The “environmental services” debate and Rio+20

There has been a lot more talk recently about *environmental services*, especially in connection with preparations for the Rio+20 conference, taking place this June. To understand this, we should briefly address the central theme of this conference: the concept of the “green economy”.

The term “green economy” comes up a lot in news about Rio+20. It sounds like a good thing, but it is important to understand that this is a proposal that has emerged in the context of a deeply capitalist economy. The main capitalist economies are facing a major financial-economic crisis, which has become particularly acute in the last few years, and in seeking ways to overcome the crisis they are searching for alternatives that will allow their companies to accumulate capital and increase their profits once again, on the basis of productive but also speculative activities – in other words, to make money “without doing anything”.

The UN, through UNEP, its environmental programme, is playing a key role through its Green Economy Initiative, including the TEEB study, discussed above, and the 2011 report “Towards a Green Economy”. The initiative also gave rise to the so-called Green New Deal, adopted by the United States and other countries, which is presented as a “win-win” approach that tackles both the economic-financial and environmental crises, by redirecting investments to so-called “natural capital”, as well as new, supposedly clean technologies (such as those based on biomass) and the “carbon market”.

In this context, *environmental services* and their trade have taken on key importance as a veritable pillar of the “green economy”. The result, according to Silvia Ribeiro of the ETC Group, which is monitoring and researching this process, is “greater commodification and privatization of nature and ecosystems, through the integration of their functions (defined as ‘services’) into financial markets.” (36)

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36 - Ribeiro, Silva: ´As novas fronteiras da mercantilização da natureza´, em Le Monde Diplomatique Brasil, Ano 5, nr. 53, dezembro de 2011