Common Practices: Researching Community Food Economies as Urban Commons

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Abstract

• In this workshop I discuss the geographic tools and methods that community economies researchers and others have developed to study the diverse economies of food provisioning, make visible alternative property arrangements, and open up urban spaces for commoning. I apply these perspectives to discuss my research on urban food mapping, community food production, and food sharing in Boston and Berlin. I highlight some of the practical "tools" for commoning that activists have developed, while exploring some of the tensions and possibilities that emerge around responsibility, accessibility, care, and ownership in common practices.
Outline

• Who am I?
• Key Concepts
• Boston
• Berlin
• Next steps and Questions
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-enacting economies.

Words make worlds

How we imagine, frame and talk about our economy influences how we act. Contemporary economic policies confront 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 materialisation.

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 enterprises) 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>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wage</td>
<td>Market</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Capitalist</td>
<td>Mainstream Markets</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALTERNATIVE PAID</td>
<td>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</td>
<td>ALTERNATIVE PRIVATE</td>
<td>ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST</td>
<td>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>Fair trade</td>
<td>State-managed assets</td>
<td>State owned</td>
<td>Cooperative Banks</td>
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<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>
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<tr>
<td>Work for welfare</td>
<td>Barter</td>
<td>Indigenous knowledge (Intellectual Property)</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>Micro-finance</td>
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<td>UNPAID</td>
<td>NON-MARKET</td>
<td>OPEN ACCESS</td>
<td>NON-CAPITALIST</td>
<td>NON-MARKET</td>
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<td>Housework</td>
<td>Household sharing</td>
<td>Atmosphere</td>
<td>Worker cooperatives</td>
<td>Sweat equity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>Gift giving</td>
<td>International Waters</td>
<td>Self proprietorships</td>
<td>Family lending</td>
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<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
- Gifts 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)
The Commons
Commons

- Common Property Regimes
- Common Pool Resources (subtractability)
- Communities and Care
- Public or Private
- Formal or Informal
- Material or Immaterial
- Noun or Verb
Urban Commons

- Rural assumptions re: community, place.
- Cities are different: density, competing land uses, cultural diversity, capital investment
- Already exist, but we need to learn to see them.
Property & Citizenship

- “a relationship of belonging that is held up by the surrounding space – a relationship that is not fixed but temporally and spatially contingent” (Keenan, 2010)
- “All of the things we own and use in order to survive well” (Gibson-Graham, et al. 2013)
- Bundle of Rights – use, access, and usufruct rights, the right to exclude others, the right not be excluded (Blomley)
Care

- A feeling of responsibility
- As everyday work of social reproduction
- As property claim or effect
- As power relation

- Who is allowed to care? How far can we care?
Boston

- PhD research 2011-13
- Questions related to household sustainability, gender, and self-provisioning
- How are social and economic relations (re)configured through self-provisioning practices?
Urban Homesteading

- The Urban Homestead: Your Guide to Self-Sufficient Living in the Heart of the City
  By Kelly Coyne and Erik Knutzen

- Radical Homemakers
  By Shannon Hayes

- Urban Homesteading
  By Rachel Kaplan and Jeff King

- Tiny Town Farm
## Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
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</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 mapping, ongoing activist-scholar collaborations)</td>
<td>To create urban commons that support collective forms of provisioning. To increase the visibility of diverse food economies in Greater Boston</td>
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# Diverse Food Economies in Boston

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<tr>
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<td>Capitalist</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALT. PAID Self-employed Paid in Food</td>
<td>ALT. MARKET Farmers market Craft market Barter</td>
<td>ALT. PRIVATE Community garden Shared backyard and kitchen Urban Commons</td>
<td>ALT. CAPITALIST Non-profit learning Social Enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNPAID Self-provisioning Housework Volunteer Work Party</td>
<td>NON-MARKET Gifting Sharing of skills, food, materials Gleaning, Foraging, Gathering</td>
<td>OPEN ACCESS Online Knowledge Commons Seed library Public Fruit Urban Commons</td>
<td>NON-CAPITALIST Households (communal, feudal, and ancient). Neighborhood Cooperative Community Enterprise</td>
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Seeing Diverse Property Practices

Commons Identi-Kit

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Figure 5.5: Commons Identi-Kit

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

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.
Mapping as a tool for Commoning

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 illustrate new spatial imaginaries with desires for and outcomes of alternative economic initiatives. Each project reveals 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.

In Japan, where the geographies of competing forms of land ownership are so deeply engrained, the Commons of the Commons is an important tool for understanding the complex relationships between different forms of ownership and use. The Commons of the Commons seeks to challenge the traditional notions of property and use, and instead explores the potential for collective ownership and use of land and resources.

Keywords: Commons, Commons, Commons, Commons.

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.

—Eschobar (1995, 198)

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 host of contemporary movements, from indigenous rights to resources and new approaches to commons, 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., Eschobar 2001; Sassen 2002; Mackenzie 2006). These spaces of difference counter 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

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*Figure 5.5: Commons Identi-Kit*

(Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2013)
**LURC’s Urban Food Commons**

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<th>Ownership</th>
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<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

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 homeowners, 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 individual(s) involved in the harvest (also listed below) 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; understand 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 it.

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
Berlin

• Post-Doc Research
• In collaboration with international research team in 8 cities: Athens, Berlin, Barcelona, Dublin, London, Melbourne, New York, Singapore
• Goal: to assess the practice and sustainability potential of ICT-mediated Food Sharing Economies in cities.
Diverse Economies of Food Sharing

Figure 1.3: The Economy as an Iceberg

(Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2015) (Cagle 2014)
Performing Diverse Food Economies
## Diverse Food Economies in Berlin

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<td>Wage Employees</td>
<td>Market Selling at Supermarkt</td>
<td>Private Kleingartenverein Home gardens</td>
<td>Capitalist</td>
<td>Market Venture Capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALT. PAID Self-employed Paid in Food</td>
<td>ALT. MARKET Farmers market Craft market Barter Selling meals,</td>
<td>ALT. PRIVATE Community gardens, Community Kitchens Fair-Teiler</td>
<td>ALT. CAPITALIST Non-profit (e.V) gGmbH Social Enterprise</td>
<td>ALT. MARKET Crowd Funding State and Foundation Funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNPAID Self-provisioning Housework Volunteer Work Party kuFA</td>
<td>NON-MARKET CSA - SolaWi Gifting skills, food, materials Gleaning, Food Rescue, Foraging, Gathering</td>
<td>OPEN ACCESS Public Fruit via Mundraub</td>
<td>NON-CAPITALIST Informal Volunteer Groups, Mutual Aid Networks, Community Enterprise</td>
<td>NON-MARKET Peer lending Sweat Equity Private Donations Donations at workshops</td>
</tr>
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What ARE Diverse Food Economies in Berlin

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Case Studies

• Himmel Beet
• Mundraub
• Foodsharing.de
• Ueber den Teller Rand
Himmel Beet

- Intercultural Community Garden – gGmbH & e.V.
- Very strong emphasis on Inclusion & politics of Encounter
- Ongoing Land Struggle
- Important node in Wedding for sustainability
- What is shared?: land, compost, food, skills, experiences, kitchens, meals
Food Sharing

- Just getting started: learning the rules and regulations, taking quizzes.
- Longer engagement with Yunity and offline food sharing.
- Commoning food via online platform and fair-teiler
Mundraub

- Commoning public fruit and nut trees via mapping, planting and community care
- Community has been hard to locate
- Wrong time of year!
- Are maps enough?
Ueber den Teller Rand

- Social Enterprise e.V
- Sharing cultures, experiences, skills, and food.
- Strong emphasis on inclusion
Next Steps

• Ongoing interviews and participant observation
• Know anyone? Please be in touch: Morrowo@tcd.ie
Discussion Questions

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

• What/Where/How are the Commons in Berlin?
Commoning Practices in Berlin

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Figure 5.5: Commons Identi-Kit
## Berlin’s Urban Food Commons

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<td>Kitchens</td>
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<td>Community Spaces</td>
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<td>Food</td>
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References

Thank you

Julie Graham
Community Economies Research Fund
Questions?

morrowo@tcd.ie
www.sharecity.ie