topics such as blue-grabbing, ocean justice, individual tradable quotas, and NGO-managed marine protected areas. We observed that contributions to the topic are frequently polarised, where one side views privatisation - such as individually tradable quotas - as a saviour, and the other sees it as a massive risk. This collection aims to bring together and organise a conversation between diverse perspectives on the topic and to allow them to engage in discussion. All papers in this collection employ a different theoretical lens and apply it to empirical examples from around the world. This editorial discusses, explains, and synthesises the findings of these contributions. To accomplish this, we utilise artificial intelligence-assisted qualitative data analysis tools. The main outcomes are that processes of ocean privatisation are ‘processes of property’, whereby bargaining and discourses of different parties involved create new institutions. Distributive consequences are at the centre of interest of all approaches, and attention to power is also an important issue for all approaches.

Keywords Ocean governance · Property rights on oceans · Marine social sciences · Privatisations of oceans

Introduction

When Maarten Bavinck in 2017 at the opening of the COST Action “Ocean Governance for Sustainability” made the point that we should focus on ocean privatisation (the accelerated enclosure of the ocean commons) as it is something special on the horizon which at this moment in time requires particular attention of the marine social sciences, a group of likeminded people was quickly formed. Ocean and coastal grabbing seemed to be more prominent than before. Marine spatial planning initiatives were spreading around the world, indicating that the use of oceans and coasts seems to be increasing and that the demand for assigning

property rights, whether to states, groups, or individuals, is on the rise. Blue Economy Strategies emerging – no matter whether you view them as initiatives for conquering and commodifying the sea, as attempts to make sure that economic development at sea happens in a sustainable way, or, more sophisticatedly, as a sustainability-discourse camouflaged strategy for conquering the sea for selfish interests – we had the impression that indeed something is happening in the marine realm, which is not necessarily new, but in any case worth more attention from marine social sciences.

We also had the impression that the discussions on ocean privatisation that took place were polarised. On the one hand, you had those who praised privatisation as the solution to major sustainability challenges (Hannesson 2004; Kompas and Che 2005). On the other hand, a community of scholars perceived in the processes described above the next enclosure of the last big commons (at least on our planet), a process of ‘blue grabbing’, something which requires a blue justice lens (Bavinck et al. 2017; Campling et al. 2012; Mallin 2025).

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As a starter, we wrote a paper on “Broadening the perspective on ocean privatisations” (Schlüter et al. 2020) that aimed to provide a holistic lens on ‘these processes’ happening at sea, without calling them privatisation (as the latter is a complicated term, as we will see in the course of this paper). A single 8000-word article, despite having various co-authors stemming from different disciplines, however, cannot do justice to properly broadening the perspectives on privatisation. Therefore, we decided to produce the present collection of papers with the working title “Perspectives on Ocean Privatisation” (which was later changed to the present title), where we intended that each author, invited to represent a specific school of thought (we use this term in a loose sense as “a set of ideas or opinions that a group of people share about a matter” (Cambridge Dictionary, accessed 8.8.2026) could engage in a critical dialogue during the preparatory phase of the collection.

The schools of thought that we hoped to include in the collection were: Political Ecology; Post-Colonialism; Historical and Spatial Perspectives; Commons, Commonising and De-commonising; Institutions and Institutional Change; Legal Pluralism, Environmental Justice and Indigenous Ocean Understandings; Democratisation and ‘Rights’ to the Sea; Ecological Economics; the Property Rights School; and the Marxist Perspective (list taken from the outline of the collection).

Obtaining all solicited perspectives on board was a difficult process, which we did not achieve entirely. Also, our academic networks are not well-balanced but lean clearly towards the critical social sciences. We also realised the extent to which the debate on ‘privatisation’ is indeed somewhat polarised, so that, for example, one important scholar in the field, despite good personal connections, refused to contribute to the collection due to another author also being included. While recruiting scholars and during the writing process, it also became clear, however, that despite a degree of polarisation, the various perspectives are not necessarily clearly distinguishable from each other, and the discussions are indeed nuanced.

All scholars within this collection connect their perspective to empirical examples. Sometimes the argument is based on one case (Charles 2025; Hadjimichael 2025; Knott et al. 2024; Schlüter et al. 2025; Siriwardane-de Zoysa et al. 2025), sometimes it is various cases (Ceglia et al. 2025; Hein et al. 2024; Libecap 2024). This condition of empirical groundedness suggests that narrow, abstract, and sometimes purely theoretical perspectives do not do justice to the complex phenomenon of ocean privatisation, but that an interdisciplinary or at least inter-theoretical perspective is required. Considering the diverse empirical phenomena observed in this collection, the richness of different processes happening, and the different perspectives you can apply to these

various processes, we suggest that it is particularly timely to jointly observe, communicate, and think about what is happening with the property processes affecting our marine and coastal environments from various disciplinary and also cultural perspectives (see for example the Hikuroa case from New Zealand)¹. This editorial aims to synthesise and reflect on such varying perspectives, focusing on common issues that emerge. We are not embarking on this analysis because we believe that we should find a unified perspective on the phenomenon of privatisation. Diversity is, after all, key and essential for understanding its complexity. However, it seems reasonable to look at the broader inferences we might take home from this debate to reduce polarisation and foster problem-solving. No matter how much our oceans are privatised, they will remain our common oceans from which we all live.

We see, analysing the ‘process of property’ (von Benda-Beckmann et al. 2009) currently happening in the ocean, as a contribution to understanding how to achieve (social, ecological and economic) sustainable governance of the ocean. Property rights are an essential sub-category of governance. The collection of these papers makes it all too clear that the process of property is a complex one, where private, state, and civil society actors (Kooiman et al. 2008) in various hybrid forms come together. It results in new property arrangements whereby power and justice play a crucial part.

In the next section, the process and the methodology employed for producing this synthesis are described. Then, each paper is briefly introduced individually from the perspective of the whole collection. This allows us to discuss the common themes that we have identified. The discussion and conclusion sections look at those themes from a holistic and comparative perspective.

Methodology

After publishing the earlier paper on privatisation (Schlüter et al. 2020), we purposefully sampled authors with a broad range of perspectives, sometimes conflicting, on ocean privatisation. We particularly wanted to have representations from various schools of thought, as we assume that more young scholars are entering the field and need orientation.

¹ Ajit Menon and Prabhakar Jayaprakash from India, who were requested to represent a Political Ecology perspective, dropped out due to capacity reasons. Siriwardane et al. and Schlüter et al. have a culturally diverse team of authors, and various other papers highlight the importance of non-Western and non-human perspectives. However, the list of author names shows whose perspectives are dominating marine sciences, namely, those developed in the West. This holds even true for the tropical marine science (Partelow et al. 2020), where authors from the West dominate despite the fact that they are often guests in those countries.

In the interaction with the proposed authors, we realised quickly that “schools” are not necessarily very clear cut, nor that authors want to be curtailed within the limits of artificially conceived boxes. Nevertheless, a colourful mixture of nine contributions emerged. In a two-day online seminar in May 2023, authors presented their paper ideas to each other, and a critical dialogue started. We continued our discussion at the end of June 2023 in a double session at the MARE “Blue Fear” conference. Since then, papers have been written, discussed and reviewed following the standard procedures. According to Maritime Studies rules, we could choose between a short summary editorial or a full editorial paper, which would go through an independent review process. Due to the richness of the material and due to our pleasure in engaging with it, we opted for the latter.

Qualitative (marine) social sciences are currently going through a process of methodological change due to the introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) to the field. It is not yet very clear where we are heading, but the different potential applications are already immense (Chubb 2023; Rädiker and Gizzi 2024). We had little experience with AI prior to writing this editorial, but we realised that this technology is going to transform substantially how we or future generations will do marine social sciences. As with any innovation, there will be pros and cons. However, “efficiency gains”, simply interpreted here as a higher amount of output for a lower amount of input, mainly measured in time, will push towards substantial use of AI in a ‘publish or perish’ dominated scientific system. Who will take the time to manually code an interview if the machine can do this for you in minutes (Paulus and Marone 2025)? However, AI does lead to the black-boxing of certain steps in the research process. We are losing control over those steps. Particularly in the field of interpretative social sciences, the entire process happened until recently, mainly in the researcher’s brain. The algorithms now helping us to structure, analyse, and even interpret the data will neither be understood nor be in the hands of the researcher. The results we are obtaining are, to a considerable extent, influenced by the choices and preferences of the software developer (Paulus and Marone 2025), a scary thought in a time where fundamentalist perspectives among tech tycoons around the world seem to be on the rise. Therefore, we thought that using AI with a set of data, which we know very well due to the intense process we went through, and which does not have any data protection issues, as all is meant to be in the public domain anyway, would provide a good opportunity not necessarily to understand the black box, but at least to experience the new tool at hand.

We used an initial coding tree, which was based on the themes that we had identified with the help of a conventional academic discussion. The first author used this tree

to manually code the nine contributions with MAXQDA (24.7.0). New codes were added as necessary; however, the main categories of codes remained unchanged. Despite a profound knowledge of the nine contributions and a detailed discussion of the themes, which are also common within the literature, the coding exercise was an evolutionary process, whereby the previously coded papers influenced the coding of the latter papers. It was a process of learning with all its consequences on intra-intercoder reliability. Therefore, in the next step, we formulated a codebook (memos or prompts), allowing us to code the data with the help of AI Assist - the AI tool of MAXQDA. The ‘memos’, as prompts for coding are called in MAXQDA, were influenced by the definitions or perspectives provided in the papers, which particularly dealt with the concrete theme to be coded. It was experimented with in two or three submitted papers. Memos were altered until the AI Assist coded reasonable text passages. We did not achieve reasonable intercoder reliability between manual and automated coding. However, we reformulated the memos until we felt satisfied with the text segments coded by the machine. All AI-coded segments have been read and potentially uncoded by the first author. Writing the short summaries on each paper in the following section was inspired by our joint analytical process, but also by a short AI-produced summary of each paper. The discussion and conclusion sections draw on the discussions and thoughts, the manual and the machine coding, and AI-Assist provided summaries of those codes. We also used certain quantitative features of MAXQDA (however, not AI-based) for answering the research question about dominant themes and their connections within the papers. A documented code book with all the used memos can be found in Appendix 1. Appendix 2 provides, in an Excel file, all coded segments with their respective code, the article they belong to, and the AI or human comment explaining why they have been coded. Appendix 3 provides a reflection on the experience of using AI for this paper.

Before we portray the different perspectives and do their analysis, it is pertinent to say something about the positionality of the two authors of this paper, as we are claiming that dogmatic positions around ocean privatisation exist and that we want more critical dialogue among the various perspectives. We are part of that scholarly community, and obviously, our own perspectives influence how we bring those various perspectives together. Maarten Bavinck is a professor emeritus of resource governance who used interactive governance, legal pluralism, and political ecology as lenses for understanding social patterns of using and living with the sea. Achim Schlüter used to be a professor of social systems and ecological economics and is currently a professor of institutional economics and ocean governance. He identifies as an institutional scholar/economist, strongly influenced by

Elinor Ostrom, Daniel Bromley and others, convinced that economics as a discipline has strong limitations on understanding economic processes. Both strongly believe that the issue, so close to our heart, as ocean privatisation, requires pluralistic perspectives, which in dialogue can potentially achieve Sustainable Development Goals.

The various articles from the perspectives of the editors

In this section, we describe the various contributions and provide an overview (see Fig. 1) from our, holistic (in the sense of an overview of all papers), and ex-post perspective after slightly more than two years of discussion. There could be many more ways to order the various papers. We argued before that, on one side of the spectrum, we find an

could be argued about. However, we aimed to order the papers on this continuum, starting with the most pointed, economist liberal perspective (Libecap 2024), and ending with an environmental justice and democratisation perspective (Hadjimichael 2025).

Gary Libecap (2024) provides a Cosean² property rights perspective on ocean conservation, which, from his perspective, leads to the locking away of large marine areas for traditional users, i.e. fishers. Powerful environmental NGOs, often from rich countries, have the power to exclude traditional users from a substantial amount of the sea without any form of compensation. This leads to inefficiency in producing the various ecosystem services, following the here-applied property rights or new institutional economics approach. However, the dominating explanatory factor is the different power asymmetries of the various actors, particularly manifesting in their potential for collective action.

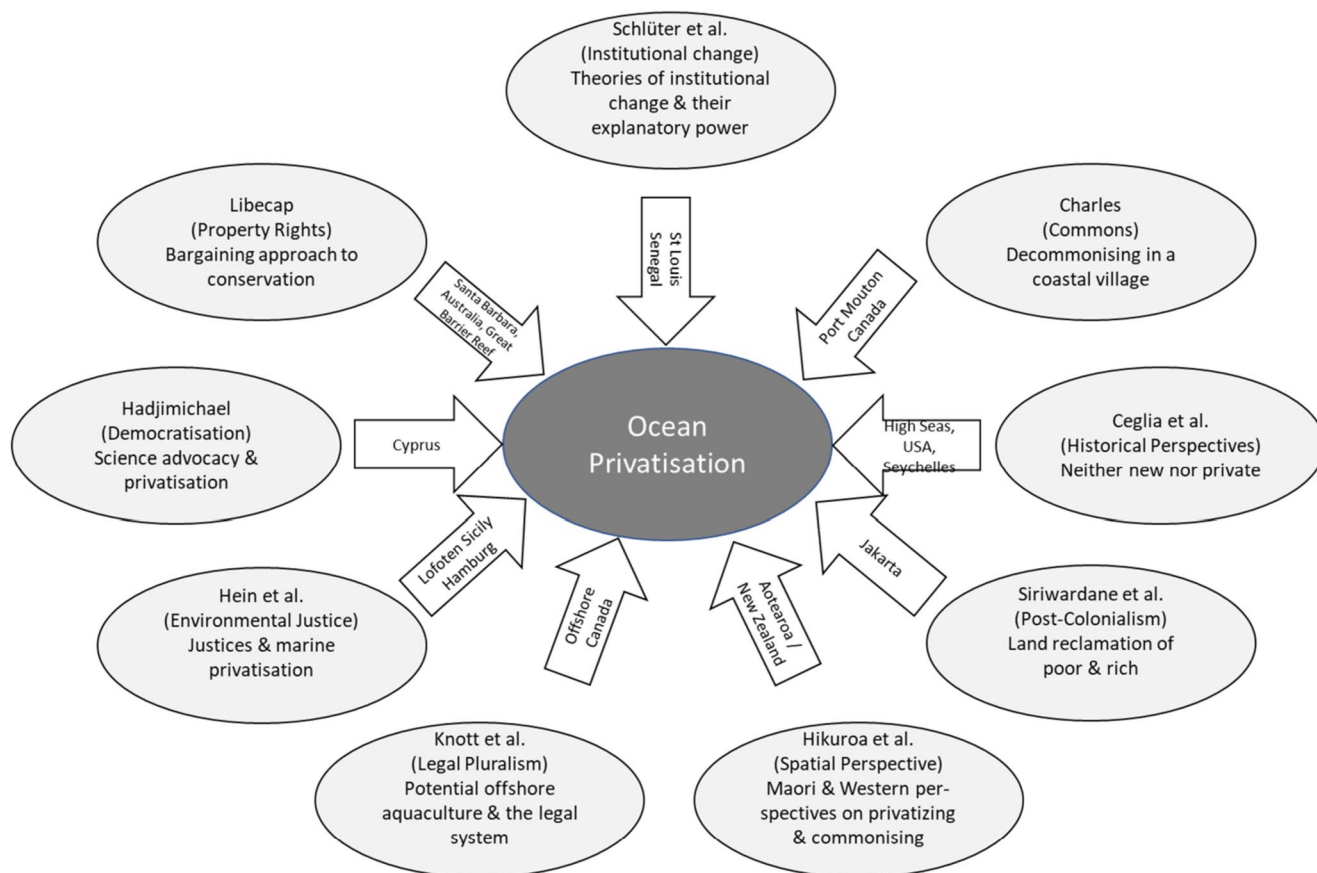


Fig. 1 The various perspectives on ocean privatisation (text in parentheses provides the perspective as requested by the editors; text in bubbles provides the paper's content in a nutshell; arrows show the empirical case studies each paper draws on)

economistic, markets-as-allocation-mechanism-friendly perspective and, on the other side, a critical social science perspective that focuses particularly on the negative consequences for weak actors. The exact position of each paper

² Ronald Coase was an economist who demonstrated, following neo-classical assumptions, that assigning property rights and letting parties negotiate would lead to efficient results, in the absence of transaction costs (Coase 1960). The model considers only human preferences and assumes actors having equal power. His theoretical thoughts are the fundament of Individual Tradable Quotas, or Carbon Credit schemes.

The main outcome emphasised is not the inefficiency in the use of the ocean but a justice issue: the big losers are the traditional users, who most often do not have clearly assigned property rights.

Achim Schlüter, Kristof van Assche, Sidy Fall, Khadi-datou Senghor, Hudu Banikoi and Elimane Kane (2025) explain different theories of institutional change stemming from various social science disciplines and then apply them to three different processes of enclosure, all taking place in the fishery town of Saint Louis, Senegal, namely the enclosure of Mauritanian waters, the enclosure for nature protection, and the enclosure for extracting gas. These are diverse processes involving different actors with different economic, political and social possibilities. Therefore, one can nicely see the instances in which one or the other theory is particularly useful. All theories contribute significantly to an understanding, depending on the characteristics of each case. The paper elaborates on the different characteristics under which each theory is applicable. Power asymmetries seem to be a key to understanding those processes. The driving forces emphasised in the various theories can also be interpreted as power resources.

Tony Charles (2025) looks at coastal privatisation from a community perspective with a commons/ Ostromian and ‘grabbing literature’ background. He uses Port Mouton, a community in Nova Scotia, where he has done many years of participatory research, as an example of the various intertwined processes currently happening in many coastal communities. In this case, the processes relate to the assignment of ITQs, fish farming and coastal properties. He suggests an analytical framework that looks at five aspects crucial for coastal communities: (a) jurisdictions, (b) range of rights, (c) magnitude of privatisation, (d) distributional implications, and (e) community perceptions. It is emphasised that to understand the perceptions of the community towards the various processes, it is key to understand community values and their strategic goals. In the case of Port Mouton, the rigorous outcompeting for coastal properties by rich outsiders destroys a substantial amount of community culture and locks many local people out. This is a gentrification process similar to that taking place in many coastal locations around the world. However, in this case gentrification is fairly well accepted as those newcomers help substantially in collective action. Community services can be maintained, and opposition against increasing fish farming can be organised.

Carlos Ceglia, Kimberly Peters, and Phil Steinberg (2025) particularly emphasise the two points that privatisation of the oceans is by no means a new phenomenon, nor is it private. Instead, the role of states with their particular interests is crucial. For the first point, they are drawing on evidence from the 17th and 18th centuries, where in “public-private partnerships” European states relied substantially on private

actors involved in piracy activity to conquer the world. Privatising and conquering the world’s oceans has a long history in the capitalist world, which should not be forgotten when the current hype about the blue economy makes us believe that oceans are only now becoming an important economic frontier to be developed. Obviously, the state is an important actor in the process of assigning property rights. However, Ceglia et al. (2025) argue that in many privatisation processes, the state enters as an actor with genuine interests, which are not equivalent to the representations of specific groups. Illustrations come from the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the North Pacific Pollock fisheries, regulated by the USA, and the strategic partnership for conservation between the Seychelles Government and The Nature Conservancy.

Rapti Siriwardane-de Zoysa, Muhammed Soufi Cahya Gemilang, As-Syahidah Al-Haq, Muthmainnah Rama, and Muthmainnah Rama (2025) take us to the contradicting worlds of current Jakarta. They describe, on the one hand, the process of land reclamation by poor coastal dwellers with the help of mussel shells and, on the other hand, contrast it with the building of artificial islands for developing the most expensive beachfront property for the richest part of Jakarta’s society. The paper is a fascinating account of how all those processes are deeply rooted in a historical and societal context. What we observe is a historically layered process reproducing long-existing inequalities in postcolonial Jakarta. The evolution of privatisation and reclamation can be traced back to mechanisms of capital accumulation and state control. The paper describes how unequal the playing field is, with the factual consequence of the inundation of homes for some.

The contribution of Dan Hikuroa, Richard Le Heron, Paula Blackett, and June Logie (2025) plays a very important role in this collection of papers, as it explicitly aims to provide or consider non-Western perspectives. Drawing on historical and current debates, it provides the contrasting views on ocean use and conservation in Aotearoa/ New Zealand. The perspectives of incoming settlers have deviated completely from the perspectives of the original Māori population. Those differences still manifest themselves strongly in today’s Aotearoa/New Zealand society and are the root cause of many societal conflicts and discussions. From a Māori perspective, the concept of ‘owning’ with all its associated rights (Schlager and Ostrom 1992) is unimaginable in relation to oceans and coasts. The Maori concept is close to the understanding of common property. Not in the Ostromian sense, who sees common property as having a clearly defined smaller group of owners (Ostrom 1990), but more as a stewardship relationship, which also allocates unalterable rights to non-humans. Such a shared perspective on property

might help us become better stewards of our oceans and the rest of the world.

Christine Knott, Melanie Wiber, and Charles Mather (2024) explore and think about how they would imagine offshore aquaculture to be developed and handled in court by analysing 46 contemporary court cases on Canadian aquaculture development in the inshore zone. They describe privatisation as a process of property (Sikor and Lund 2009; von Benda-Beckmann et al. 2009), which starts with a societal imaginary, in this case, the vast open space that is out there and is waiting to be ‘developed’. This frontier imaginary is inherent to the Blue Economy discourse. The bargaining process is evolving long-term among actors with substantial asymmetries in bargaining potential, in which not only, as pointed out by Ceglia et al. (2025), the state, but more specifically, the courts play a crucial role. As the article shows, courts, endorsing a blue growth and tech-solution perspective, have played a key role in legitimising ocean privatisation despite substantial environmental and community concerns.

Jonas Hein, Silja Klepp and Anna Lena Bercht (2024) apply an environmental justice lens to three different ocean and coastal developments, namely the privatisation of beaches in Sicily (Italy), the expansion of Hamburg’s (Germany) port and its influence on estuarine fishers of the Elbe, and the consolidation of the banking sector in the Lofoten (Norway). They show that understanding access relations and property rights is key to revealing ocean injustices. Power relations, in which privatisation processes and access relationships are embedded, help us to understand whether injustices can be articulated and successful justice claims can be brought forward, thereby allowing for procedural justice to be done. Despite favourable or at least not disadvantageous formal rights in all cases, *de facto* access rights for the losers are extremely limited. *De facto* licences for beach space go to those with privileged networks. Access of Elbe fishers to their fishing grounds is, despite legal rights, substantially restricted, and fishers in Lofoten are *de facto* cut off from any form of credit, with significant consequences for their access to fish. The latter is explained by reference to the concept of translocal justice, which becomes increasingly important in a commodified and privatised world, where, through the rescaling of political and economic power, distant decisions have severe consequences on local situations. Thus, a bank director in Oslo determines the fate of the Lofoten fisher, and a Chinese shipyard designing the new generation of container ships has influence on the destiny of the Elbe estuarine fisher.

Maria Hadjimichael (2025) reports on an initiative of academics (including herself) who became involved as engaged citizens in the implementation of the EU marine spatial planning directive in Cyprus. The danger existed

that with this directive, it would have become legal to make parts of the sea and the coast of Cyprus private property, which, according to past regulations, had not been possible. It highlights the importance of the technical, scientific, and ethical capacities of the involved academics, which facilitated this initiative’s influential and successful intervention. These capacities, coupled with various state actors’ strong commitment to meticulously follow the legal requirements concerning participation and involvement, made it possible for their initiative to be successful. The paper advocates for academics to become active and involved in political processes, which might otherwise lead to the exclusion of many from the marine environment.

Dominant themes on ocean privatisation

In the following, we describe the common themes that we identified in analysing the various perspectives on ocean privatisation. According to our analysis, privatisation is seen as a process of property, which has clear justice implications in relation to distributional, procedural, recognitional and translocal justice. Within that process of property, it is essential to consider that non-private actors, and particularly the state, play a crucial role. Also, we note that privatisation is all but a new phenomenon. The historical perspective on ocean privatisation might not be thematised in many papers, but path dependencies are brought forward as a key aspect of the processes of property. Despite recognising that privatisation is not new, however, strong arguments are brought forward that, in the current age, it is something special, requiring focused attention. Last but not least, the theme of power and its role in the process of property emerges strongly.

Property Rights as a process of property

The term ‘ocean privatisation’ is a catchy one, but also misleading. Taking dictionaries as a reference point, the term privatisation refers to the “transfer of a business, industry, or service from public to private ownership and control” (Oxford Languages, but see also Wikipedia, Cambridge Dictionary). In Schlüter et al. 2020; we defined “privatization as a process that transfers exclusive property rights over valuable goods, spaces, and processes to private actors”. This is too simplistic for our present purposes, however (Ceglia et al. 2025; von Benda-Beckmann et al. 2006). What interests us and is described in this collection are any changes in property rights concerning the ocean.

According to Libecap, a property right as an institution “is a ubiquitous, uniquely human custom that underlies all economic activity in shaping expectations about resource

control, use, and exchange. It is based on a moral notion of civil society that includes acceptance of equity and norms of right and wrong in access, use, and avoiding theft and trespass (Merrill and Smith 2006; Wilson 2020, p. 15).” (Libecap 2024, p. 10). The collection of papers analyses many ongoing changes in those property rights. Most papers observe a change towards more exclusive property rights on a continuum between open access, state, common and private property (Bromley 1991). This process often comes along with commodification and intensification of use, as we currently observe under the umbrella of blue economy and blue growth strategies (Das 2023). However, this change in property rights is thankfully not necessarily a one-way street (Nayak, 2021), as the example of Hikuora et al. (2025) shows, where, due to the influence of Māori culture, property rights to the ocean have become more collectivised. It is also a complex bundle of rights that traverse the boundaries of the economic, political, social, and cultural.

All papers see “property as a process” (Knott et al. 2024). Referring to von Benda-Beckmann et al. (2006), Kronenburg Garcia et al. (2020) Ribot et al. (2003), and Sikor et al. (2009), Knott et al. describe this as follows: “Foundational to a processual understanding of property is the recognition that property enters social phenomena at multiple levels, not all of them congruent. As von Benda-Beckmann et al. (2006, 15) point out, property exists in cultural ideals and ideologies, in legal institutions, in actual social relationships, and in social practices. How property operates at these different levels can vary such that the social unit holding property, the property object itself, and the rights and responsibilities attached to that relationship may not closely match preconceived ideas, or even what is laid down in legal rules and regulations” (Knott et al. 2024, p. 3). It is a bargaining process between differently powerful actors who bring in their discourses and much more to shape property rights, most often in their favour. This is so colourfully described in Hikuora et al. (2025), where Māori and so-called Western worldviews fight with each other for reasonable and sustainable ocean property rights; in Schlüter et al. (2025), where small-scale fishers in Saint Louis, Senegal, fight vigorously on all fronts with the oil and gas industry, nature conservationists and the government of Mauritania; or in Port Mouton where Tony Charles (2025) observes how the community tries to find its way in this process of property, where changes in the political (state), societal, and economic sphere are happening at the same time. These are just three examples, but all nine articles of this collection describe empirically observable processes of ocean property around the world. The outcome of these processes has strong implications for distribution. After all, property rights define who has the right to what. Therefore, it is plausible that all authors in this collection have also drawn attention to implications for ocean justice.

Ocean justice

Hein et al. (2024) is the paper that explicitly applies an environmental justice lens. However, the topic of ocean justice is prominent in all papers (see Table 1). The topic is very prominent even in papers where we would not have expected it (see further explanations at the beginning of the discussion section). Hein et al. distinguish classically between distributive, procedural, and recognitional justice and add translocal justice. Distributive justice is the most important justice topic addressed. This is not astonishing as property rights determine the rights and obligations of people, and therefore, it is unlikely to find a change in property rights or institutions in a more general sense that has no distributive consequences (Knight 1992). The dominant thought seems to be that property rights changes have regressive effects. This is particularly striking in the case of Siriwardane et al. (2025), where land reclamation by the rich is a tactic to create one of the most valuable private properties in Jakarta and land reclamation by the poor is a way that creates insecure rights on land that is prone to inundation. Also in Hein et al. (2024), Schlüter et al. (2025), or Libecap (2024) the losers are quickly identified, and they are often small-scale fishers. However, it is by no means a black-and-white story. Ceglia et al. (2025) describe the debt for nature swap in Seychelles, which gave TNC a key role in marine governance and conservation, as a bargaining process, which, results in a win-win situation for the state and TNC (the distributive effects for other actors do not become so clear in the paper). Hikuora et al. (2025) describe a negotiation process between Māori and so-called Western settlers about property rights to the ocean, where, over centuries, the identity of the losers has been clear. However, some progress has been made in the last decades towards more ocean justice. Hadjimichael (2025) presents a story where academic activists have successfully maintained the coast as a common property resource within the EU-induced marine spatial planning process. Notably, the latter two cases demonstrate that distributive justice is often closely linked to procedural and recognitional justice. By having inclusive political institutions involved in the processes of property right changes, the likelihood of creating property rights, which give reasonable opportunities for many and create distributive justice and a productive, wealth-producing property system, is much higher (Robinson and Acemoglu 2012).

The second most coded concept of justice within all papers is translocal justice (Table 1). According to Hein et al., translocal justice “emphasizes the importance of ensuring that such interconnectedness is just and that translocal relations can be developed in a fair way” (Hein et al. 2024, p. 16). Many papers show how interconnected the property processes are and how local justice is most often

Table 1 Number of segments coded for each theme in the various articles^a

	Libecap	Schlüter et al.	Charles	Ceglia, Peters, Steinberg	Sirwardane et al.	Hikuroa, Le Heron et al.	Knott, Wilber, Mather	Hein, Klepp, Bercht	Hadjimichael	SUM
Article length in words (including all references abstracts etc.)	16366	15207	13185	10106	9234	15661	12233	15816	7942	115750
Property rights	33	30	49	27	30	46	27	47	14	303
Property rights > Property rights according to Libecap	16	9	24	9	10	17	13	16	5	119
Property rights > Property as a process	17	21	25	18	20	29	14	31	9	184
Ocean Justice	36	19	36	20	23	57	37	93	22	343
Ocean Justice > Distributional justice	19	11	12	5	16	18	9	26	1	117
Ocean Justice > Procedural justice	9	2	10	2	2	9	13	26	10	83
Ocean Justice > Recognitional justice	0	0	2	2	1	22	4	12	3	46
Ocean Justice > Translocal justice	8	6	12	11	4	8	11	29	8	97
Privatisation is all but private	14	20	19	24	14	13	18	23	8	153
Privatisation is all but new, currently something special	3	15	12	26	14	22	6	21	4	123
Historical examples	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	4
Path dependencies	2	13	5	17	10	20	4	11	2	84
However, currently something special	1	1	6	7	4	2	2	10	2	35
Power	28	30	27	26	28	42	28	41	21	271
SUM	114	114	143	123	109	180	116	225	69	1193

^aIt is important to note that counting the number of segments where the theme was mentioned is only one proxy for getting at the importance of the theme. The arguments made in the text are built on human reasoning and are not the result of a simple quantification. Quantifications are only used as a supporting argument

influenced by processes happening at some other place in the world, sometimes directly or indirectly connected and sometimes with a positive and potentially more often with a negative influence, as commodification and remoteness of decision-making leads to less consideration of justice concerns (Campling and Colas 2021). The world's hunger for high-trophic aquaculture species leads to highly exploitative patron-client relationships in the fishmeal industry of West Africa (Schlüter et al. 2025). Big container ships produced in Asia (Hein et al. 2024) or discourses and initiatives of global conservation NGOs (Libecap 2024) result locally in the lockout of fishers. However, policy processes happening in Brussels also lead to a more transparent process of beach property rights distributions in Sicily (Hein et al. 2024) or more procedural justice in the marine spatial planning process in Cyprus (Hadjimichael 2025). The concept of translocal justice seems particularly important in times when supply chain law initiatives are abolished, and own-nation-first approaches dominate international politics. This relates well to the next topic, as we focus now on the role of the state in privatisation processes.

Privatisation is all but private

This topic is brought to our attention by Ceglia et al. (2025), who remind us that the state's role should not be forgotten in

analysing ocean privatisation. It seems evident that, at least for formal property rights, the state plays a crucial role in their establishment and also in their enforcement. However, this is not the main point that Ceglia et al. are aiming to make. Referring to the 'privatisation' of North Pacific Pollock fisheries, so meticulously described by Mansfield (2004), they demonstrate how the state, in this case, the USA, is an actor with its own interests and agenda. Many processes of ocean privatisation define rights and give power to states. The role of the state as an actor is particularly obvious in the case of UNCLOS and the establishment of Exclusive Economic Zones, which are often seen as a precondition for further privatisation, e.g. the establishment of ITQs (Queffelec et al. 2021). This role of the state as an actor with its own agenda, which moves beyond the interests of powerful individual actors, becomes clear in the case of Saint Louis fisheries (Schlüter et al. 2025), where national strategic agendas for gas exploration and the wish to establish a Mauritanian fish processing sector exclude Saint Louis fishers from resources. Similar happenings can be seen when looking at the development of offshore aquaculture in Canada (Knott et al. 2024). However, one gets the impression that the state is acting there, if not necessarily on behalf, but strongly in the interest of the large companies developing this sector. Knott et al. (2024) make efforts to differentiate the state, as their main interest is to understand the role of

courts in the process of property. They thus demonstrate how, in many court cases, the judges have facilitated the interests of aquaculture companies, belittling the arguments of conservationists and farm neighbours for the sake of jobs and the growth of the sector. The authors fear that the more we move offshore, e.g. in aquaculture taking place in areas beyond national jurisdiction, the more an unhealthy alliance between national and huge companies' interests will lead to the neglect of other concerns towards the ocean.

Tony Charles (2025) agrees that the state cannot be seen as a single entity, but that it is comprised of multi-levels, which all might have their own interests. Knott et al. (2024) refer to the process of property as something far broader than the simple interaction between the state and private actors, including not only political and economic processes but social and cultural ones as well. Therefore, many other actors become crucial for achieving an understanding. Libecap (2024), for example, demonstrates how international NGOs, often coming from high-income societies, are very successful in determining the process of property in poorer countries to the detriment of traditional, usually extremely poor users. International organisations, like the World Bank, also often play crucial roles in these processes (Ceglia et al. 2025; Hamilton et al. 2021). Hadjimichael for the case of Cyprus (2025) but also many other publications, show that academia also plays and wants to play a significant role in this process of property (for example: Barbesgaard 2018; Bavinck et al. 2017; Bennett et al. 2015; Schlüter et al. 2023). All in all, it seems clear that the process of property is not simply private but is a complex process of collective action happening at various scales and fora of the society (Acemoglu et al. 2021).

Privatisation is not new but currently something special

The point that privatisation is not something new is also made by Ceglia et al. (2025). They observe a strong presentism in the current debate about ocean privatisation, potentially tied to the hype of the blue economy and blue grabbing. However, discussions on ocean privatisation, commodification, financialisation, and the fight for the rights to the oceans are many centuries old; the discussion of John Selden on *Mare Clausum* in 1635 might just be one example (Selden 1935). As the most remarkable example, which underlines their argument on interconnectedness between private actors and the state, Ceglia et al. (2025) write about the public-private partnership between nations and privateers who engaged in piracy worldwide. Campling and Colas (2021), in their historical analysis *Capitalism and the Sea*, or Bhattacharyya (2018) in *Empire and ecology in the Bengal Delta*, provide detailed accounts that indeed privatisation and the fight for

rights, or better said, grabbing, is at least as old as colonialism³. This is vividly shown in the paper of Hikuroa et al. (2025), who describe the various hundred-year-old fights of Māori vs. so-called Western perspectives on ocean use. Two completely opposing perspectives on the ocean and in how far it could be a private property, an item for helping accumulating individual gain, versus the view of 'Kaitiakitanga' - Māori "customs and practices developed to sustain water and life dependent on water, to achieve the principle of intergenerational sustainability" (Hikuroa et al. 2025) - is brought forward as an ongoing battle. It is clear that a historical perspective on ocean privatisation can help us understand current processes and, if not avoid, at least point out the foulest that is currently taking place in the process of ocean property. Hikuroa et al.'s (2025) paper is primarily not a historical piece, but aims to draw the reader's attention to this particular contemporary struggle. Their reference to the past occurs because indeed privatisation, or the process of property, is characterised by path- and interdependencies (Van Assche et al. 2014). Such path dependencies are present in many papers of this collection. Siriwardane et al. (2025) show how deeply rooted the "ethno-racialized" two different institutional systems of land-making practices in Jakarta are. Knott et al. (2024) assume path dependencies by drawing conclusions on future institutional development of aquaculture beyond national jurisdictions from previous court cases on offshore aquaculture in Canada. Charles (2025) and Schlüter et al. (2025) show how access to wild fish too is a path-dependent process.

Often, we see century-old patterns of ocean privatisation (Campling and Colas 2021; Ceglia et al. 2025; Wintersteen 2021). Nevertheless, all papers, including Ceglia et al. (2025), provide good reasons for arguing that ocean privatisation is not something new; in any case, however, it is pinpointed as an issue that does deserve special attention (see Table 1). The technological changes and the potential of human beings in the Anthropocene seem to have accelerated the process substantially (Aswani et al. 2017). Innovations in freezing and fish processing technology, for example, lead to a complete renegotiation of property rights to wild fish on the West Coast of Africa (Campling and Kim 2025; Schlüter et al. 2025; Touron-Gardic et al. 2022). Offshore aquaculture beyond national jurisdictions (Knott et al. 2024), still a hardly existing phenomenon, also because of property rights issues (Markus 2024), has become or will become a technological option rather soon. Land-making and artificial islands are a reality in various Asian countries (Siriwardane-de Zoysa et al. 2025). The increased degree

³ The two authors of this editorial paper confess that they live in cities (Bremen and Amsterdam) that have been heavily involved in this race for resources and oceans during colonialism and beyond (Ariese 2020; Aselmeyer and Kamche 2024).

of global interconnectedness is shown in Port Mouton, where local fishers compete for property with rich European holiday-home owners, who can pay so much more for a view than fishers for their access to wild fish (Charles 2025). Similar global connectedness is shown in Schlüter et al. (2025) where global supermarket customers buying salmon or shrimp compete with Senegalese parents aiming to buy food for their children; in Hein et al. (2024), where the fate of Elbe fishers is related to shipyards in Asia and their technological innovations; or in Ceglia et al. (2025), where TNC, based in the USA, is governing marine protected areas in the Seychelles.

This last example points to a third reason why ocean privatisation might currently be something special to be analysed. Institutional evolution is indeed a long-term path- and interdependent process (Acemoglu and Robinson 2008; Campling and Colas 2021). However, in the last decades, we have seen some remarkable governance innovations, which allow for new forms of property to emerge. ITQs are, by now, nearly a classical example, but possession and trade of an individual right to a certain share of a particular fish stock is a rather recent phenomenon (Bromley 2016). Debt for nature swaps, which allow a private conservation NGO in a public-private partnership to play a decisive role in marine protection, are a rather recent governance construct (Partelow et al. 2019). Credit-scoring algorithms, which cut off the Lofoten fishers from their local bank dealer and therefore from their access to fish, are an innovation of the 1990s. Libecap (2024) advocates in his paper for a governance structure for marine protection, which would hand over rights to traditional owners (particularly small-scale fishers), allowing them to bargain and potentially trade in markets.

Power, power asymmetries and the bargain/struggle for property rights

Power is an important topic in all papers. It has the second most codes after Ocean Justice (if we do not differentiate Ocean Justice into various components) (Table 1). Power is about possibilities occurring in the bargaining process over property rights. Asymmetries in using one or the other power resources for one's own goals are all too obvious in all papers. Those resources could be manifold. The importance of rhetoric (Knott et al. 2024), discourses, narratives, mental models – different schools of thought use different terms for closely related phenomena – is often stressed as an important power resource. Most prominent nowadays is the rhetoric of the sustainable blue economy, which is particularly versatile as it nicely combines a clear rhetoric for growth and economic activity with a sustainability agenda. Nobody can after all oppose a development that considers ecological,

social, and economic sustainability! Obviously - depending on the person's interests (and privatisation is usually about individual interests) - one or the other issue is higher on the priority list of a particular actor. The use of a rhetoric of praise for the blue economy as a means to push own ideas is most prominent in Knott et al. (2024), but is also present in other papers (Ceglia et al. 2025; Charles 2025; Hadjimichael 2025; Hein et al. 2024; Schlüter et al. 2025). Libecap (2024) instead points out the importance of a conservationist rhetoric, which provides important power resources for E-NGOS to install protected areas around the world. However, their power also derives from key positions they hold in (Western) governments and international arenas, from their better ability to get organised, and their higher level of natural science capabilities. For Libecap (2024), it seems that these (natural) science capabilities are instrumental as a power resource in the bargaining for protection. Academic capabilities are also key in the story of Hadjimichael (2025). The Cyprus academics have been good at getting their voice heard. However, it is also the rhetoric that oceans or beaches and the coast should be a common/public good, which resonated in the bargaining process, as the discussion about 'mare liberum' versus 'mare clausum' has a long history. This demonstrates the importance of path dependencies in goals (Van Assche et al. 2014), ideologies (Mahoney and Thelen 2009), and institutions (North 1990). Whose rhetoric is heard in the bargaining process about property rights is often related to the financial means a particular actor or actor group possesses (Campling and Colas 2021; Johnson and Acemoglu 2023). Financial means are described as a crucial power resource in many of the papers. The power differences described between the informal dwellers and the business elite in the process of land reclamation in Siriwardane et al. (2025) are obvious. The fishers of the Lofoten and the bargaining process they are engaged in for a credit with a big bank in Oslo seems like a fight of David against Goliath (Hein et al. 2024). Rich foreigners seem to buy off everything in Port Mouton (Charles 2025), similarly as it is done in many beautiful coastal and island places around the world (Müller et al. 2021; Ounanian and Howells 2024); and TNC is in a good bargaining position due to its ability to buy the debt of Seychelles and obtain a good proportion of the right to ocean governance in return (Ceglia et al. 2025). Ceglia et al. (2025) emphasises the role of the state in privatisation processes. In many papers, a coalition with the state is portrayed as a key power resource. In Knott et al. (2024), the courts are portrayed as vicarious agents of aquaculture companies. In Schlüter et al. (2025), the coalition between Kosmos Energy, British Petroleum, and the state is crucial for determining marine and coastal property rights. The alliance between conservationists and the state in Libecap (2024) or the helping bureaucrat who takes European

participation rules in Cyprus seriously (Hadjimichael 2025) are crucial in particular processes of property.

Power and power asymmetries are not only prominent in the papers because they are essential for understanding the direction of the process of property, but also because power and power asymmetries are also the outcome of a process of property. It is highly likely that processes of privatisation lead to an increase in power asymmetries (Neef et al. 2023). This concentration of power as a result of processes of property is addressed and lamented in nearly all papers. Only in the papers of Maria Hadjimichael (2025) and in Hikuroa et al. (2025) does some decentralisation of power seem to result from the process of property. In Hadjimichael (2025), the civil society initiative assures that coasts remain public property. In Hikuroa et al. (2025), after a prolonged period of domination by so-called Western settlers, the Māori understanding of property becomes increasingly important. Both papers describe processes of property that do not lead to more exclusive property rights for fewer individuals, but rather describe a process of commonising (Nayak and Berkes 2021), which distributes power more equally. Understanding how to reach such a desirable state is equally important as understanding how processes of privatisation, leading to more exclusion, evolve.

In many analyses of changes in property rights, power plays an important role, no matter which resource is being studied (Libecap, 1989/1993; Mahoney and Thelen 2009). However, we would argue that there are other reasons why perspectives on ocean privatisation particularly emphasise the role of power. Knott et al. (2024), looking at offshore aquaculture in areas beyond national jurisdiction, draw our attention to opaqueness, which characterises processes of property in the marine realm (McCormack 2017). Actions taking place in or on oceans are usually more difficult to observe than on land, often many jurisdictions overlap, and many different institutional systems meet each other (Van Assche et al. 2020). All these factors facilitate the use or abuse of power. And we would argue that the oceans and coasts are places where particularly severe power asymmetries exist. After all, actors engaged in activities that require exceptionally high resource endowments (e.g. oil and gas or cruise shipping) are interacting with people who are using the ocean as a commons for fulfilling their basic needs (Schlüter et al. 2025; Senghor 2025). The outcomes of such interactions are often skewed to the extreme.

Discussion

It is remarkable to note that despite having asked explicitly for different perspectives on ocean privatisation, we still find that all papers in the collection contribute to all central

themes in a relatively equal fashion (see Table 1). This happens despite the fact that we have, in most cases, used the definition provided by the authors considered to focus particularly on this theme (e.g. for property rights, we used the definitions of Libecap (2024) and Knott et al. (2024), for justice-related issues, we used the definitions of Hein et al. (2024); see annex one for the definition of all codes). It is interesting to see that the most important topic emerging from the collection of papers is ocean justice, followed by property rights and power. Justice is most often coded, despite the fact that privatisation is after all a change in property rights. We had expected, as they indeed have done, that Hein et al. (2024) would write most about the issue of ocean justice, as they are using an environmental justice lens. However, it is astonishing that Libecap (2024), who provides the property rights perspective that is usually first of all interested in questions of efficiency of property rights changes, also emphasises strongly environmental justice arguments. However, in contrast to Hein et al. (2024), he focuses mainly on distributive justice (due to the lack of assigned property rights, traditional right holders, like small-scale fishers, lose access due to powerful international alliances of conservationists). It is also noteworthy that Knott et al. (2024) focus on ocean justice issues, as we would not expect major distributive issues, at least concerning human beings, from offshore aquaculture. However, we must point out that their emphasis is also more on procedural and translocal justice.

That ocean privatisation is not private, but that, first of all, the state and other societal actors play a crucial role is also discussed in all papers. In relation to privatisation not being a new phenomenon but currently something special, it is interesting to see that only a few papers draw on historical examples for learning about ocean privatisation, which might indicate that there is a certain presentism, as claimed by Ceglia et al. (2025), in our perspectives on ocean privatisation. However, path dependencies influencing current privatisation processes are discussed in all papers. Power as a driver or as an outcome of privatisation processes is an essential topic in all papers, and figures quite evenly. From our perspective, this demonstrates the central role of power in understanding ocean privatisation processes.

How are the different themes related to each other? The processual understanding of property that seems to be more important than the more static definition of property rights provided by Libecap (2024) (Table 1) is relatively strongly intertwined with the other themes (see Fig. 2), as various other factors determine this process. Robust in this regard is the relationship between the process of property and the state's role in the process, which underpins Ceglia et al.'s (2025) point that it is essential to understand the role of non-private actors in understanding privatisation. What also stands out is that power is relatively closely related

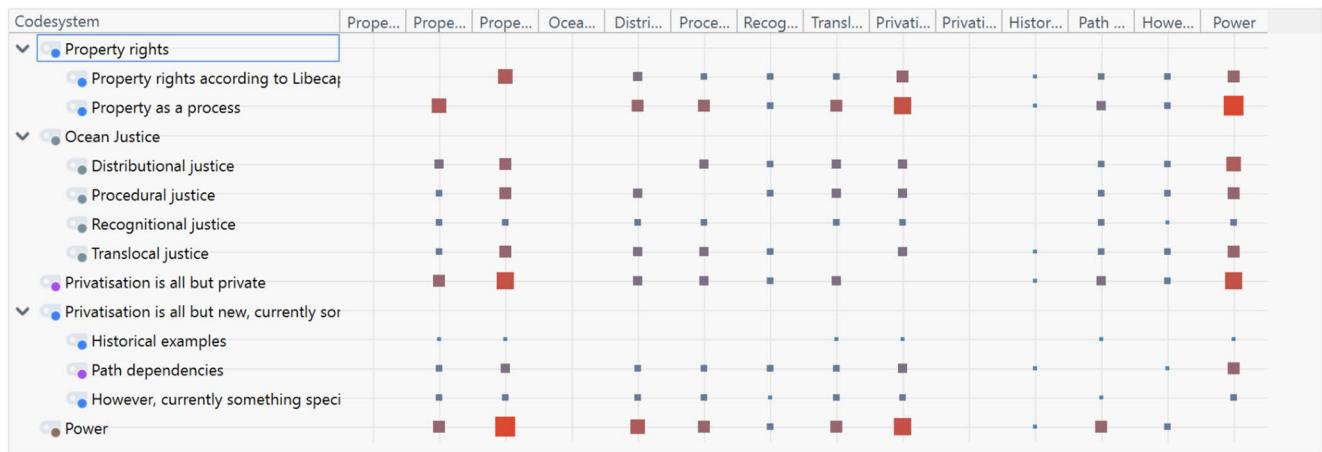


Fig. 2 Code relation matrix showing the relative frequency with which codes overlap in the coded documents. The size of the square corresponds to the number of overlapping segments

to all other themes. This seems to match the conclusion of Schlüter et al. (2025) that many different factors influencing privatisation processes can be identified with the help of a power lens.

On the one hand, this collection of papers aimed to show different perspectives on ocean privatisation. On the other hand, the purpose of the collection was also to foster the discussion between the various perspectives, as we observed

Table 2 (a) Citations of the contributing papers to the works of the other authors in the collection, (b) same as a) but excluding Schlüter et al. 2020; (c) Citations of the contributing papers to the five most crucial scholars in developing the corresponding author's particular perspective

a) Citations of papers of the authors of any other paper in the collection including Maarten Bavinck as an Editor

Article authors:	Mentioned in the articles of:									SUM
	Libecap	Schlüter et al.	Charles	Ceglia, Peters, Steinberg	Siriwardane et al.	Hikuroa, Le Heron et al.	Knott, Wiber, Mather	Hein, Klepp, Bercht	Hadjimichael	
Bavinck	1	4	16	1	4	0	1	4	0	31
Libecap	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
Schlüter et al.	3	0	13	5	3	0	3	6	0	33
Charles	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	4
Ceglia, Peters Steinberg	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	4
Siriwardane et al.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Knott, Wiber, Mather	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	2	11
Hikuroa, le Heron, et al.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	9
Hein, Klepp, Bercht	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Hadjimichael	1	6	1	6	1	0	1	1	0	17
SUM	7	18	39	12	15	0	5	12	11	119

b) Citations of papers of the authors of any other paper in the collection, including Maarten Bavinck as an Editor, excluding Schlüter et al. 2020

5 main authors of:	Mentioned in the articles of:									SUM
	Libecap	Schlüter et al.	Charles	Ceglia, Peters, Steinberg	Siriwardane et al.	Hikuroa, Le Heron et al.	Knott, Wiber, Mather	Hein, Klepp, Bercht	Hadjimichael	
Cross references	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bavinck	0	1	14	0	2	0	0	3	0	20
Libecap	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
Schlüter et al.	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
Charles	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	4
Ceglia, Peters, Steinberg	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	4
Siriwardane et al.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Knott, Wiber Mather	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	2	11
Hikuroa, Le Heron, et al.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	9
Hein, Klepp, Bercht	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Hadjimichael	0	5	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	10
SUMME	2	14	24	5	9	0	0	5	11	70

c) Citations of papers of the five main authors influencing the respective perspective of the corresponding author

5 main authors of:	Mentioned in the articles of:									SUM
	Libecap	Schlüter et al.	Charles	Ceglia, Peters, Steinberg	Siriwardane et al.	Hikuroa, Le Heron et al.	Knott, Wiber, Mather	Hein, Klepp, Bercht	Hadjimichael	
Libecap	0	22	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	22
Schlüter	11	0	18	0	0	0	0	2	0	31
Charles	9	12	0	0	2	0	8	5	1	37
Ceglia	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
Siriwardane	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Le Heron	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3
Knott	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	10	0	13
Hein	4	5	11	3	0	0	2	0	0	25
Hadjimichael	7	8	9	10	4	0	0	1	0	39
SUM	31	56	38	18	6	0	13	18	1	181
Number of references:	146	101	63	66	83	50	71	113	35	728

that the different perspectives on ocean privatisation are often polarised and do not speak to each other (Schlüter et al. 2020). Therefore, we analysed how the authors with their various perspectives refer to each other.

In a first attempt, we analysed how often the papers cited the other authors, who also contributed to the collection (Table 2a). We searched for citations of any of the authors' papers. We also included Maarten Bavinck, who did not contribute his own paper to the collection but was crucial in organising this collection. Therefore, we assumed that contributors would relate to him. It is difficult to interpret the numbers, as reference points are missing. However, we would argue that contributors hardly cite each other. This is despite the fact that at least one well-established senior scientist is participating in all papers. The three authors referenced most are Schlüter, Bavinck and Hadjimichael. However, this is driven mainly by the publication of Schlüter et al., which was the starting point for embarking on this collection. When excluding the reference to Schlüter et al., the total number of cross references reduces from 119 to 70 (Table 2b). The most often cited authors are then in the respective order Bavinck (20), Knott, Wiber, or Mather (11), Hadjimichael (10), Le Heron (9), and Libecap (8). However, this is driven by one (Libecap; Le Heron), two (Hadjimichael; Knott, Wiber & Mather) or a maximum of three authors (Bavinck).

As indicated above, judging whether this number of citations is few or many is difficult. However, considering that in total all papers refer to 728 sources (many sources are

cited various times), it seems few. Therefore, we asked the corresponding authors of each paper to provide us with the names of the five most crucial scholars in developing their particular perspective on ocean privatisation (Table 3). In total, the number of citations rose from 119 to 181 (Table 2a & 2c), which we also would not consider to be a substantial increase. Papers cite most often the top five authors of Maria Hadjimichael (39), Tony Charles (37) and Achim Schlüter (31). Their top five authors were cited by six papers, respectively. However, the citations stem from a few papers. This is most pronounced for Libecap, whose top five authors were only cited by Schlüter et al. (2025). That the authors of Maria Hadjimichael, Tony Charles and Achim Schlüter have been cited more often seems to be mainly influenced by the following: they all three mentioned Elinor Ostrom (cited 19 times), a person, who researched processes of property and aimed to bridged gaps between various perspectives, therefore, one could assume that she is citable by scholars from many different perspectives. However, only three papers referred to her (Libecap 7 times, Schlüter 3 times, and Charles 9 times). The other author, apart from Elinor Ostrom, who drives the high number of citations of Maria Hadjimichael's favourites, is Liam Campling, who plays a substantial role in Schlüter et al. (2025) and Ceglia et al. (2025). Neither Ostrom nor Campling are mentioned by Maria Hadjimichael, which might be due to the particular character of her paper, which basically reports on academic activism. Tony Charles and Achim Schlüter both have Daniel Bromley on their list of top five, and they extensively refer to him (10 & 8 times, respectively).

Table 3 The five authors mentioned by the first author, when asked: "Could you please send me your top 5 authors, whom you think have been crucial in developing your particular perspective on ocean privatisation?"^a

Gary Libecap	Ronald Coase, Harold Demsetz, Yoram Barzel, Douglas North, William Cheung
Achim Schlüter	Douglas North, Jack Knight, Elinor Ostrom, Daniel Bromley, Daron Acemoglu,
Tony Charles	Fikret Berkes, Daniel Bromley, Elinor Ostrom, Melanie Wiber, Maarten Bavinck ^b
Carlo Ceglia	Becky Mansfield, Liam Campling, Alex Colás, Laleh Khalili, James Fairhead
Rapti Siriwardane	Bosman Batubara, Emma Colven, AbdouMaliq Simone, Adam Grydehøj, David Harvey
Richard Le Heron ^c	Fiona McCormac, Brett Christophers, Kimberley Maxwell, Elspeth Probyn, Rebecca V. Gladstone-Gallagher
Christine Knott	F. & K. Benda-Beckmann, Angela Kronenburg García, Jesse Ribot, Irus Braverman, Sara Seck ^d
Jonas Hein	Jesse Ribot, Tor A Benjaminsen, Eric Kit-wai Ma, David Schlosberg, Nathan Bennett ^e
Maria Hadjimichael	Wesley Flannery, Silvia Federici, David Harvey, Elinor Ostrom, Liam Campling

^aThe automated search used family names of the authors and was manually checked for consistency

^bWe excluded Schlüter, Bavinck et al. (2020), as this is already accounted for in the other search and also it would have squeezed the results as nearly all papers are referring to this paper. However, other papers by Maarten Bavinck have indeed strongly influenced perspectives on ocean privatisation

^cAs Richard Le Heron is the corresponding author of this paper the question was asked to him instead of to Dan Hikuroa

^dChristine Knott mentioned Schlüter as one of the five authors. However, this name is already included in the other search and it would have squeezed the results, as nearly every paper is referring to this author. Therefore, AI assist was asked in relation to Knott et al. (2024): "Which are the 5 most important authors in this paper? Please do not refer to the authors of the paper themselves nor Schlüter". The list produced was: Braverman, Seck, Jeffery, Grear, and Rasmussen. The first scholar not mentioned by the author was chosen. Seck was mentioned 9 times in Knott et al

^eJonas Hein mentioned Schlüter as one of the five authors. However, this name is already included in the other search and it would have squeezed the results, as nearly every paper is referring to this author. Therefore, AI assist was asked in relation to Hein et al. (2024): "Which are the 5 most important authors in this paper? Please do not refer to the authors of the paper themselves nor Schlüter". The list produced was: Bennett et al., Ribot and Peluso, Fricker, Fraser, Lukes. Nathan Bennett was chosen, as he is one of the important authors in relation to ocean justice

Only two other papers also refer to him (Hein et al. 2024; Libecap 2024). However, having been cited 22 times in all papers together, he is even outperforming Maarten Bavinck (if we exclude Schlüter et al. (2020), the highest cited person among all authors involved. As already indicated, it is difficult to interpret this evidence, as reference points are missing. However, the initial assumption that there are certain polarisations in the debate and rather few cross references taking place among authors who aim to understand ocean privatisation seems to be supported by this evidence. This is astonishing as all but two authors (Gary Libecap, Richard Le Heron) are either regular attendees of the MARE conference and/or have published already before in *Maritime Studies*, the MARE journal and might be assumed to be aware of other perspectives.

Conclusion

The collection of papers offers a rich diversity of processes of property around the world. All empirically grounded papers show how each process has its individual characteristics, and the analysis needs to be grounded in those particularities. However, we can also see that there are many commonalities. Most of the papers highlight processes of property occurring in today's marine realm, and it therefore seems well justified for social scientists to focus on the issue right now, as there seems to be an acceleration of such processes taking place. In the analysis of this accelerated process, it is, however, not only essential to look at processes of privatisation, in other words, the processes which lead to more exclusive property rights, but also at processes which move in the opposite direction, namely, as processes of commonising (e.g., Hikuroa et al. 2025). After all, due to the specific characteristics of oceans, due to their supportive roles for humankind, such property arrangements are crucial (Gelcich and Donlan 2015; Nayak, 2021; Ostrom 1990; Schlüter et al. 2019). Institutions shape the world we will live in. This is demonstrated by the high emphasis on justice-related topics in our collection. Processes of property in the ocean realm are also by no means a new phenomenon. Therefore, historical perspectives can help us understand current processes. Path dependencies seem to reproduce specific processes again and again. Power asymmetries lead to property rights outcomes that once more create power asymmetries. However, due to the complexities involved, this is not a deterministic process, but a condition of constant bargaining with uncertain outcomes (Johnson and Acemoglu 2023), which are well worth fighting for (Hadjimichael 2025). We therefore conclude that continuing the discussion on the process of ocean property from various perspectives that we have embarked upon is needed.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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