

ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHIES

Navigating Research and Activism

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Introduction

The way we investigate the economy in many ways *produces* the economy. This is the starting point for researchers in the sub-field of economic geography known as diverse economies (Gibson-Graham and Dombroski, 2020). In this approach to economic geography, methodology is not about ‘getting accurate data’, but instead considers the kinds of economic realities our research is representing and thus producing. Within the diverse economies field, community economies scholars aim to both *represent* and *produce* a world where capitalism is not the sole dominant economic force shaping peoples’ lives. This chapter outlines how this understanding of economic performativity is expressed in ethical and critical methodologies of economic geography, and in particular the field of diverse and community economies research.

Economic geography as a subdiscipline focuses on the ways in which places and spaces *shape* and *are shaped by* economic activities. Tracing the history of the discipline, Trevor Barnes (2009) notes that, like many subdisciplines in geography, economic geography has been influenced by trends in thinking more broadly. In the 1950s, descriptive regional geographical work was challenged by a new generation of economic geographers who aimed to create a spatial science that could map and predict relationships between economic activities and locations. These geographers used quantitative methods influenced by economics and physics, including mathematical modelling. One example is William Alonso (1964) who modelled the cost of land against the distance from a city ‘centre’ in *Location and Land Use: Toward a General Theory of Land Rent*.

Since the 1970s, these spatial science models in economic geography have been challenged by Marxist political economy approaches. Trevor Barnes highlights some high profile ‘defections’ from the modelling approach to the explanatory approach offered by Marxist influenced thinking, such as prominent economic geographer David Harvey, who went on to develop key theoretical contributions to economic geography using Marx. Here, methods were not seen as ‘neutral’ tools revealing the natural patterns underlying the economy, but as already influenced by the frameworks of thinking the researcher brought to the object of research, in this case, economic patterns in space and place. Critical realism was a methodological approach developed to explain economic geographies of place with reference to both the ‘external necessary relations’ such as economic structures and the ‘internal, contingent relations’, which both shape place

(Sayer, 1982). Andrew Sayer (1982) argued that in-depth research was required to separate out these two, and statistical spatial science was not able to do this without engaging with theory. Doreen Massey's work in the 1980s was an important step in engaging with both 'big picture' theories of political economy and rich, place-based case-study investigations (see particularly Massey, 1984).

In the 1990s, feminist economic geographers Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson (writing as JK Gibson-Graham) took aim at both the spatial science versions of economic geography and the Marxist-informed versions, which had previously been seen as 'opposites'. In *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it): A feminist critique of political economy*, Gibson-Graham (1996) argued that both approaches continually described and re-described the economy as a capitalist monolith, ignoring what did not fit that description. Both approaches thus worked to *produce* and reproduce the economy as ever more capitalist, especially as alternative and diverse economic practices were constantly positioned as insufficient and hopeless, even by those scholars who were anti-capitalist. For Gibson-Graham, ethical and effective methodologies of economic geography would pay more attention to the power of economic representation, in the same way that feminist and queer methodologies paid attention to the power dynamics of gender and sexual representation. Feminist theorists had challenged 'phallocentrism', pushing back against the organising of all gender thinking with cis-men as the norm or centre. Gibson-Graham drew this thinking into their analysis of economic geography, arguing that it was 'capitalocentric', organising all thinking, even Marxist thinking, around the 'norm' or centre of capitalism (1996). Gibson-Graham sought to intervene in capitalocentric understandings of the economy by representing it as an iceberg, where the capitalist economic activities examined by economic geographers (including Marxists) were only the 'tip' above the waterline. By representing all the heterogenous and invisible economic activities below the waterline, a researcher was making an informed, ethical decision to make those 'lost' activities more visible and thus more likely to continue. While this approach drew on rich place-based descriptions of economic activities similar to economic anthropology, Gibson-Graham refused to represent non-capitalist economic activities as necessarily doomed for co-option or destruction. Instead, they intentionally searched for the possibilities of different kinds of economies that were already present, refusing to fold everything into a teleological story of destruction or 'progress'. Gibson-Graham drew on the work of Eve Sedgwick, who asked:

What if instead there were a practice of valuing the ways in which meanings and institutions can be at loose ends with each other? What if the richest junctures weren't the ones where everything means the same thing?

Sedgwick, 1994, p. 6

This approach to research came to be known as the diverse economies approach, and scholars working in this tradition use methods that deliberately represent these 'othered' economic practices as 'at loose ends', not completely woven into a single story. This approach left room for possibly different futures from what a 'strong' capitalocentric theory of capitalism would predict for them (Gibson-Graham and Dombroski, 2020). In subsequent work, Gibson-Graham and diverse economies scholars have sought to develop visions of the economy that built on these diverse practices, in particular the ones which can contribute to 'surviving well together' as people and planet (McKinnon, Healy, and Dombroski, 2019). This is the work of community economies.

What does this research really look like in practice? In this chapter we take up this question, beginning by outlining how economic geographers in the field of diverse economies work to

inventory economic diversity in an open, non-deterministic, way. This inventorying makes present a wide range of economic activities and, in doing so, increases the possibilities for economic action. We then turn to outlining some of these actions, focusing on the work of community economies scholars who are working with others to make a claim for some economic activities over others. We conclude by considering what this means for the kinds of methods economic geographers might adopt in the twenty-first century, when the changes we face are complex and the future is unknown.

Embracing and Inventorying the Mess

In his thought provoking book *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research*, John Law (2004) wrestles with the problem of ‘mess’ in social science. What he means by mess is the complexity and contingency of our social realities, the ways in which they are multiple and overlapping, and ultimately, very difficult to both *know* and *represent* in research. He invites us to understand methods as assemblages of materialities, spatialities and socialities that help us understand reality but also participate in *making* reality. Similarly, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (de Sousa Santos, 2014) highlights the ways in which knowledge from the Global North erases realities present in the Global South, a process which he calls ‘epistemicide’. De Sousa Santos calls for ecologies of knowledge, where interacting multiple realities are acknowledged in our scholarship and fieldwork. Bringing this into the field of economic development, Arturo Escobar (2018) in *Designs for the Pluriverse* proposes a conceptualisation of reality as a pluriverse, one in which multiple realities coexist in space, and where our attempts at knowing and designing interventions must be fully embedded in this multiplicity. In economic geography, Doreen Massey’s (2005) book *For Space* argues that space is a ‘simultaneity of multiple trajectories’. Yet, as economic geographer Gerda Roelvink (2016) points out in her book *Building Dignified Worlds*, it seems as if sometimes in doing research we keep picking out the same constellations again and again, ignoring the vast multiplicity of the night sky for the familiar patterns that we know, such as capitalism, neoliberalism and so on.

These arguments are important to acknowledge because our understanding of what is possible in the world, our *ontology*, affects our understanding of what can be known in the world, our *epistemology*. If capitalism is seen as the only game in town, for example, then resistance to capitalism becomes the main option for political struggle and our knowledge production will be centred on showing the destructive nature of capitalism in order to motivate and aid this resistance. Our understanding of what can be known in the world will therefore also affect our *methodology*, or the way in which we structure and rationalise our research methods. But the reverse is also true: if our methodologies are too narrow and do not create space for multiplicity, what are we erasing in our research process? What other possibilities might there be for political struggle and other ways of surviving well?

The erasure of reality through the process of knowledge production is well known to Indigenous peoples around the world. In her ground-breaking book *Decolonising Methodologies* (1999), Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith describes the violence that colonial assumptions about reality have wrought over Māori in the area of research. While this book does not focus on economic geography, we can see many of the same patterns in our discipline. In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori realities were – and often still are – overwritten by the ‘realities’ of the coloniser, particularly in unequal research relations. What is ‘possible’ is described and delineated by Western science, and the diverse relationships with place and beings in place are erased. Ngāti Whakaue author Amanda Yates, for example, discusses the importance of the concept of *mauri* or intrinsic life force in Māori realities, where the distinction between

‘animate’ and ‘inanimate’ is not normalised. The *mauri* or life force of a river is important in the holistic, more-than-economic wellbeing of a community and a place (Yates, 2016). For Smith, the approach to research with Māori must be one grounded in kaupapa Māori, or Māori agendas and protocols, in collaboration with community.

For others working in economic geography or other disciplines in Aotearoa, it is about making space for multiple realities within whichever space one is working (Waitoa and Dombroski 2020). Our methodologies must make space for complexity, for ‘mess’, for multiple ontologies (McKinnon, Healy, and Dombroski, 2019). For those of us who have been pushed to the margins of economic geography, this awareness of multiplicity is not new. For those of us (the authors included) who have grown up in positions of ontological privilege, we must learn how to develop this capacity for multiplicity in research.

Over the last three decades, diverse economies scholars have developed methodologies that provide space for multiplicity. As Gibson-Graham and Dombroski (2020) note in their essay ‘inventory as ethical intervention’, in economic geography and other disciplines that study the economy, we are often encouraged to study the economy primarily through the lens of capitalism, asking ‘what is capitalist about this or that’ (6). In a diverse economies approach to research, we are, however, invited to ‘stand back and assess whether the effects of our representations are opening up spaces for change or transformation or not’ (6). For Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, this ‘standing back’ comes through an attentiveness to a spacious silence and slowing down, an embodied response that deliberately pays attention to what is possible, what is present, and allows the researcher to be rendered as ‘newly constituted’ in a ‘newly constituted world’ (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2010, p. 322).

Formulating this into a methodology, diverse economies scholars have picked up on Eve Sedgwick’s (2003) idea of ‘weak’ theory and used this to develop a reparative approach to economic research. Rather than confirming that which is already known (such as capitalism is the only reality), the diverse economies researcher looks for surprise, difference and that which might provide self-nourishment. Taking this approach, a researcher resists inserting that which they see into an existing framework of explanation and instead offers a loose (but rich) description of what they find.

This loose and rich description approach can help us see things which are obscured by a ‘strong theory’ approach. Reflecting on their different research journeys, Anmeng Liu, SM Waliuzzaman, Huong Do, Ririn Haryani and Sonam Pem (Liu et al., 2020) describe how the diverse economies framework enabled them to see and loosely describe a world in which Westernised development was not the only thing present in their home countries of China, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Vietnam and Bhutan. This process was transformative for these authors; Liu, for example, wrote an ethnographic thesis about the multiple identities and possibilities for small town youth in China’s Northwest, using what she calls ‘a methodology of openness’ that refused to bind youth into the same old stories of backwardness (Liu, 2021). SM Waliuzzaman used GPS trackers to create rich maps of slum-dwellers’ daily activities in Kallyanpur slum in Dhaka, Bangladesh, fleshing these out with in-depth interviews and showing how slum-dwellers are engaged in diverse economic and commoning activities across the city (Waliuzzaman, 2020). Ririn Haryani went on to write about the economic practice of *arisan* in Indonesia not as a dying practice on the road to modernity but as a legitimate strategy for women’s economic resilience in the face of disaster (Haryani and Dombroski, 2022). As Haryani writes with Liu et al., (2020, p. 448), she used to ‘perceive *arisan* as a wasting time activity’ and had not previously considered even studying it: prior to putting on the ‘lens’ of diverse economies, it was invisible. Similarly, Huong Do used embodied participatory methods working the rice fields,

which helped her come to value the traditional knowledge beliefs and practices of her farming in-laws in rural Vietnam as forms of climate change adaptation that had been overlooked in the rush to develop quantitative indicators based on ‘modern’ assumptions (Dombroski and Do, 2022). Finally, in Bhutan, Sonam Pem turned to oral histories and walking pilgrimage interviews to explore the diverse river care practices of Buddhist thinking, particularly as used by youth and nuns to develop forms of environmental activism grounded in tradition (Pem, 2018). What is important here is that it is not the methods as such, but the ways in which what can be seen through the methods is informed by the ‘lens’ of diversity that one has developed before ever going into the field. These young scholars framed these stages as ‘the moment of noticing’, ‘the moment of revaluing’, and ‘the moment of reconnecting’, in doing so describing their journeys from a colonised capitalocentric thinking into something more open to what is already there and what could be grown further if nurtured.

For diverse economies scholars, these moments of noticing diversity – where everything does not have to mean the same thing – are grounded in an understanding of the world which is ‘more than capitalist’. Gibson-Graham developed a loose framework of diverse economic practices, based on the simple image of an iceberg mentioned earlier. In Figure 22.1, the iceberg shows what is normally ‘noticed’ in economic geography: market transactions, waged labour, capitalist enterprise. Then, strikingly, below the waterline lie all the other things that could be part of our economy – and our economic geographies – which usually go unrecognised.

This image has been used in participatory action research with a variety of communities around the world. One of the most vividly instructive has been the floating coconut diagrams developed by diverse economies scholars in the Pacific (Carnegie et al., 2012). Here, Pacific men and women worked in groups with researchers to document hundreds of economic activities they were involved in, paying attention to gendered divisions of labour in particular. What was clear from the resulting images was the finding that much more of the women’s economic activities were ‘under the waterline’, but also men’s economic activities were being overlooked by capitalocentric understandings of what ‘counted’ as economic (see Figure 22.2: floating coconut economy).

A less visually striking, but perhaps a more analytical framework, is the diverse economies table, which uses a box form with capitalist, alternative capitalist and non-capitalist sections as a prompt for thinking and seeing other forms of economic activity in a community. Gibson-Graham use it in the Philippines (Gibson-Graham, 2005b) and in the La Trobe valley of Australia (Gibson-Graham, 2006) with economically marginalised communities, Maria Bargh uses it with the tribal enterprises of her iwi (tribe) Te Arawa (Bargh, 2011), and Emma Sharp with diverse food initiatives in Auckland (2020). In Table 22.1, for example, you can see the diverse economic energy generation activities of Te Arawa in Aotearoa New Zealand. The goal is to deliberately bring to light and make more visible economic activities that might be overlooked when researchers focus only on processes of capital accumulation and neoliberalisation, a strong temptation in economic geography research.

While the table has sometimes been used in a more static way than Gibson-Graham first intended (Gibson-Graham and Dombroski, 2020), it provides an important starting point for economic geographers interested in inventorying the kinds of economic activities present in a place. Moving away from representing ‘broad trends’ or ‘average citizen’ statistics, the intervention of the table was to create space for the multiple realities already present in place, without enrolling them in a story of what ‘must’ come next (Gibson-Graham, 2005a). This two-step process of ‘seeing diversity’ and then ‘multiplying possibility’ (Dombroski, 2015, 2016) is a



Figure 22.1 The economy iceberg.

broad brush methodology to doing research in economic geography with an eye to transformation. While capitalism is a process some can certainly see and describe, bringing other processes to light is a way of making them seem more ‘possible’ as building blocks for different kinds of economies. For scholars in diverse economies, activism builds further on this shift from the descriptive, inventorying mode of research exemplified in the icebergs and tables into something more intentionally constructive: the possibility of taking the many things represented in the diverse economy inventory, and working with communities to select those which foster life, enabling communities to survive well together. This is when diverse economies moves into community economies research, extending from inventorying to co-creating different kinds of economic realities that are not just ‘more than capitalist’ but actively postcapitalist or non-capitalist. Research methodology for this kind of economic geography thus moves from *documenting* to *activating*.



Figure 22.2 Floating coconut economy.

Source: Carnegie, M., Rowland, C., Gibson, K., McKinnon, K., Crawford, J., Slatter, C. 'Floating coconut poster' in *Monitoring gender and economy in Melanesian communities: Resources for NGOs, government and researchers in Melanesia*, University of Western Sydney, Macquarie University and International Women's Development Agency, November, 2012.

Activating New Economies Through Performative Research

Documenting and inventorying economies through the ontological lens of diverse economies reveals a whole range of economic activities. However, these activities will not all enhance well-being, equality or sustainability. Many economic geographers have documented oppression, exploitation and homogenising forms of globalisation, but equally important is inventorying the things that *are* more life-giving, sustainable and equitable. How can we imagine and perform realistic change if we are not documenting the experiments with doing economy differently, the traditions of economic exchange that support interdependence, and the connecting patterns of solidarity economies throughout the world? If economic geographers do wish to participate in such change, they are faced with a choice in their research methodology: to stand back and document only as an observer or to 'muck in' (Wright, 2017), seeking to enhance the 'reach' of certain forms of economy. In other words, can we actively participate in the different kinds of economies we document?

In their book *Take Back the Economy* (2013), Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy provide a set of methodological tools for community groups and researchers to analyse and activate

Table 22.1 The diverse economy of Tūaropaki Geothermal Enterprise

<i>Transactions</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Enterprise</i>	<i>Property and resource ownership</i>
<i>Market</i>	<i>Wage</i>	<i>Capitalist</i>	<i>Capitalist</i>
Power sold to national grid. As per joint venture, Mighty River Power provides long-term support for the sale of electricity.	Salary As per joint venture, Mighty River Power conduct maintenance of steamfield, power-plant, and transmission systems and marketing. Contracting of Strettons Chartered Accountants to manage enquiries and accounts.	Board of Directors (3 from Tūaropaki Trust and 1 representative of the joint venture). Dividends paid to shareholders.	As per joint venture, ¼ of Mokai II is owned by Mighty River Power.
<i>Alternative Market</i>	<i>Alternative Paid</i>	<i>Alternative Capitalist</i>	<i>Alternative Capitalist</i>
<i>Koha</i> (including for corporate gifts to trading partners)	In-kind. Long term pay off-Meeting with key stakeholders. Environmental – replenishing of water in geothermal area beneath power plant.	Scholarships for education and <i>kaumātua</i> grants (aim is for equitable distribution).	Right to extract granted to Tūaropaki Power Co. because of <i>whanau</i> link to Tūaropaki Trust. Land (Tūaropaki E block) owned by Tūaropaki Trust. Approx. 30 hectares for steamfield wells, pipelines, and electricity generating plant.

<i>Non-market</i>	<i>Unpaid</i>	<i>Non-capitalist</i>	<i>Non-capitalist</i>
State allocations. State appropriations = corporate tax, local government rates? <i>Whanaungatanga</i> (care for family). <i>Kaitiakitanga</i> (guardianship). Potentially the sustainability focus and activities of the company could be understood as transactions with <i>papatūānuku</i> (Mother Earth) – replenishing.	Presentations made at conference by Directors and Chairperson. Attendance at various <i>marae</i> meetings by Directors and Chairperson which they connect to. Advice to other Māori businesses.	Tūaropaki Trust comprised of 7 Mokai <i>hapū</i>. The Trust is an Ahu Whenua Trust, managing Māori freehold land under Te Ture Whenua Māori Act 1993. Tūaropaki Power Co. is wholly owned by Tūaropaki Trust. Māori Land Court appoints trustees to Tūaropaki Trust and holds Trust Order/Deed (provides legal framework) and requires the Trust administer “the lands for the benefit of the beneficial owners” (Tūaropaki). Tūaropaki Trust maintenance of <i>marae</i> community complex.	State – resource consents from Environment Waikato (the regional council). <i>Whakapapa</i> genealogy) – descendants of the <i>hapū</i> involved have genealogical and spiritual ties to each other and the lands involved.

Source: see Bargh 2011, p. 64.

Note: This analysis shows the variety of economic practices that are part of the wider economy of Tūaropaki, including more-than-capitalist practices.

economic change wherever they are. The book draws on a variety of research and community activist projects from around the world, constructing a vision of what a life-giving community economy might look like. Rather than provide a set of answers as to what ‘good’ economies might look like; however, Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy ask a set of questions that build on the previous work thinking about postcapitalist politics, asking, among other things, how do we survive well together? (2013, p. xiii).

Gibson-Graham, Cameron and Healy go on to answer this question in a speculative way, arguing that researchers and communities need to think up ways that we can take back the economy through collective ethical action – both in action research and community action. For these scholars and others in community economies, ethical action means:

- *Surviving* together well and equitably;
- *Distributing surplus* to enrich social and environmental health;
- *Encountering others* in ways that support their well-being as well as ours;
- *Consuming* sustainably;
- *Caring for* – maintaining, replenishing, and growing – our natural and cultural *commons*; and
- *Investing our wealth in future generations* so that they can live well (Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy, 2013, p. xix).

Researching economies in this frame is thus centred on ethical action for researchers. There are two kinds of ethical action with relevance to economic geography methodologies here. Firstly, paying attention to what our research is ‘making more real’ and making ethical decisions about representation and research focus. Secondly, using research time to actively work with communities to co-create different kinds of economies that enable surviving well, distribution of surplus, encountering of others, sustainable consumption, care for commons, and investment in future generations. We look at both in turn.

Firstly, behind the idea that research makes some realities more real than others is the theory of performativity. Here language is seen as a force that can bring into being that which it names (Austin, [1955]1962). The force of these language acts relies on a whole host of actors and apparatus, including witnesses (Sedgwick, 2003). For research to be performative, then, we need to look at research methodologies as an assemblage stretching from methods with participants, to academic journals and networks, and on to policy makers (Law, 2004). We can thus talk about “hybrid research collectives” involving a vast arrangement of co-researchers, tools or methods, and more (Roelvink, 2016). Within these collectives, agency is not only already distributed among a range of actors. Working at increasing the agency of those involved can also become a key part of the research process, such as in the training and employment of community researchers or providing other necessities such as a medical clinic within the research project. Similarly, in his work with a community college, Leo Hwang shows diverse economies action research projects can “generate agency” in contrast to research from a distance that examines communities for what they lack, ultimately disempowering them (Hwang, 2020). Abby Templer Rodrigues used art-based methods to work directly with artists and artisans in Franklin County, Massachusetts, intentionally shifting the focus away from market-based understandings of artist economic lives into diverse economies framings of how artists and artisans can and do make a living (Templer Rodrigues, 2020). These projects are thus already responding to Judith Butler’s (2010) call for those interested in economic performativity to tackle questions about how economies should work. Community economies performative research practice is guided by a political intention to build “other worlds” and the ethical commitments already listed above (Roelvink, St. Martin, and Gibson-Graham, 2015).

A key part of this research agenda is the creation of new economic subject positions. It is often very hard for people to see themselves outside of the capitalist framing, even if they are against capitalism. Those ‘outside’ of capitalism, as Gibson-Graham (1996, p. 6) suggest, are:

... often understood primarily with reference to capitalism: as being fundamentally the same as..., or as being deficient or substandard imitations; as being opposite to capitalism; as being the complement of capitalism; as existing in capitalism’s space or orbit.

While the diverse economies framing performs economic diversity, disrupting this capitalocentrism, seeing oneself outside of this frame requires a change in subjectivity (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. xxxv). Here community economies researchers explore the power of affect to bring about a change in economic subjectivity. Shifts in affect have the potential to disrupt habits of thought, creating moments for new relationships and opportunities to emerge. Roelvink’s (2016) research on the World Social Forum, for example, shows how stories of struggle and survival shifted participants emotionally and affectively, disrupting narratives of neoliberalism and enabling the exploration of other ways of living (in that case, enabling the commoning of recently privatised resources and the opportunity for individualised citizens to become commoners).

The work of performing more life sustaining economies is not only directed at transforming economies and opening up economic subject positions. It also transforms the researcher. When researchers deliberately seek to change the world for the better, they seek out reparative possibilities for the self. This intention draws on the work of Eve Sedgwick (2003) who argues that we can accept the horrors of the world without continuing to confirm them through our research. Instead, we can seek out possibilities for the world to be otherwise, which are also possibilities for joy and pleasure, and ultimately a form of self-nourishment for the researcher. Compassion, the “feeling of shared suffering combined with an orientation toward reparative action” (Roelvink, 2020), for others and the self lies at the heart of this “reparative stance” (Sedgwick, 2003). Through this compassion a researcher is open to “learning to be affected” (Latour, 2004; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink, 2010), a process by which one is transformed through their encounters with others in a research process centred on transforming the world. Importantly, through this process the hybrid research collective (which includes the researcher) is put into action. In their research on community gardens, for example, Jenny Cameron, Craig Manhood and Jamie Pomfrett (2011) have intentionally created opportunities for gardeners to learn to be affected by each other and other gardens, thereby increasing the possibilities for gardens as the climate changes:

community gardening potentially amplifies the process of registering and responding to the world around us as more contrasts are added with gardeners working alongside others (even in gardens that use individual allotments). We contend that performative and collective research can add even more contrasts and intensify the ways in which we can learn to be affected by the world around and propelled to act.

Cameron, Manhood and Pomfrett, 2011, p. 502, emphasis in the original

In the second aspect of performative research, scholars are using research time to actively work with communities to co-create different kinds of economies in action research projects. In recent times, community economies scholars have been exploring ways to constructively engage with communities, funders, state services, Indigenous tribal organisations, and other

kinds of partners in action research. In Aotearoa New Zealand, scholars have worked within National Science Challenge structures to co-produce economic tools with communities. Under the hubris of the Building Better Homes Towns and Cities fund, community economies scholars are working with urban farms, charitable trusts, and government organisations to co-create and test a version of a 'Community Economy Return on Investment' tool (Healy et al., 2019), as first proposed by Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy (2013) and further developed by Petrescu et al., (2021). Under this project, PhD student and urban food systems activist Bailey Peryman has begun to work with soil and society to implement new urban composting initiatives in Ōtautahi Christchurch as part of his action research. The Community Economies team is now part of the government funded Huritanga Urban Wellbeing project subtitled *Towards Socio-ecological Wellbeing-led Urban Systems in an Era of Emergency*. This action research project aims to change the way Aotearoa New Zealand plans for urban wellbeing, with the community economies researchers focusing on how return on investment is calculated for local government and community enterprise, particularly in a time of ecological emergency.

Other examples of action research in the community economies tradition might be seen as more 'direct action'. Anna Kruzynski both participates in and documents the direct action of La Pointe Libertaire (the Anarchist Point), which has sought to create, expand and protect urban commons in the Point St. Charles area of Montreal, Quebec (Kruzynski, 2020). Jarra Hicks founded an organisation that finances and builds community-owned renewable energy enterprises as part of an ongoing action research lifestyle (Hicks, 2020). Bradley Wilson and his students at West Virginia University started a fair trade coffee cooperative, connecting with farmers in Nicaragua through action research crossing the Americas (Williamson 2017). Others, such as Emma Sharp and Ann Hill, have participated in alternative food systems as a way not just only of studying the changes but investing in them (Hill, 2011; Sharp, 2020). Others, such as Maria Bargh, Matt Scobie and Suli Vunibola research with their own Indigenous communities and organisations as a way of making research fit decolonising methodologies, where community aspirations are front and centre in the research process (Bargh, 2011, 2020; Scobie, Lee, and Smyth, 2020; Vunibola, Steven and Scobie, 2022). As Cameron writes,

If we are now living in a planetary experiment, perhaps social research could also take a more experimental approach. By this I do not mean the sort of carefully controlled experiment where we isolate and test variables to try and determine cause and effect. Rather I'm thinking of more open, even playful forms, of experimentation to try out new ways of living in the Anthropocene. Such an approach would mean setting aside the idea of research as neutral and objective activity in which there is a critical distance between the researcher and the object of study. Instead, research would entail making a stand for certain worlds and for certain ways of living on the planet, and taking responsibility for helping to make these worlds more likely and these ways of living more widespread.

Cameron, 2015, pp. 99–100

Action research has traditionally been about collaborating with marginalised groups to produce research that directly impacts lives positively (Cameron and Gibson, 2020). In the community economies and diverse economies tradition, it has also been expanded to include action and activist research that reframes the economy to create possibility, reframes economic subjectivity to further enable possibility, and contributes to direct economic actions that change lives and economies now and into the future.

Concluding Thoughts: New Challenges for Economic Geography

Economic geography has often focused on describing and theorising the effects of capitalism. In their work transforming the capitalocentric orientations of economic geographies, JK Gibson-Graham have invited researchers to consider the performative aspects of their research methodologies. In this chapter we have discussed the methodological challenges of ‘embracing the mess’ and ‘activating new economies’ in a particular strand of economic geography. An emerging challenge is how our methodology, and use of particular methods, is created and enacted with human and more-than-human others. This includes working with those with other traditions and different ontologies as well as more-than-human participants whose agency is often not recognised. One emerging trend in community economies and decolonial forms of economic geography is the expanding engagement with ontological traditions that do not privilege the human species. We finish up this chapter looking to the future: new forms of action research that work with the more-than-human to think economy differently.

In recent times, economic geographers have begun to turn their attention to the problem of doing economies differently, for the sake of human wellbeing but also for the sake of planetary wellbeing and species survival. Community economies researchers have been at the forefront of this task. Many have drawn inspiration from the work of ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood (2007), who plainly states that ‘we’, humans living in highly industrialised societies, must radically change our mode of humanity if we are to survive the ecological crisis that has begun. Action research has thus been expanded to include research that actively seeks to transform human relationships with our environments and to live more harmoniously in place with others – both human and more-than-human others. In this vein, community economies researchers and economic geographers more generally are really just catching up with Indigenous interdisciplinary researchers who have long recognised the importance of being together in relationship with place with many others (Kimmerer, 2017). The challenge is to respectfully learn from scholars and elders in these traditions, while doing the work of transforming economies where we are and with what we have – the scholar’s tools, and the activist’s tools.

A few examples of where this might go seem appropriate here. Making space for Indigenous leadership and ways of doing things means that projects might not end up being framed as economic geography, as diverse economies or community economies, but might end up fully embedded in Indigenous knowledge frameworks and carried out with appropriate protocols for those communities (Waitoa and Dombroski, 2020). While projects we and others have engaged in can surely be framed as a community economies project, we can also perform different forms of academic scholarship by giving way to Indigenous ontological frameworks in our writing, project reporting and co-creation. In the end, these are best adapted to the environment in which we find ourselves agitating for cultural, social and economic change with the more-than-human.

In economic geography more generally, recognising the agency and contribution of more-than-human entities is a fraught process that requires careful scholarly and embodied work. Ethan Miller has written extensively about the work that non-humans do to support the lives of humans, and we can certainly add more generalised ecological processes to that awareness (Miller, 2019). However, framing these processes and this work as ‘ecological services’ has performative effects: does it then frame ecology as at the service of economies and humans? As Miller argues, we need to reframe our understanding of *economy* to fit in *ecology* rather than the other way round. There is still much to go in this process, and new methods of working with more-than-human research participants must be developed. We can work closely with ecologists

and other representatives of more-than-human entities as a matter of course, drawing on multi-species ethnographic methods (Tsing, 2015) and in partnership with Indigenous activists and scholars (Bawaka Country et al., 2016; Yates, 2016). In all this, we need to remember that we too are an embodied species and draw on research methodologies that place this embodiment at the forefront.

To recap, then, embracing and inventorying the mess is a stance towards methodology that acknowledges the tangled interactions of multiple realities: multiple ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies. Economic geographers in the diverse economies tradition use multiple methods to ‘see’ and document the diverse economic realities already present, thus multiplying the possibilities for building different kinds of economies based on the activities already present, capitalist, non-capitalist, alternative capitalist – what Gibson-Graham and Dombroski (2020) call ‘more-than-capitalist’. In hybrid research collectives they also actively seek to build some economies over others, taking a stake in the kind of economies that provide for a good life for us, other species and the planet. In this work we remain open, keeping our work as a question rather than offering an answer, and in doing so we can continue to learn from others.

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