
MAPPING THE DIVERSE COMMUNITY ECONOMY SECTOR IN CHRISTCHURCH

ABSTRACT

Post-quake Christchurch has seen a flourishing of alternative economic activities that work to directly support the wellbeing of residents, often through the volunteer and community sector. This project seeks to produce a database, conceptual map, and a literal map of the diverse economic activities contributing to both coping with change and the future renewal of Christchurch. This short paper will outline the project's goals and theoretical foundations, and will provide opportunities for community groups to register their interest in participating in this mapping project.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Crisis has a way of altering horizons. From the global economic crisis of 2008 to the quakes that rocked Christchurch in 2010 and 2011, this city has faced more than its fair share of economic challenge and change in recent times. At the same time, Christchurch people are well aware of the ways in which crisis has helped to open new horizons, often by forcing people to find alternative ways to meet their wellbeing needs. Initiatives such as GapFiller, Greening the Rubble, the Food Resilience Network, Find it & Fix it, the Student Volunteer Army and more have risen to the challenge, working alongside previously existing organisations such as local churches, playcentres and community action groups. What these groups have in common is a grappling with hardship and a re-envisioning of economic activity as something which is meant to support communities, wellbeing and resilience. These organisations not only contribute to the informal economy, they are also experimenting with new ways of doing economics: prioritising ethical considerations over profit maximization, reorienting themselves towards equity, social and ecological sustainability, cooperation, democratic processes, and community-based development. There are exciting things going on, but they are often studied in isolation from each other – as little more than interesting case studies or fun examples of a vibrant local culture. They are not always taken seriously as real, important contributors of economic wellness. This results in a skewed view of the economy, where the focus is on state budgets, for-profit capitalist enterprises and the market economy – leading to the assumption that it is these things that promote economic growth and therefore will best help Christchurch get back on its feet.

But what if these alternative economic practices were the start of something new? Could they contribute to a groundswelling of community resilience activity that can survive the hard knocks that big buildings and budgets cannot? What if these networks and skills *are* the future of sustainable economies, both here and elsewhere? Internationally, these types of initiatives are being studied as part of the diverse economies framework, a broad framework that encompasses diverse forms of enterprise (such as social or family enterprise), transactions (including informal exchanges), labour (such as time banking), property (such as iwi or trust owned) and finance (such as credit unions). Mapping the diverse economy – literally and conceptually – is a way of increasing the visibility of these important alternative economic practices, and interrogating their potential to build economies around the needs and wellbeing of communities.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research project is interested in mapping the diversity of economic activities in Christchurch. To what extent does studying alternative non-capitalist enterprises, entities, practices and initiatives together help us to envision Christchurch's sustainable future? **The central hypothesis is that many of these diverse economic activities have a substantial and heretofore unrecognised significance and positive impact on the city and**

surrounding areas, in terms of increasing economic activity, employment, well-being and overall socio-environmental sustainability. To this end, the following research questions are pertinent:

1. What types of alternative and non-capitalist economic activities are currently being practiced in Christchurch, and how have these changed in recent times?
2. Where are the different initiatives located? Do they cluster geographically, and if so, how and why?
3. How do such initiatives map on to local social and economic geographies?
4. How do they network with each other, and how do these networks function?
5. What types of benefits flow from these economic activities, and which ones can we pick out for expansion?
6. What types of personal economic identity characterises people involved in these initiatives?
7. How do these initiatives engage socially and politically with each other, their local communities, and the local government?
8. How do these economic activities contribute to what is known globally as 'the solidarity economy', and what are the implications of this?

In the longer term, the project would turn to calculating the economic value (direct and indirect) that solidarity economy initiatives contribute to the local and regional economy.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Guided by the research questions, this research project aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To conceptually and spatially map the diverse economy of pre- and post-quake Christchurch (research questions 1-4)
2. To investigate, in depth, solidarity economy initiatives and their significance for participants, their communities, and the city. (Research questions 3-6)
3. To generate a highly detailed spatial database of the solidarity economy in Christchurch, modelled on similar databases under construction by colleagues in Philadelphia, New York City and Worcester, Massachusetts. This database will be used to investigate clusters of solidarity economy activities, and examine membership in terms of socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, age and other factors. (Research question 8)
4. To work with US colleagues to develop and pilot an interactive participatory mapping platform for solidarity economy initiatives, for use in networking, education and research. (Research questions 6,8).
5. To recruit and train community researchers from within solidarity economy initiatives to research their own activities and those around them, while building up the capacity of their own organisations.

The objectives are realistically linked to a similar project members of the Community Economies Collective are undertaking the US. The Community Economies Collective is an international group of researchers with shared interests in fostering community economies. Building on the work that is already being done by a National Science Foundation-funded group of researchers within the collective, this research project hopes to contribute to global thinking on solidarity economies as well as practical outcomes and information for Christchurch planners and residents.

METHODOLOGY

Building on the strengths of the Community Economies Collective, this project seeks to recruit community researchers to conduct mapping and inventory activities in the areas of the community they are most familiar with. Collaboration with community organisations and other less formal community groups will be the basis of this project. Community researchers may have no background in research, but must have strong connections

to some portion of the community. The exercise will be a capacity building and training opportunity for people interested in developing their community organisation and research skills. These community researchers will be supported in running workshops and collecting relevant data for our inventory of diverse economic activities in the community sector of Christchurch.

OUTPUTS

Visual artist and photographer Inge Flinte will work with community researchers and groups to represent their work in a collaborative photobook publication. Videographer Marney Brosnan will assist with developing short films to represent the findings of our project to wider non-specialist audiences. These outputs, alongside articles and book chapters in more traditional academic media, hope to exhibit the collective strength of the alternative community sector in the city. This has ongoing political and economic reverberations, as these important activities are understood not as small, isolated projects, but as a vibrant community economy.

RESEARCH TIMELINE

August 2014 – January 2015	Ongoing networking and applications for funding. Media releases on research plans.
January 2015 – February 2015	Recruitment and training of community researchers, ongoing networking with community organisations. Filming for short film used to promote the research project to the community, funders, city planners, and to raise awareness of alternative economic activities in Christchurch.
April 2015	Travel to the US (Philadelphia, New York and Chicago) to meet with Mapping the Solidarity Economy colleagues and visit their database (Philadelphia), fieldsites (Philadelphia and New York) and meet with the full project team to plan collaborations (Chicago).
May – July 2015	Begin first stage of data collection in Christchurch, training community researchers and pilot testing qualitative data collection strategies.
July- Nov 2015	Reviewing pilot data and organising major fieldwork for December 2015.
Dec 2015	Hosting US Colleagues and associated fieldwork.
Jan- Feb 2016	Training community researchers in the participatory mapping platform and using them to promote it. Interviewing and surveying community organisations.
March-Dec 2016	Data analysis and map construction. Shooting for photobook and filming for documentary, both looking at alternative economic activities in Christchurch and their effects on wellbeing. Highlighting solidarity economy activities for further research.
Jan-Dec 2017	Writing and preparing collaborative articles, book chapters. Work on photobook with photographer.

ABOUT THE TEAM – THE LOCALS

Dr Kelly Dombroski is a lecturer in human geography at the University of Canterbury. She has conducted community based and participatory research with communities in northwest China, Australia and New Zealand. As a member of the Community Economies Collective, she draws on the collective skills and capacity

of this international group of scholars and activists. She is actively seeking to collaborate with community partners interested in exploring alternative economic enterprise and activity.

Dr Femke Reitsma is a senior lecturer in Geography at the University of Canterbury. She has conducted a wide range of GIS modelling and mapping projects, and has an interest in food resilience and the city. She is a member of the Christchurch food resilience network.

Inge Flinte is a visual artist specialising in the medium of photography. She received her MFA from the Otago Polytechnic School of Art, New Zealand and her thesis explored the use of photobooks in story-telling. Her work pays close attention to both human and non-human agents of change.

Marney Brosnan manages and develop the cartographic, video, geodigital imaging and graphic design facility in the Department of Geography, University of Canterbury. She specialises in effective, innovative and creative science communication within and beyond the University in a variety of mediums including film.

ABOUT THE TEAM – INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY ECONOMIES COLLECTIVE MEMBERS

Oona Morrow is a lecturer at Boston University, and conducts research broadly concerned with how people create sustainable lifestyles and livelihoods in US cities. Her current research on urban homesteading examines the social and economic relations that develop around urban self-provisioning practices, such as do-it-yourself, urban agriculture, and cottage food production. Through this research she explores the intersections of gender, diverse economies, and urban food policies.

Dr Stephen Healy is a research fellow at the University of Western Sydney. He is a key researcher in the NSF funded project “Collaborative Research: Mapping the Solidarity Economy in the US”. He also has research experience in health care reform in the United States, the work of informal care givers, cooperative development for marginalized populations, and efforts to integrate environmental concerns into teaching and the process of regional development. He aims to develop and learn to speak a new language of economy. The practice of speaking this language is learning to revalue every day care, ordinary places and labours and to find in them both meaning and potential. His research aims to give voice to an economy of values capable of holding and expressing our commitments to others.

Associate Professor Jenny Cameron is Assistant Dean of research training at the University of Newcastle, Australia. Through her work as a long-time member of the Community Economies Collective, she has trained community researchers in a variety of different diverse and community economies mapping projects. With Katherine Gibson (JK Gibson-Graham) and Stephen Healy, she is co-author of the recent book *Take Back the Economy: An ethical guide for transforming our communities*, which has been well-received all over the world.