

An Introduction to Seasteading

Presented by Chuck Grimmatt



“Buy land, they’re not making it anymore.” - Mark Twain

“Production resumed.” -Seasteading Institute, 2007

Note: This is just an introduction. I will not go into the technicalities of how the physical structures will look or how individual services will be provided; this will be determined by individual circumstances and innovation on the free market. This presentation is intended to show what seasteading is, why people are pursuing it, and why it is a viable option. For in-depth discussion on specific issues, the best place to consult is the Seasteading Institute’s book: http://seasteading.org/book_beta/

Keep in mind that seasteading is in its early stages and does not have all the answers, nor is it a utopia. It will not suit all people. It is grounded in current technology, not technology that is only imaginary, and its apparent problems are being worked on daily.

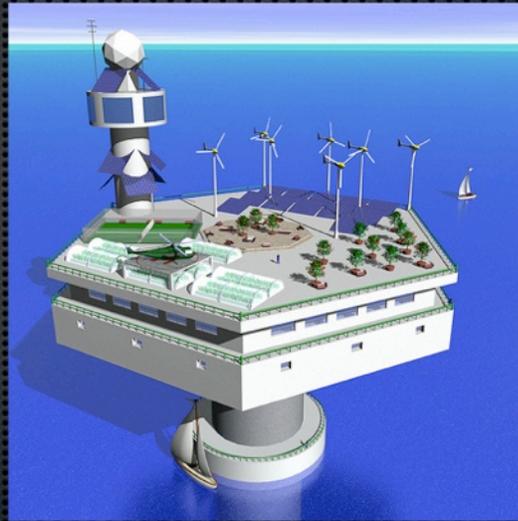
While we will never reach utopia, we think we can make some fundamental improvements to current social systems, and in the real world, that is plenty to strive for. Also keep in mind that life on sea is very different from life on land. Seasteaders will likely have different lifestyles than they did on land. To think about this, it is necessary to detach yourself from ideas of how daily life, government, and services are modeled and provided on land.

It is always open to new ideas and new technology, though, so visit www.seasteading.org to find out how to help.

What is Seasteading?

Homesteading the high seas

Creating dwellings for permanent occupation on the ocean.



Note: Though seasteads typically are understood to be structures linked together to form a new sovereign community, this does not necessarily have to be the case. See the note on slide 4 for an explanation.

The Seasteading Institute



- In 2007, Patri Friedman and Wayne Gramlich founded the Seasteading Institute as a vehicle for fundraising and research.
- Their mission: “Establish permanent, autonomous ocean communities to enable experimentation and innovation with diverse social, political, and legal systems.”

Fun fact: Patri Friedman is Milton Friedman’s grandson

Most of the ideas presented in this presentation are from the Seasteading Institute. TSI is the only major institute dedicated to research and experimentation on seasteading. The idea is not original—it dates to the late 1960s. Back then, it meant living on boats. Today, it means something very different, as this presentation will show.

Why form new societies rather than change what we have?

- Many people are unhappy with the current state of society, they have a vision of what a better society would look like, and want to live around that vision.
- Whether you are a libertarian, environmentalist, communist, anarcho-capitalist, pacifist, sustainist, or anything else, seasteading offers you the opportunity to try your ideas and learn from what works and what does not.
- Government tends to be very hard to change and to loosen its grip on a land area. Seasteading virtually gets rid of these two problems and allows government to change to better suit the needs of society without exploiting them. This idea is discussed more later in the presentation.
- Something to keep in mind: Seasteading does not result in a utopia, but it should increase the efficiency of any government and allow the freedom to try different forms of government. If you do not like freedom and do not like efficient government, seasteading is not for you.

Also, keep in mind that seasteaders are not necessarily seeking absolute freedom. They are looking for as much freedom as they can get. A seastead does not have to be sovereign. They can very well be used for purposes other than forming new societies. An example is having a resort just off the coast; this does not have to be a sovereign entity outside of a country's jurisdiction.

A significant amount of freedom can still be gained on the ocean, even if a seastead is under the jurisdiction of a country (by a flag of convenience, possibly). This allows the seastead to be outside of any local or state jurisdiction and just follow the national rules. This certainly allows more freedom and allows experimentation with how to structure a local community most effectively.

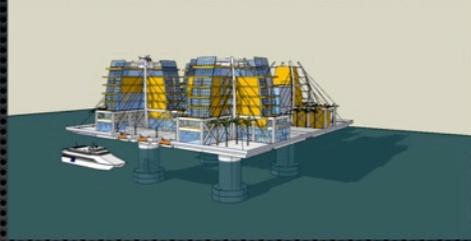
Why oceans?



- Instead of only discussing ideas and theorizing, seasteaders want to start living their ideas of different ways to structure societies.
- Trying to change a country, even a small one, is a daunting task that takes a great deal of time, if it can be done at all. In order to test alternative societal and judicial structures, we need to look for somewhere outside of the jurisdiction of a country. Since every piece of land is claimed, turning to the oceans looks like the best chance of success.

Oceans allow more freedom with structuring a society than on land. The idea of flags of convenience (see page 4 above and pages 12 and 13 below for an explanation) allows more freedom to structure a society that is not autonomous, and the idea of dynamic geography (see page 6 below) allows autonomous seasteads to have more efficient government.

Why oceans? continued



- Dynamic Geography
- Building floating cities from detachable units allows these societies to be dynamic. Drastically lowers cost of relocating to another jurisdiction. Also, much lower barriers to entry.
- Governments on land can control people because they can control the territory and the immobile structures on top of it. On the ocean, this is not so. A seasteed can float anywhere. Exploiting a trapped citizenry is a non-issue.

In *The Machinery of Freedom*, David Friedman (Patri's father) used the following metaphor to show the benefits of anarcho-capitalism:

"Consider our world as it would be if the cost of moving from one country to another were zero. Everyone lives in a house trailer and speaks the same language. One day, the president of France announces that because of troubles with neighboring countries, new military taxes are being levied and conscription will begin shortly. The next morning the president of France finds himself ruling a peaceful but empty landscape, the population having been reduced to himself, three generals, and twenty-seven war correspondents."

Suppose we could drastically reduce the cost of physically moving your property to another jurisdiction. A country would keep its monopoly on the given land area, but governments would have to compete for citizens. What will competition do? It will lead governments to provide services more effectively.

How do we do this? It is not, at this time, feasible on land. While homes can be moved, it is extremely expensive. The story is different on the ocean. Even large buildings, if floating, can be towed to new locations cheaply (think cruise ships or aircraft carriers).

This counters the "ratchet effect" and moves power down to the smallest possible unit. Government becomes a competitive industry.

What happens when a government physically prevents a seasteed from leaving? While this definitely is a problem, seasteeds have an advantage over land here, too. On land, property is locked in. On the ocean, seasteeds have a much greater chance of making an escape. Also, this restriction would have to happen suddenly, because if there is any chance of this happening, many people will probably leave.

Why oceans? continued



- “A reset without a frontier”
- An entire government can be scrapped and started anew without bloodshed or having to pack up and leave. Moving seasteads is much cheaper than moving buildings. A new government or society can be formed without actually leaving your own property because it goes with you.
- Allows new ideas to constantly build on old ones and allows more frequent and less painful innovation of government organization.
- “The threat is greater than the execution”

Those who play chess (or some who have children) understand the quote at the bottom. The threat of moving away may be enough to keep a society’s laws and government in check.

Freedom of association is at the core of seasteading.

Why not islands or boats?



- Fixed locations such as islands, seamounts, and atolls are vulnerable to the whims of the nearby governments, but a seastead can be moved.
- Boats are designed to transport, not provide comfortable living. While there is a growing number of live-aboard voters, the comfort is questionable to many and a seastead would provide better community.

What Seasteading Can Learn From Similar Projects



- Floating homes, houseboats, sailboats, moored villages, cruise ships, and cruise condos
- Oil platforms, private islands, Sealand
- Freedom Ship, Minerva Reef, Isle of Roses
- Gambling ships, “pirate radio” boats and platforms

The photo in this slide is Sealand.

What we can learn from these projects:

Floating homes, houseboats, sailboats, and moored villages all are ways to live on the water. These all have disadvantages, however: Floating homes and houseboats can only be used in very calm water. Sailboats can brave the waves, but they are cramped and uncomfortable for full-time living, though some people use them for such.

-Moored villages, are a little closer to what seasteading wants to do, but they are immobile. Moored villages in the southwest Philippines are built over shallow water, either on stilts or floating. In many cases, the communities over water are much larger than the islands they are around.

-Cruise ships and cruise condos are massive structures that can withstand rough weather and demonstrate that things this large are feasible and easy to move on the ocean. However, while they can be seen as small cities, they are not self-sufficient and need to return to port after a few weeks to replenish supplies. Seasteading looks to mimic the size and functionality of cruise ships, but they need to work on being a little more self-sufficient and current designs look less like ships.

-Oil platforms are more like an artificial island than boat, since they are towed to the final location. They withstand severe weather, but need to be reduced significantly in cost.

-Cruise ships, gambling ships, “pirate radio”, and Sealand demonstrate that seasteads could exist in international waters with relatively little interference. See slides 12 & 13 for more on this, though. Sealand, the Minerva Reef, and the Isle of Roses demonstrate that it is important that seasteads be mobile. Also, these demonstrate the length that nations are willing to go to in order to preserve their monopoly of force over a given area.

A neat idea, but how?

- Incrementalism in prototypes, infrastructures, and people.
- Need to take in account current technologies, not nonexistent ones. Also need to take in account current international policies.
- “The initial seasteads will probably be used for fairly mundane tasks -- ocean research, housing for aquaculture personal, etc. Over time they should evolve into small villages and towns. I expect to be long dead before cities and independent countries emerge.” - Wayne Gramlich

“Incrementalism is an answer because we never need to find 10,000 people willing to take the plunge. We only need to find the core of enthusiasts to start, say 10 people. Then the 40 people who are willing to move now that there are 10 people. Then the 100 that will move because there are 40, and so on. it’s not that there is no one willing to be the first, just that there aren’t very many. But that’s ok because we don’t need very many to bootstrap.

Having many residents be timesharers or hotel guests, by letting people participate part-time, is crucial as well. Rather than moving to this floating platform, people can just visit, which many more will be willing to do, as there is a gargantuan difference in the level of commitment. This is especially valuable in converting the skeptics and realists, who will have reasonable doubts about such an ambitious venture. While there are 52 weeks in a year, our anecdotal surveys suggest that the ratio of people willing to do a new country full-time vs. 1 week a year is at least 1,000:1, possibly much higher. Hence many initial residents will either be guests or support staff.

One version of the question points out the importance of network effects as a threat to the incremental approach. (A network effect is when something is valuable based on the number of interconnections, which go up as the square of the number of participants). While network effects can be important, if they were truly incompatible with incrementalism, there would be no networks that started small. Yet almost all networks (big cities, land and cell-phone networks, websites like Google and eBay) that are cited as examples of the importance of network effects started small, growing from a tiny seed one piece at a time. The big, successful networks have both incremental properties, which allowed them to grow, and network properties, which make them more and more useful as they grow.

So, sure, a new society will have network effects, which will make it hard to grow at the beginning. Just like any new venture. Which is why, like any new venture, it will need to start out appealing to niche markets that are currently under-served. The application of this principle to sovereign floating cities seems rather straightforward.”

- From Seasteading Institute’s website: http://seasteading.org/book_beta/Concerns.html

Areas being worked on:

- Structural designs - underwater, on water, above water, design issues
- Infrastructure - water, food, power
- Additional Infrastructure - government, transportation, shelter, communications, waste disposal, appliances, health services
- Defense

Read more about these ideas in the Seasteading Institute's online book:
http://seasteading.org/book_beta/

I cannot go into the technical details of this, how well these things can be provided on a seasteed is very important to its level of self-sufficiency. Realistically, seasteeds are unlikely to be 100% self-sufficient due to lack of space and capital. A realistic goal for an early seasteed, however, is to grow its own fruits and vegetables and get some protein from sea life.

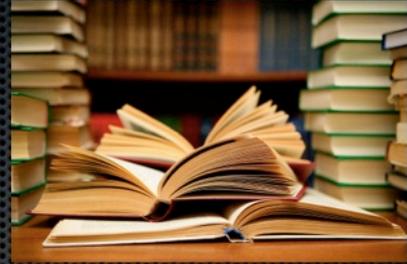
Hydroponics, greenhouses, and aquaculture (raising ocean food) provide ways for early seasteeds to grow and raise their own food.

While right now, importation may be the best way of getting meat, but this does not mean raising animals is out of the picture entirely. When seasteeds become cheaper to build, one unit may be entirely devoted to raising animals for food. This is where innovation is beneficial.

For power, experimenting is being done with harnessing energy from the sun, wind, and waves. Obviously, energy efficient appliances will need to be used until the a way is figured out to create large amounts of energy cheaply.

From the Seasteading Institute on the issue of defense: "Since there is little a seasteed can do to stop a real navy, they shouldn't spend too much money to try. Seasteeds should focus on the ounce of prevention rather than the pound of cure. Other than the ability to damage the attacking force through defensive deterrents, most prevention is political rather than military. Avoid angering terrestrial nations enough to provoke an attack. Be redundant - build many floating cities in many places. Work with existing nations - have a good relationship with your flag issuers. The economic and military inferiority of seasteeds may only be temporary. As a sea-city gets larger, it is more likely to anger existing nations, and it will be more economically feasible to spend money on defense. Perhaps, over time, seasteeds will become large and rich enough to join the ranks of dangerous nations. But it's going to be awhile."

Current Maritime Law and Seasteading



- Politics in maritime law is a complicated issue, as it deals with many different political zones, each with different rules of how navies can intervene in them, if the navies even follow the rules.
- Territorial seas, Contiguous zones, Exclusive Economic zones, Exclusive Fishing zones, High Seas, and Special zones
- Flag of Convenience vs Flagless
- Sovereignty vs non-sovereign

Ships today use a “flag of convenience”, which means that a private ship can choose to fly the flag of any country, as long as that ship is registered in that country. Since seasteads fall more into the category of boats than islands, if seasteads do not want to be autonomous from a nation, they can find nations which are friendly to them. This allows them to be sovereign from all local and state jurisdictions and only subject to the national jurisdictions. Of course, seasteads can choose to go flagless or try to make their own sovereign community.

For more on this, see the next slide for Patri Friedman’s ideas on initial seasteads dealing with maritime laws, see the next page.

Plan for Seasteads in regards to Maritime Law



- “We think a good approach is a balanced one. First, seasteads will fly obscure or convenience flags. They will attempt to find flagging countries willing to offer reasonable deals. While growing and establishing themselves as non-threatening, they will occasionally petition for a change in the international law. At the appropriate time, and with good publicity, one or more seasteads will choose not to renew their flags. They'll announce that they aren't bothering anyone, and ask not to be treated as pirates. Their members will actively attend maritime law gatherings and agitate for changes redefining pirates, restricting boardings to real criminals, not harmless pioneers of the new frontier, and so forth. Eventually, and with the help of public opinion, the rules will change.”
- -Patri Friedman, Seasteading Institute

It is important to keep in mind that seasteads do not have to be sovereign, autonomous units (in fact, the initial ones most likely will not be). The incremental approach can lead to this, but working up to that is the key. It has been said that flying flags of convenience defeats the purpose of autonomy by seasteads subjecting themselves to a country's laws. This is the goal in the future, correct. In the beginning, however,

Arguments have been made that governments will crush this if it is incremental, so it must be launched full-scale or not at all. This seems very difficult to me because there will be no “testing the waters” for how government will deal with seasteads. The idea of seasteading allows individuals to try different approaches, however, and learn from the trials.

FAQs and Concerns

- Pirates / Interference / Defense Issues
- Cost
- Comfort / Lack of Popularity
- Will it harbor cults?

For full explanations of these concerns, visit:
http://seasteading.org/book_beta/Concerns.html

Why piracy on a seastead is not a likely problem:

Piracy is typically done today by large, organized crews that board boats and take them hostage and steal the ship and cargo. Pirating seasteads is not nearly as profitable.

Seasteads would stand out in port, so they can't be sold or used to obtain new cargo.

Seasteaders will be defending their homes, not their employer's trade goods, so they'll fight harder.

Crew / \$ of cargo: Since seasteads are residential, they are much more like the cruise ship than the container ship. This means far more danger for the criminals, and far less profit.

The seastead shape makes it very defensible against small arms - it's like a concrete castle. (Against weapons large enough to destroy the spar, it's more vulnerable, but now we're talking about navies, not pirates).

In other words, why attack a platform of people who would be defending their homes when you could attack a cargo boat with a few lightly armed sailors who would much rather not die to protect some corporation's cargo?

Against government navies, however, seasteads do not stand a chance. There is no way to prevent a naval battleship from blowing up a seastead or launching an arial attack on it.

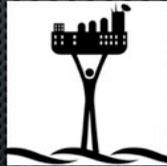
Cost concerns: Yes, the cost will be pretty high in the beginning. Like all technology, however, the price will decrease over time and become more widely available.

For cost concerns, visit: http://seasteading.org/book_beta/Concerns.html

Source of my information and for further examination:



- The Seasteading Institute: <http://www.seasteading.org>
- They have a blog, wiki, online book, FAQs, events, contests, and ways you can help.



Here is the URL to the book, the best resource on seasteading to date. It provides in depth discussion on nearly all issues connected to seasteading: http://seasteading.org/book_beta/

Most of my information came from the Seasteading Institute for this presentation. I do not take credit for these ideas being my own. They are not. I just wanted to expose some students at Hillsdale College to these ideas.

Contact me with questions or concerns:

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Contact me with questions.