Researching Community Food Economies

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Sustainability and Social Contestation, Utrecht University
Outline

• Introduction – Research & Work
• Community Economies Research
• Urban Homesteading: Diverse Economies, Gender & Self-Provisioning
• Community Food Economies: Growing Urban Commons and Collectivity
• SHARECITY: Mapping Diverse Food Economies and New Infrastructures for Commoning
• Next Steps and Questions
Research & Work

Nature-Society Geography

Urban Studies

Communities

Economies

Sustainability

Food Security

Care Work

Poverty

Policy

Social Reproduction

Feminist Geography

Food Studies
Community Economies Research

Key ideas

Other economies are possible

We are interested in an economic politics that allows us to think creatively and to start here and now to make new economies. We believe that other, more just and ecologically sustainable, economies are possible. Everyday people in everyday places can be part of re-thinking and re-creating economies.

Words make worlds

How we imagine, frame and talk about our economy influences how we act. Contemporary economic politics confronts the economy as a bounded object separated from other social processes. This representation informs modes of accounting value and influences how economies are materialized through practices and organizations. In order to remake the economy we need different representations and framings that enable new modes of calculation and materialization.

The ice-berg image

The Iceberg is one way of illustrating that what is usually regarded as “the economy” (i.e. wage-labour, market exchange of commodities and capitalist enterprise) is but a small set of activities by which we produce, exchange and distribute values in our society. This image
## Diverse Economies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Labor</th>
<th>Transactions</th>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Enterprise</th>
<th>Finance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wage</td>
<td>Market</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Capitalist</td>
<td>Mainstream Markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALTERNATIVE PAID</td>
<td>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</td>
<td>ALTERNATIVE PRIVATE</td>
<td>ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST</td>
<td>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>Fair trade</td>
<td>State-managed assets</td>
<td>State owned</td>
<td>Cooperative Banks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocal labor</td>
<td>Alternative currencies</td>
<td>Customary (clan) land</td>
<td>Environmentally responsible</td>
<td>Credit unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-kind</td>
<td>Underground market</td>
<td>Community land trusts</td>
<td>Socially responsible</td>
<td>Community-based financial institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work for welfare</td>
<td>Barter</td>
<td>Indigenous knowledge (Intellectual Property)</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>Micro-finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNPAID</td>
<td>NON-MARKET</td>
<td>OPEN ACCESS</td>
<td>NON-CAPITALIST</td>
<td>NON-MARKET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housework</td>
<td>Household sharing</td>
<td>Atmosphere</td>
<td>Worker cooperatives</td>
<td>Sweat equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>Gift giving</td>
<td>International Waters</td>
<td>Sole proprietorships</td>
<td>Family lending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-provisioning</td>
<td>Hunting, fishing, gathering</td>
<td>Open source IP</td>
<td>Community enterprise</td>
<td>Donations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slave labor</td>
<td>Theft, piracy, poaching</td>
<td>Outer Space</td>
<td>Feudal</td>
<td>Interest-free loans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The items in each cell are only examples of what could be included.*

(www.communityeconomies.org)
Diverse Food Economies

- Buying food in chain grocery stores, chain restaurants
- Buying food at farmers markets, road stands
- Buying meals from locally owned restaurants that buy local food
- Buying/selling sustainably grown, fairly traded food
- Growing your own food
- Hunting, fishing, gathering
- Cooking for your household
- Sharing meals among friends
- Potlucks
- Gifting of food
- Trading for food
- Gleaning
- Free meals given to the poor
- Poaching
- Dumpstering
- Food stamps
- Emergency food boxes
- Communal kitchens

(Gross 2014)
A community economy is a space of interdependence and ethical negotiation around:

- what is necessary to personal and social survival;
- how social surplus is appropriated and distributed;
- whether and how social surplus is to be produced and consumed; and
- how a commons is produced and sustained (Gibson-Graham 2006)

(Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2013)
Urban Homesteading

*The Urban Homestead*

*Urban Homesteading*

*Radical Homemakers*

*Tiny Town Farm*
Urban Homesteaders League, Boston

We are committed to re-imagining the good life as one that is meaningful, pleasurable, environmentally sustainable, and socially just. We place the **home** at the center of that pursuit and see it as a site for personal and societal transformation.
Research Questions

• How are social and economic relations (re)configured under self-provisioning practices?
  – What kinds of social relations (e.g. gender, race, ethnic, and class relations, friendships, voluntary associations, place based communities) are self-provisioning practices embedded in and enabled by?
  – What kinds of economic relations (e.g. gender divisions of labor, barter networks, supply chains, property regulations, zoning, production, consumption, and distribution networks) are self-provisioning practices embedded in and enabled by?
  – What is the impact of self-provisioning practices on social and economic relations at multiple urban scales within and beyond the home?
## Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media Analysis of Urban Homesteading blogs, books, and news articles</td>
<td>Defining Urban Homesteading. Identifying popular discourses and identities associated with UH. Developing a sampling frame.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Observation at Urban Homesteaders League Events</td>
<td>Developing an experiential understanding of self-provisioning. Meeting potential interviewees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-depth interviews and site visits (n 40)</td>
<td>Identifying self-provisioning skills and practices, motivations, spaces, values, and experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory Action Research (e.g. events organizing, participatory</td>
<td>To create urban commons that support collective forms of provisioning. To increase the visibility of diverse food economies in Greater Boston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mapping, ongoing activist-scholar collaborations)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Diverse Food Economies in Boston

<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>ALT. PAID</td>
<td>ALT. MARKET</td>
<td>ALT. PRIVATE</td>
<td>ALT. CAPITALIST Non-profit learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed Paid in Food</td>
<td>Farmers market</td>
<td>Community garden</td>
<td>Social Enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Craft market</td>
<td>Shared backyard and kitchen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Barter</td>
<td>Urban Commons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>NON-MARKET</td>
<td>OPEN ACCESS</td>
<td>NON-CAPITALIST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-provisioning Housework</td>
<td>Gifting</td>
<td>Online Knowledge Commons</td>
<td>Households (communal, feudal, and ancient).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer Work Party</td>
<td>Sharing of skills, food, materials</td>
<td>Seed library</td>
<td>Neighborhood Cooperative Community Enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gleaning, Foraging, Gathering</td>
<td>Public Fruit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Urban Commons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gender and Self-Provisioning
I was just alone in our kitchen, doing the same thing over and over again, every week.....And honestly I just felt like "What am I doing spending so much time on doing things that only benefit me and my husband?" you know that we're going to eat it and then it's going to be gone. And it's not like I'm saving a huge amount of money. *I mean it’s like a choice, a lifestyle choice*, and for me, ultimately, I'm really glad I've done this, I'm really glad I know how to do these things, but I don't feel the *need* to do it all the time always. Because I want a more open life (Lisa, artist, Cambridge)
Gender and Self-Provisioning

If you come at it with the sort of mentality that you’re taking care of something, it’s not, *it doesn’t feel like work*, as much as it’s like feeding your kids, or watering your plants…. So it’s not like a task, so much, so that’s really it. There’s taking care of my cultures and then there’s the benefit it has for my kids and you know our health (Mike, tech worker, Arlington)
Collectivity and Commons

I think having a cooperative is itself political because it’s another structure, a different structure, that we need to have more examples of and learn how to do (Regina, unemployed, Cambridge)

I guess it’s a way of living that’s enjoyable, you know even though we’re in an urban area. And it seems to be really hard to do, but there’s all these little ways to do it that are fun and social, and they just open up new kinds of opportunities for, you know, just doing things, And almost everything.
Community Food Economies

A community economy makes and shares a commons—without a commons, there is no community, without a community, there is no commons (Gudeman 2016)

(Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2013)
League of Urban Canners

Community-based Food Production

The League of Urban Canners (LUrC) oversees an urban orchard of more than 100 fruit trees, mostly in Cambridge and Somerville. While most trees are located in private yards, some are in parks and public spaces. Each year, with the consent of owners, we prune trees and arbors, harvest fruit, and process the product of our harvest into jams, ciders, and other preserves.
Community Food Economies

• How can cooperative food enterprises share and cultivate commons?
The Commons
Community Food Economies

• How can we use our research practices to create and care for commons, and make them more real and imaginable?
Mapping the Commons

Toward a Cartography of the Commons: Constituting the Political and Economic Possibilities of Place

Kevin St. Martin
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Competing with the cartography of capitalism, undermining its power to fix resources as open to capitalist appropriation and space as enclosed, will require a cartography of the commons that makes visible community and commons processes; it will require a shift in strategy from explicating and defending existing commons to mapping spaces into which a commons future might be projected. The “Buffalo Commons” and a map-based project in New England fisheries link new spatial imaginaries with desires for and actualization of alternative economic initiatives. Each project redefines economic and environmental processes relative to the potential of the commons rather than the potential of capitalism. Key Words: cartography, commons, diverse economies, economic geography, subjectivity and space.

Storytelling and analysis must be generated around the commons in order to replace the language of efficiency with that of sufficiency, the cultural visibility of the individual with that of community.


Place-based policies and struggles around resources that counter neoliberal dispossession of what had been common require an ontological ground on which such policies and struggles might be enacted. A hope of contemporary movements, from indigenous rights to resources to atenclosure movements, rely on a vision of community territory or local commons through which alternative forms of environmental knowledge, productive utilization of resources, and local identities can be imagined (e.g., Escobar 2001; Steno 2002; Mackenzie 2006). These spaces of difference contest hegemonic understandings of nature as an inventory of discrete resources open to individual appropriation, and they are increasingly represented using mapping and related technologies that fall under the rubric of “counter-mapping” (Peluso 1995).

Countermaps work against the displacement, valuation, abstraction, individualization, privatization, and alienation of resources that...
Mapping an Urban Food Commons
Community Food Economies

• How are access, care, responsibility, benefit, and ownership negotiated around urban food commons?
### Commons Identi-Kit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Access</th>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Care</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Property</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shared and wide</td>
<td>Negotiated by a community</td>
<td>Widely distributed to community members (and beyond)</td>
<td>Performed by community members</td>
<td>Assumed by community members</td>
<td>Any form of ownership (private, state or open access)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5.5: Commons Identi-Kit*

(Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2013)
### Negotiating Urban Food Commons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Access</th>
<th>Care</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Ownership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>League of Urban Canners</td>
<td>Private Yards used by LURC to harvest fruit</td>
<td>By Permission of Property Owner</td>
<td>LURC – provides pruning and some pest management</td>
<td>Property Owner</td>
<td>LURC- free fruit and fun Owner – clean yard, 10% of harvest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Commons IdentiKit” Adapted from Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2014
Negotiating Access

By permission of property owners

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**Got fruit? Want jam?**

The League of Urban Canners will harvest unwanted fruit from your yard, can it into sauce, jam or butter and give you 10% of the product.

- Grapes ... Apples ... Peaches ... and more!
- We remove fruit before it falls and makes a mess.
- We bring a small team of experienced harvesters, use our own tools, and clean up after ourselves.
- We work with home owners, tenants, and schools.
- We schedule our visits in advance.
- We do not charge.

UrbanAppleSauce@gmail.com
www.LeagueOfUrbanCanners.org
Practicing Care

League members provide pruning and pest management services
Sharing Responsibility

Property Owners and Liability Waivers

League of Urban Growers Harvest Participation
WAIVER OF LIABILITY AGREEMENT

1. In consideration for receiving permission to harvest fruit and/or vegetables from the property listed below, the individuals involved in the harvest (also listed below and hereinafter referred to as HARVESTERS) hereby release, waive, discharge, and covenant not to sue any and all representatives of the property listed below in this waiver as from any and all liability claims, demands, actions, and causes of action whatsoever arising out of or related to any loss, damage, or injury, including death, that may be sustained by HARVESTERS or to any property belonging to the HARVESTERS while participating in such activity, while in, on, or upon the property listed below, regardless of whether such loss is caused by the negligence of the HARVESTERS.

2. The HARVESTERS state that they are fully aware of the risks and hazards connected with the activities of harvesting, and are aware that such activities include the risk of injury and even death, and hereby elect to voluntarily participate in said activities and understand that they are not required to participate in this activity.

3. It is the HARVESTERS' express intent that this Waiver shall bind the members of their family and spouses and shall be deemed as a release, waiver, discharge, and covenant to sue. HARVESTERS hereby further agree that this Waiver of Liability shall be construed in accordance with the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Any portion of this document deemed unlawful or unenforceable is severable and shall be stricken without any effect on the enforceability of the remaining provisions.

IN SIGNING THIS AGREEMENT, HARVESTERS ACKNOWLEDGE AND REPRESENT THAT they have read the foregoing Waiver of Liability; understood it, and sign it voluntarily as their own free act and deed; no oral representations, statements, or inducements, apart from the foregoing written agreement, have been made; they are fully competent; and they execute this Agreement for full, adequate and complete consideration fully intending to be bound by same.

The undersigned HARVESTERS hereby certify that all property representatives located at:

Street:

City: ______________________  State: ______  Zip code: ____________

are hereby released from any and all responsibility as named above.

Print name: ______________________ Signature: ______________________ Date: ____________

(HARVESTER)

Print name: ______________________ Signature: ______________________ Date: ____________

(HARVESTER)

Print name: ______________________ Signature: ______________________ Date: ____________

(HARVESTER)
Distributing Benefits

**LURC** – Free fruit & fun

**Preservers** – 70%

**Harvesters** – 20%

**Owners** – Clean yard, and 10% of harvest
Ownership

Mostly Private
New Directions

• Collective Infrastructure for Community Food Economies
• The role of Law and Policy in Governing Community Food Economies
• Social difference in Diverse and Community Food Economies
• New Technologies for Commoning
SHARECITY: Aims and Objectives

SHARECITY will assess the practice and sustainability potential of city-based ICT-enabled food sharing economies by:

– Developing deeper theoretical understandings of contemporary food sharing
– Generating comparative international data about food sharing activities
– Assessing the sustainability impacts of food sharing activities
– Exploring how food sharing in cities might evolve in the future
Diverse Economies of Food Sharing

(Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2015)

Figure 1.3: The Economy as an Iceberg

(Cagle 2014)
What is Shared and How?

What is shared?
- Knowledge & Skills
- Meals
- Fruits & Vegetables
- Eating together
- Land
- Food Products
- Tools
- Plants & Seeds
- Kitchen Devices
- Kitchen Space
- Compost
- Meat & Fish

Multi functionality
*e.g. Community Gardens*

What is shared?
- Land
- Tools
- Compost
- Knowledge and Skills

How is it shared?
- Gifting
- Collecting
- Bartering

How it is shared?
- Gifting: 2385
- Selling: 1705
- Collecting: 420
- Bartering: 335

Number of Enterprises
Organization of sharing and flows

- **1386** Nonprofits
- **1101** Associations
- **1007** For profits
- **829** Informal
- **261** Cooperatives
- **229** Social Enterprises

- **Peer2Peer**: 3150
- **Charity2Individual**: 3078
- **Business2Individual**: 2455
- **Business2Charity**: 1379

- **Economic**: 3150
- **Social**: 3078
- **Environmental**: 2455
- **All 3**: 1379
Performing Diverse Food Economies
Technologies for Commoning
Technologies for Commoning
Next Steps

• In-depth ethnographies and netnographies of food sharing enterprises in 7 cities, 3 satellite cities, and 1 pilot city.
• Developing collaborative relationships with food sharing enterprises.
• Co-Creating sustainability assessment toolkits.
References

Thank you

Julie Graham
Community Economies Research Fund
Questions?
morrowo@tcd.ie
www.sharecity.ie