

Synergies between the blue economy and SDG 14: pathways to a sustainable future

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Abstract. The ocean is considered the new economic frontier due to its potential for resource wealth and economic growth driver. However, the ocean faces increasing pressures from overexploitation, pollution, biodiversity decline, and climate change. In this context, the concept of Blue Economy emerges, which seeks to reconcile economic development with the environmental sustainability of oceans and coastal areas. Its linkage with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 14 - Life below Water, is a challenge due to possible competitions and conflicts between individual or industrial targets. The Blue Economy encompasses both established and emerging sectors, and is promoted as a strategy to protect the world's oceans and water resources. SDG 14 seeks to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources, and has driven global efforts in this regard, such as the creation of marine protected areas and the reduction of marine pollution. Identifying the synergies between the Blue Economy and the SDGs is essential to harness the full potential of the ocean in a responsible and sustainable way.

Keywords. blue economy, SDG, sustainable development.

1. Introduction

For many, the ocean is the new economic frontier. It holds the promise of immense wealth of resources and great potential to drive economic growth, employment, and innovation. And it is increasingly recognized as indispensable to addressing many of the global challenges facing the planet in the coming decades. While the ocean's potential to help address these challenges is enormous, it is already under pressure due to overexploitation, pollution, declining biodiversity, and climate change. Realising the ocean's full potential will therefore require responsible and sustainable approaches to its economic development (OECD, 2016).

In this context, the blue economy is becoming a popular term for people who are increasingly concerned about the oceans, seas, and coastal areas. In a more conscious view, the concept of the blue economy seeks to promote economic growth, social inclusion, and the preservation or improvement of livelihoods, while ensuring the environmental sustainability of oceans and coastal areas (WORLD BANK, 2017).

Adopting more sustainable ways of managing the ocean is a global priority and possible solutions on a global scale are advocated by the United Nations in

its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the context of this work, notably SDG 14 – Life Below Water – "Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development" and which covers, among other characteristics, the economic pressures on the marine environment, as well as the specificities of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and coastal communities (STIBBE; PRESCOTT, 2020).

Linking the Blue Economy to the UN SDGs is challenging, especially when there are potential competitions or conflicts between individual or industrial targets, such as fossil fuel-based carbon emission reductions and energy supply (LEE; NOH; KHIM, 2020b). Thus, this research seeks to address the challenges and identify opportunities for future investigations. In order to identify the key synergies between the Blue Economy and the UN SDGs, this research attempts to provide some evidence to bridge the gap between the "Blue Economy" in the context of the UN SDGs.

2. Methodology

A metodologia utilizada neste artigo consistiu em uma revisão bibliográfica abrangente e sistemática sobre o tema da Economia Azul e sua relação com os Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável (ODS),

com ênfase no ODS 14 - Vida na Água. Primeiramente, os pesquisadores realizaram uma busca extensiva em bases de dados acadêmicas, como Scopus e Web of Science, utilizando termos de pesquisa relevantes, como "Economia Azul", "ODS 14", "Blue Economy", "SGD" e outros relacionados ao tema. Também foram consultados relatórios, reportes e documentos de organizações internacionais com publicações relevantes. Os dados e informações relevantes foram extraídos dos estudos selecionados e organizados de forma a construir uma revisão abrangente sobre o tema. Foram identificadas as principais sinergias entre a Economia Azul e o ODS 14, bem como os possíveis conflitos e desafios envolvidos.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Blue economy

The term Blue Economy has become a popular term in recent governmental, intergovernmental, and academic literature, but it remains poorly defined. Depending on the case, it may represent an end development goal or a development path (CISNEROS-MONTEMAYOR, 2019). The term Blue Economy has been used in different ways and similar terms such as "ocean economy" or "marine economy" are used without clear definitions.

The concept of the Blue Economy is rooted in a number of different disciplines (such as geoeconomics, politics, economics, social and cultural studies), crossing the boundaries of ecology, with tipping points giving a new sense of urgency to the environment and the economy and reassessing the oceanic, biological, and economic relationship around the world (LEE; NOH; KHIM, 2020). A study conducted by Santos (2021c, 2022) conducted a bibliometric search based on scientific publications from the Scopus and WoS databases, covering the period 1959-2020; and given the diversity of approaches to the topic, he pondered that there are "fifty shades of blue (economy)", as defended by Vieira, Leal and Calado (2020) apud (SANTOS et al., 2022).

The Blue Economy is a relatively new concept that has its origins in the concept of the green economy endorsed at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. It shares the same desired goal: improving human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcity. The UN's concept paper on the Blue Economy begins by emphasizing the importance of the oceans: The oceans cover 72% of our planet's surface and constitute more than 95% of the biosphere. At the same time, it emphasized that the oceans "provide food and livelihoods to a substantial part of the global population and are the means of transportation for 80% of global trade" (KONTOVAS et al., 2022).

The World Bank has defined the "Blue Economy" as "the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs, while

preserving the health of the ocean ecosystem (WORLD BANK, 2017)." In Brazil, in a conceptual document, the Technical Group (WG) GDP of the Sea, presented a definition of the concept of Blue Economy as "the sustainable use of marine resources for economic development, improvement of social well-being and job creation, conserving the health of ocean and coastal ecosystems" (SANTOS et al., 2022).

The Blue Economy encompasses both economic activities that already generate considerable wealth and emerging ones that have the potential for growth and value creation. The OECD divides ocean-based industries into established and emerging sectors. In the first group, there are: capture fishing, seafood processing, shipping, ports, ship construction and repair, offshore oil and gas, shipbuilding, maritime and coastal tourism, maritime commercial services, maritime research and development, education, and dredging. The second group includes: marine aquaculture, deepwater and ultra-deepwater P&G, offshore wind, ocean renewable energy, marine and seabed mining, maritime security and surveillance, marine biotechnology, high-tech marine products and services, among others (OECD, [n.d.]).

The Blue Economy, an increasingly popular concept as a strategy to protect the world's oceans and water resources. It can arise when economic activity is in balance with the long-term capacity of ocean ecosystems to sustain activity in a sustainable manner. Moreover, in recent years, the Blue Economy has been widely promoted by various stakeholders as a concept and strategy for the preservation of oceans and water resources around the world (LEE; NOH; KHIM, 2020).

3.2 SDG 14 – Life Below Water

For the headings of the sections, use Calibri 14 pt. bold with single line spacing and 6 pt. spacing after; and for the subsections Calibri 12 pt. bold with single line spacing and 3 pt. spacing after. To understand the history of SDG 14, it is necessary to consider the previous trajectory of initiatives related to oceans and marine life. Prior to SDG 14, there were other international initiatives and agreements that sought to promote ocean sustainability. Considering a landmark event, in 1987, the document Our Common Future or, as it is well known, the Brundtland Report, presented a new look at development, defining it as the process that "satisfies present needs, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". In the Brundtland Report, chapter 10 – Managing the Commons, there is an item called Oceans: The Balance of Life, mentioned that:

"On Earth's wheel of life, the oceans provide the balance. They play a critical role in maintaining life-support systems, moderating the climate, and sustaining animals and plants" (BRUNDTLAND, 1987).

An important and prominent event was the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (ECO-92), which resulted in the creation of Agenda 21, a

comprehensive action plan for sustainable development in various areas, especially on the oceans and seas. Ahead of the Rio+20 conference, held in Rio in 2012, a new concept gained prominence in the context of the international financial crisis. The concept was called "green growth." According to the OECD, this term refers to boosting economic growth and development while ensuring that natural resources continue to provide the ecological services on which our well-being depends. Recognizing the relevance of this new concept and its close link to growth from terrestrial ecosystems, a group of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) highlighted the importance of the Blue Economy (EIKESET et al., 2018). Thus, in the review event (Rio+20), in the Final Declaration of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, article 158 included the recognition of oceans, seas and coastal areas as an integral and essential component of the Earth's ecosystem (AMBIENTE et al., 1992). In this way, the concept of the Blue Economy was expressed for the first time prominently at the United Nations Rio+20 Conference.

In the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the conservation of the oceans, seas and marine resources was covered by the broader goal of ensuring environmental sustainability, set out in MDG 7. With the launch of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations in 2015, it represented a significant advance of the SDGs over the MDGs in terms of substantive reach. While the MDGs were predominantly 'social' in nature, the SDGs "aim to cover the entire universe of sustainable development. This is particularly evident in the fact that environmental sustainability, rather than being relegated to a single goal, now extends across multiple SDGs that explicitly target key global environmental issues, including SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 14 (life below water) and SDG 15 (life on land) (NTONA; MORGERA, 2018).

Thus, with the advent of the SDGs, the theme of oceans and seas gains due representation through SDG 14 – Life below Water, with the objective of conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development (SACHS; SCHMIDT-TRAUB, 2020). Thus, SDG 14 recognizes the importance of the oceans for the survival and well-being of humanity, as well as the need to protect and sustainably use these resources. The targets of SDG 14 include reducing marine pollution, conserving and sustainably managing marine resources, protecting coastal and marine ecosystems, preventing ocean acidification, and strengthening ocean research and monitoring capacity (UNITAR, 2016).

SDG 14 has driven efforts around the world to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources. Several countries have been working to establish marine protected areas, implement sustainable fishing practices, reduce

plastic pollution in the oceans, and promote awareness of the importance of conserving marine resources (SANTOS et al., 2022).

In 2016, the United Nations concluded the first World Ocean Assessment, which pointed to the urgency of sustainably managing ocean activities. Thus, in 2017, the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development was proclaimed, to be implemented from 2021 to 2030, seeking to fulfill the commitments of the 2030 Agenda, focusing on SDG 14 and related (MCTI, [n.d.]).

Thus, the oceans, seas and marine resources are indispensable to achieving global sustainability, with targets corresponding to some of the most pressing issues confronting sustainability. As such, the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean is now recognized as one of the most important sustainability challenges worldwide (WRIGHT, 2017).

4. Discussions

Systematic efforts to connect SDG 14 with business activities seem necessary to achieve the widest possible range of benefits and multiplier effects (UNDP, 2017). It is important to remember that while a Blue Economy approach may entail important changes in the way development is carried out, many of the sectors that would potentially be included are already very large and distributed around the world. In this sense, the Blue Economy not only implies that new developments incorporate inclusive and environmentally sound economic development concerns, but that existing and potentially quite significant industries are transformed for the need to balance the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in relation to the oceans (CISNEROS-MONTEMAYOR, 2019; GRIGGS et al., 2013). It is noteworthy that, recent policymaking related to the Blue Economy is significantly influenced by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Steven et al., 2019), specifically SDG 14, "conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development", which fundamentally outlines the importance of the oceans on a global scale.

Voyer et al., (2018) highlight that, the Blue Economy is grounded in two distinct dimensions – opportunities for growth and development, on the one hand, and threatened and vulnerable spaces that require protection, on the other. These two debates present intrinsic conflicts, demanding solutions that allow us to take advantage of the opportunities associated with the ocean economy, while recognizing and addressing the threats involved (KONTOVAS et al., 2022). Thus, meeting the challenge of linking the Blue Economy to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) becomes a complex task, especially when possible competitions or conflicts arise between UN goals or industrial interests. The adoption of practices related to the

Blue Economy can bring direct benefits to several SDGs. In the appendix is a descriptive table of the beneficial correlations that the blue economy can present for the SDGs, in particular SDG 14 and its respective targets.

The blue economy, if implemented in a sustainable and integrated manner, can play a key role in promoting the SDGs, specifically ocean-related targets, promoting conservation, sustainable use of marine resources, reducing pollution, strengthening ecosystems, and promoting inclusive and sustainable economic development for coastal communities.

In a study conducted (LEE; NOH; KHIM, 2020b) through a literature search between 1998 and 2018, we found that the Blue Economy is highly associated with SDGs 14 and 17. Notably, as the Blue Economy directly addresses global ocean and water resources, it is not surprising to find that SDG 14 Life Below Water is the highest goal of the SDGs. Interestingly, SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation is not highly associated with the Blue Economy, while SDG 15 Life on Land and SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production are highly linked to the Blue Economy, as shown in the figure below.

Figure 1 - The identified SDGs most linked to the Blue Economy (1998 – 2018). The asterisk in the yellow bars above represents the top 5 (right) of the UN SDG 17.



Source: Lee et al, 2020b.

For the Blue Economy to effectively contribute to the SDGs, it is necessary to adopt integrated approaches that consider social, economic and environmental aspects. This entails implementing appropriate policies and regulations, promoting international cooperation, and engaging multiple actors, including governments, the private sector, civil society organizations, and local communities.

Importantly, the transition to a sustainable Blue Economy will not be without challenges. Issues such as overfishing, marine pollution, degradation of coastal ecosystems and lack of institutional capacity in many regions need to be addressed.

5. Conclusion

This article shows the synergy, complexity and diversity of the Blue Economy in relation to the UN SDGs, in particular SDG 14 – Life Below Water. The Blue Economy offers an approach to ocean and coastal development that strictly and explicitly incorporates economic development with environmental conservation. The principles of the

Blue Economy are synergistic with the SDGs, and can provide a roadmap for sustainable practices related to the oceans.

By conserving the oceans and their resources, promoting sustainable use, developing responsible value chains, investing in innovation and sustainable infrastructure, and promoting education and awareness, businesses can play a key role in building a sustainable future for the oceans. The transition to a Blue Economy requires joint efforts by governments, the private sector, civil society and local communities. Only with an integrated and collaborative approach will we be able to protect the oceans and ensure that they continue to play their vital role in the sustainability of our planet. In this context, the Blue Economy should not be seen as a slight improvement over business as usual, but as an opportunity for a fundamental shift towards ambitious social and environmental goals.

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7. Appendix

Sustainable Development Goals	Potential positive impacts generated by activities related to the Blue Economy
SDG 1: No poverty	The blue economy can generate jobs, promote entrepreneurship, and create economic opportunities for coastal and island communities, contributing to poverty reduction and improved livelihoods.
SDG 2 Zero Hunger and Sustainable Agriculture	The blue economy includes sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, which can provide a source of nutritious and sustainable food, contributing to food security and nutrition.
SDG 3 Health and Well-Being	Oceans play a key role in human health. The blue economy promotes the conservation of marine ecosystems by reducing pollution and improving water quality, which positively affects the health of coastal communities and everyone who depends on the oceans.
SDG 4 Quality Education	The blue economy provides opportunities for education and training in ocean-related fields such as marine sciences, coastal management, and sustainable tourism, contributing to quality education and awareness of the importance of the oceans.
SDG 5 Gender Equality	The blue economy can promote women's inclusion and equitable participation in ocean-related sectors such as fisheries, aquaculture, and coastal tourism, strengthening gender equality and women's empowerment.
SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation	The blue economy is directly linked to the health and quality of ocean water. By promoting the conservation of marine ecosystems and reducing pollution, it contributes to the preservation of drinking water and the promotion of adequate sanitation.
SDG 7 Affordable and Clean Energy	The blue economy can drive the development of renewable energy sources in the oceans, such as tidal energy, wave energy, and offshore wind energy, thereby promoting access to clean and sustainable energy.
SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth	The blue economy can drive sustainable economic growth through the creation of decent and inclusive jobs in sectors such as coastal tourism, shipping, fisheries, and aquaculture.
SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure	The blue economy stimulates innovation and the development of sustainable technologies for ocean-related sectors, promoting the growth of industry and the development of maritime infrastructure.
SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities	The blue economy can contribute to reducing inequalities between and within countries by promoting equitable access to marine resources and the fair distribution of benefits generated by ocean-related activities.
SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities	The blue economy promotes the sustainable management of coastal zones, the protection of marine ecosystems, and the promotion of sustainable urban planning practices to ensure resilient and sustainable coastal cities and communities.
SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production	The blue economy emphasizes the importance of sustainable utilization of marine resources, reducing waste, adopting responsible fishing practices, promoting sustainable supply chains, and encouraging responsible consumption of seafood.
SDG 13 Action Against Global Climate Change	The blue economy contributes to climate change mitigation by promoting renewable energy from the oceans, reducing marine pollution, and conserving coastal and marine ecosystems, which act as natural carbon sinks.
SDG 14 Life Below Water	The main objective of the blue economy is the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources, contributing directly to the preservation of marine biodiversity, the reduction of pollution and the restoration of coastal and oceanic ecosystems.
Goal 14.1	Through sustainable practices and appropriate regulation, the blue economy can help prevent and reduce marine pollution, both from land-based activities and from marine debris and nutrient pollution.
Goal 14.2	The blue economy promotes the sustainable management and protection of marine and coastal ecosystems, strengthening their resilience and taking action to restore them. This contributes to ensuring healthy and productive oceans while avoiding significant adverse impacts.
Goal 14.3	The blue economy can collaborate in tackling ocean acidification by strengthening scientific cooperation at all levels, promoting research, and sharing knowledge to minimize and address this problem.

Goal 14.4	By effectively regulating fisheries, the blue economy contributes to ending overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and destructive fishing practices. Implementing management plans based on scientific evidence helps restore fish populations, striving for maximum sustainable yield.
Goal 14.5	The blue economy promotes the conservation of at least 10% of coastal and marine areas, respecting legislation and using reliable scientific information. This contributes to the preservation of marine biodiversity and the protection of critical ecosystems.
Goal 14.6	The blue economy can play an important role in prohibiting harmful fisheries subsidies, which lead to overcapacity and illegal fishing. In addition, it seeks to eliminate subsidies that contribute to unreported and unregulated fishing, preventing the introduction of new subsidies of this kind. Special and differential treatment for developing countries is considered in this process.
Target 14.7	Through the sustainable use of marine resources, such as fisheries, aquaculture, and tourism, the blue economy can increase economic benefits for small island developing states and least developed countries. This promotes sustainable economic development and improved living conditions for coastal communities.
Target 14.a	The blue economy supports the increase of scientific knowledge, the development of research capacities and the transfer of marine technology, especially to developing countries, including small island developing States and least developed countries. This aims to improve the health of the oceans and harness marine biodiversity for sustainable development.
Target 14.b	The blue economy seeks to provide access to marine resources and markets for small-scale artisanal fishers, valuing their traditional practices and ensuring their livelihoods.
Goal 14.c	Through the implementation of the international law of the sea, as reflected in UNCLOS, the blue economy ensures the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and their resources.
SDG 15 Life on Land	The blue economy is intrinsically linked to the conservation of coastal ecosystems, mangroves, coral reefs, and marine habitats, which are vital for terrestrial life. By promoting the sustainability of the oceans, it contributes to the protection of terrestrial biodiversity.
SDG 16 Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions	The blue economy promotes international cooperation in the management and conservation of marine resources, the fight against illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing, and the building of effective institutions for ocean governance.
SDG 17 Partnerships and Means of Implementation	The blue economy emphasizes the importance of collaboration between governments, the private sector, civil society, and local communities, encouraging public-private partnerships to promote the sustainable development of the oceans.