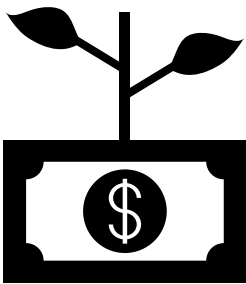


Creating a Personal Diverse Economic Portfolio



AIM OF ACTIVITY

In this activity, students reflect on and analyze their own economic practices, to recognize their diverse and social character. As a result, students come to realize themselves as interdependent and ethical economic subjects. This activity is inspired by the work of J.K. Gibson-Graham on diverse economies.

I have not yet tried out this activity in my own classrooms, but could see it being used in economics teaching and economics-focused social science courses, either as an independent project over the course of a term or as a two-week more intensive exercise. It can be carried out either in-person or online or as a hybrid.

ACTIVITY OUTLINE

1. Economic Diaries

The activity begins with students keeping an economic diary over the course of a week to become more aware of their economic lives. In the diary they record all of their economic transactions and exchanges, where they took place, whom they involved, whether money was exchanged etc. Students then classify these activities into capitalist, alternative and non-capitalist, by drawing on relevant theoretical readings and class discussions.

ACTIVITY OUTLINE

2. Economic Inventories

The next step involves students translating their diary into an inventory, using a template adapted from the Diverse Economies Framework that consists of three sub-inventories: transactional exchanges, economic organizations and labor practices. Some examples can be provided to get students going:

www.communitypartnering.info/diverse25.html

- **Transactional exchanges:** *capitalist* market transactions; *alternative* transactions such as students swapping things or buying a vegetable box from a local farmer; *non-market* transactions such as sharing household labor, free-cycling, gifting or community gardening.
- **Economic organizations:** *capitalist firms* such as supermarkets or department stores; *alternative capitalist enterprises* such as op-shops, fair trade stores, non-profits, cooperative and community enterprises, food waste apps and shared ownership schemes, *non-capitalist* organizations such as communal and household groups, independent businesses supported by friends' or family members' free labor
- **Labor practices:** *capitalist wage work*; *alternatively paid* labor activities such as under-the-table tutoring or baby sitting, self-employment, swapping childcare or final thesis drafts; *unpaid labor* such as housework, household or family physical and emotional care, volunteer work, self-provisioning through gardening.

ACTIVITY OUTLINE

3. Social and ethical questions

Here students reflect on two questions: **on what basis am I making economic decisions** and **what kind of social relationships am I entering or creating through my economic activities?** The first question is likely to show multiple reasonings, including affordability, convenience and ethical concerns such as fair trade, animal treatment or food miles. Recognizing the plurality of their choices and calculations shows students the limited application of neoclassical theories of self-interested, utility-maximizing individuals and reveals (most) students as ethical consumers who complement their financial calculations with non-financial questions about how their economic activities might be impacting other human beings, animals or the wider environment.

The second question about social relationships goes to the heart of re-socializing economic relations, as it makes students aware of the diversity of relationships on which their economic activities are based. These can range from a standard consumer relationship to parent/child or other kin connections, friend, neighbor, flat mate or mentor. Realizing how socially interconnected and interdependent economic activities are also undermines orthodox notions of autonomous, self-centered individuals and shows the economy as embedded within social systems.

ACTIVITY OUTLINE

4. Get Creative

This involves students creating a visual representation of their diverse economy portfolios in the form of an iceberg or other creative, potentially multimedia, formats. The iceberg is a pedagogical tool developed by Gibson-Graham and colleagues to show that what is usually regarded as 'the economy' is but the tip of a huge amount of economic activities that are often invisible, sidelined or ignored. They nevertheless constitute the majority of people's, and students,' economic lives. The intention of this final part of the activity is therefore to make personal diverse economies visible and to move students from the linearity of writing to experimenting with more creative forms of imagining and expressing themselves as diverse economic subjects. Students then share their creations either in physical or virtual formats.

www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/take-back-the-economy

READING SUGGESTIONS

These are the readings my students do for the classes connected to the activity:

- Gibson-Graham, J. K., & Dombroski, K. (2020). *The Handbook of Diverse Economies*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K., Cameron, J., & Healy, S. (2013). *Take back the economy: An ethical guide for transforming our communities*. U of Minnesota Press.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. (2006). *A postcapitalist politics*. U of Minnesota Press.
- Roelvink, G., Martin, K. S., & Gibson-Graham, J. K. (Eds.). (2015). *Making other worlds possible: Performing diverse economies*. U of Minnesota Press.