ABCD Meets DEF: Using Asset Based Community Development to Build Economic Diversity

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In this paper we want to bring two approaches into conversation with each other—Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) and the Diverse Economies Framework (DEF). And we particularly want to look at how these approaches can be combined and used for community and economic development. We start with the Diverse Economies Framework.

This framework recognises and values the diverse economic practices that sustain our lives. One way of illustrating this diversity is to think of the economy as an iceberg (Figure 1). The top part of the iceberg is usually recognised as the economy. But hidden from view are a host of other economic activities, many which directly contribute to individual and community wellbeing.

Figure 1: The Economy as an Iceberg
Source: Community Economies Collective, 2001.

Another way of illustrating this diversity is through the Diverse Economies Framework (Figure 2). The first row represents what we usually think of as the economy—that part of the iceberg that sits above the waterline. It includes goods and services that are transacted through the market, and produced by paid workers employed in capitalist enterprises. But hidden from view is considerable economic diversity. There are alternative markets which are used to transact goods and services, there are a variety of ways that labour is remunerated and there are a variety of alternative capitalist enterprises, driven by something other than profit-maximisation (like a social or environmental ethic) (see row 2). There are also ways that goods and services are transacted outside of market mechanisms, there are many forms of unpaid labour, and there are non-capitalist enterprises (see row 3).

Transactions	**Labour**	**Enterprise**
MARKET	**WAGE**	**CAPITALIST**
ALTERNATIVE MARKET Sale of public goods Ethical 'fair-trade' markets Local trading systems Alternative currencies Underground market Co-op exchange Barter Informal market	**ALTERNATIVE PAID** Self-employed Cooperative Indentured Reciprocal labor In kind Work for welfare	**ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST** State enterprise Green capitalist Socially responsible firm Non-profit
NON-MARKET Household flows Gift giving Indigenous exchange State allocations State appropriations Gleaning Hunting, fishing, gathering Theft, poaching	**UNPAID** Housework Family care Neighbourhood work Volunteer Self-provisioning labour Slave labour	**NON-CAPITALIST** Communal Independent Feudal Slave

Figure 2: The Diverse Economy

Source: Adapted from Gibson-Graham, 2006, 71

We know that what goes on in the hidden economy (what largely sits in the bottom two rows) is substantial in conventional economic terms. We only have to think of housework. We know from the work of people like Duncan Ironmonger, from the University of Melbourne, that even in the West, the value of the goods and services produced by unpaid workers in households is equivalent to the value of goods and service produced by paid workers for the market (Figure 3).

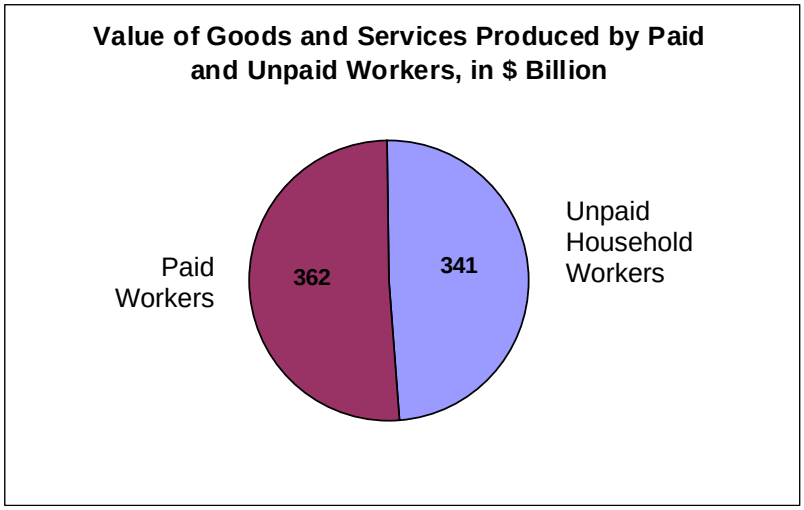

Figure 3: Value of Household and Paid Work, Australia, 1992
Source: Ironmonger, 1996, 51-2.

Here of course there are parallels with ABCD. Both are concerned with representations and the new possibilities that emerge when we change how we view things. ABCD is about changing how we view people and places, particularly marginalised or disadvantaged people and places. ABCD helps us see people and places not as problems for experts to solve, but as being full of hidden assets, skills and strengths that can be harnessed (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). The Diverse Economies Framework is about changing how we view the economy. The shift is from seeing only a fragment of the economy to seeing a world of economy diversity that might be harnessed for community, economic and environmental wellbeing.

There are two examples that demonstrate how this economic diversity can be harnessed.

Like so many community gardens, Fig Tree Community Garden in Newcastle (see www.figtree.org.au) is not about gardening, but about people, and specifically developing a community space in inner Newcastle for a diverse range of people. To do this Fig Tree uses a range of economic practices. First there is a paid coordinator working 2 days per week (see Figure 4, row 1). He works with people to help them do what they want to do for the garden—whether it is working with a Work for the Dole crew who decide they'd like to tile the pizza oven area, or with students from a herbal medicine course who do 20 hours of volunteer work, or just keeping an eye on the chickens and the gardens so that people can be paid in kind for looking after the chooks, watering the gardens, weeding and so on (see row 2). The coordinator describes what he does in the following way:

> [At the start in 2004] there was a plan, sure. But the plan was only a guide to start with and then … when people came to us, we asked 'What do you want? What do you want out of this?' Then we catered to that. We let their ideas flourish and develop. And then the end vision is very different to what us as individuals might have seen at the beginning … People just come from all different places and you don't know where they're going to come from next. And you just say "Oh, yeah, sure. Let's do that".

This approach to working with and developing the ideas of people who are interested in the garden, not only gives rise to new activities in the garden, but is also a wonderful illustration of ABCD at work. Those who come to the garden are seen as already having ideas, interests and passions, and the role of the coordinator is to enable these to flourish.

There is also a horticulturalist who works 2 days a week (see row 1) growing herbs that are sold by arrangement to local restaurants and an organic fruit and vegetable shop, and growing potted plants that again are sold by arrangement through a local hardware store (see row 2). There is also an enormous amount of gift giving (see row 3). For example, the neighbours and local restaurants gift their waste to the chickens and the worm farm, the local mowing service gifts their grass clippings to the compost piles. The garden itself is a gift for people to use. For example, people drop by to pick the evening's salad, a home school group uses the site for educational activities, the beekeeper who monitors the port keeps his hives on the site, people turn up every second Friday evening or the last Sunday in the month for pizza cooked in the pizza oven (and to do this people bring gifts of food, the garden itself contributes, and through communal and volunteer labour up to 50 people will share in pizza (see row 3)). The gardens and the site itself is largely maintained and developed by volunteer labour, including neighbours, who drop by to weed, water, plant and so on (see row 3). So overall Fig Tree as a non profit incorporated association has people working in largely self-directed and communal ways (see row 3). As a result the initiative is characterised by a diversity of economic practices through which a community foremost is being built.

Transactions	Labour	Enterprise
MARKET	**WAGE** Coordinator (2 days/week) Horticulturalist (2 days/week)	**CAPITALIST**
ALTERNATIVE MARKET Sale of herbs to local restaurants and organic food shop Selling potted plans through local hardware	**ALTERNATIVE PAID** Work for the Dole Work for Study (herbal medicine course) In kind (e.g. eggs & produce)	**ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST**
NON-MARKET Gift giving	**UNPAID** Neighbourhood work Volunteer	**NON-CAPITALIST** Non profit incorporated association (emphasis on self direction & communalism)

Figure 4: The Diverse Economy of Fig Tree Community Garden

For another example of how economic diversity can be harnessed we turn to the Philippines. In the rural province of Bohol, people are interested in gaining income. For a group of women aged between their 40s and 80s, an income would mean they could access credit, repay debt and, most importantly, maintain or improve their health and the health of their families. So through an participatory action research project involving Unlad Kabayan Migrant Resource

Services and the Australian National University, and funded through the Australian Research Council and AusAid, these women set up a ginger tea making enterprise that now provides them with the income they need. The Laca Ginger Tea Enterprise employs a diversity of economic practices. For example they sell through local markets, but also through alternative markets using *suki* or local trading agreements to build strong relationships with small *sari sari* stores (see Figure 5, column 1). They also use hawking and vending, and barter arrangements. In terms of labour arrangements the women are paid a proportion of what they make (see row 2). They are also paid in kind with enterprise funds set aside to for snacks and for toppings for the rice that the women bring as gifts to share with each other (see rows 1 & 3). And they use *hungus* or a local reciprocal labour custom (see row 2). If one worker cannot attend a production day because they are sick or have other commitments, another household or kin member will attend in her place. The group has also set up a small credit facility that incorporates principles of *repa repa,* the local revolving credit practice (see row 2). In terms of its enterprise form, this enterprise operates as an informal cooperative with an emphasis on collectivism and communalism (see row 3). Overall then this enterprise is using economic diversity to build social and economic wellbeing (for more on Laca Ginger Tea, see Community Economies Collective & Gibson, 2009).

Transactions	**Labour**	**Enterprise**
MARKET Coordinator (2 days/week)	**WAGE**	**CAPITALIST**
ALTERNATIVE MARKET Local trading agreements Informal hawking and vending Barter Alternative Credit	**ALTERNATIVE PAID** Cooperative In kind Reciprocal	**ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST**
NON-MARKET Gift giving	**UNPAID**	**NON-CAPITALIST** Informal cooperative (emphasis on collectivism & communalism)

Figure 5: The Diverse Economy of Laca Ginger Tea

Like Fig Tree, Laca Ginger Tea also uses locally available assets, particularly the skills of the women in making ginger tea as well as the plentiful supplies of ginger that grow in the area. Both are also building on and proliferating another asset—existing economic diversity. For example, Fig Tree is building on and proliferating people's willingness to and interest in volunteering and gifting. Laca Ginger Tea is building on and proliferating existing economic and cultural customs like *hungus*, *repa repa* and *suki*. So existing economic diversity is one of those assets that can be harnessed for both economic and community development. The results when we look at initiatives like Fig Tree and Laca Ginger Tea are not regular economic enterprises, but what we might call community enterprises, that is enterprises that use diverse economic practices to directly benefit their communities—socially, economically and even environmentally (for more on community enterprises see Cameron 2008 & 2009).

So what we'd now like to do is talk about strategies for developing these types of community enterprises, particularly in terms of two overarching steps:

1. identifying existing economic diversity, and
2. building on and proliferating existing economic diversity.

1. Identifying Existing Economic Diversity

The strategies for identifying existing economic diversity are basically the same as those for identifying any existing assets. But we need to expand our economic imaginary so that we can readily identify economic diversity. For example, Figure 6 shows an extract from a Portrait of Gifts used to report on the assets and skills of people in the Latrobe Valley, Victoria who were heavily impacted by the restructuring and privatisation of the state owned mines and power stations (including retrenched electricity industry workers, unemployed young people). The Portrait of Gifts is one method that is used for reporting on assets mapping exercises (for more on Portraits of Gifts, see Kretzmann et al, 1997). But these assets and skills can also be translated into the diverse economies framework—thereby bringing to light existing economic diversity in an area like the Latrobe Valley that is all too readily identified as lacking economic activity (see Figure 7).

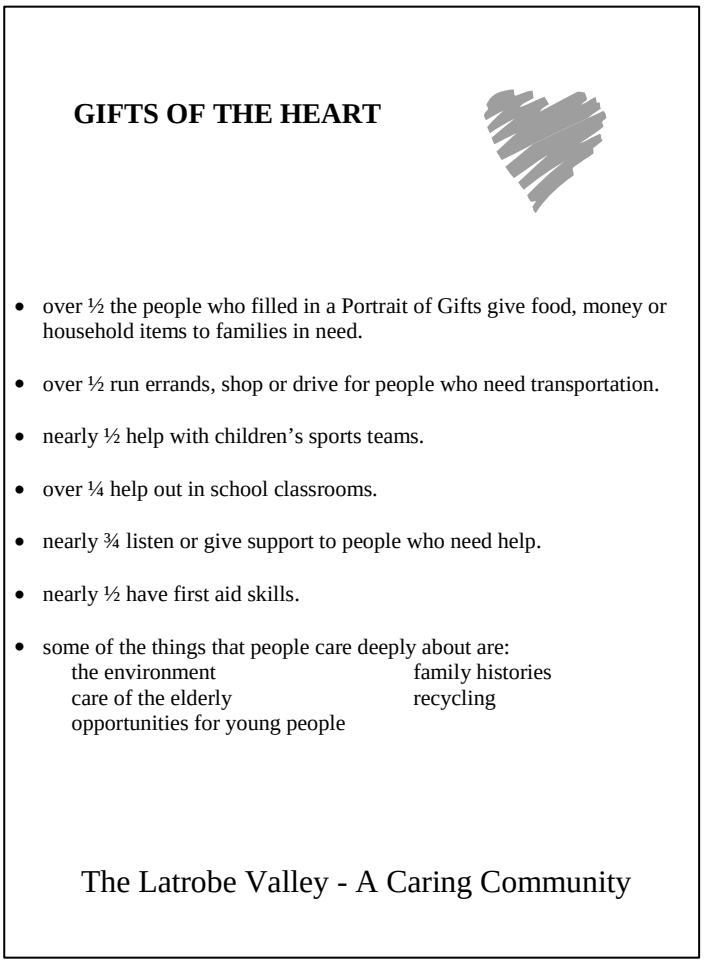

Figure 6: Detail from a Portrait of Gifts

Source: Cameron & Gibson, 2001 & 2005a

Transactions	Labour	Enterprise
MARKET	**WAGE**	**CAPITALIST**
ALTERNATIVE MARKET Informal exchange (swapping skills) Cash in hand (e.g. help around the yard)	**ALTERNATIVE PAID** In kind (e.g. garden produce for maintenance skills)	**ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST**
NON-MARKET Household flows (e.g meals; care of ch'n, elderly, sick; care of house, garden) Gift giving (e.g. running errands; child care; donating food, clothing; free accommodation)	**UNPAID** Housework/Family care (e.g. cooking; caring; maintenance) Volunteer Labour (e.g. helping out friends, family, schools, community groups, sport teams)	**NON-CAPITALIST** Non-profit (Not for Profit Inc. Assoc.) Registered Charities

Figure 7: The Diverse Economy of the Latrobe Valley (based on the Portrait of Gifts)

Identifying existing economic diversity is therefore a way of reframing the economy. It shifts our focus away from what's missing, in particular what's missing in the top row, to instead focus on the economic activities already present and ready to be built on.

2. Building on and proliferating existing economic diversity

There are three strategies for building on and proliferating this existing economic diversity. One is reframing our sense of self, the second involves developing a sense of collective possibility and the third is to act on that changed sense of self and collective possibility (see also Cameron & Gibson 2005a & b).

1. We know that ABCD involves a change from people seeing themselves as lacking and needy, to seeing themselves as already having skills, strengths and abilities that can be mobilised. So too in the DEF people shift from seeing themselves as economically inactive and lacking, to seeing the diverse economic activities they already participate in. The techniques we have used include participatory action research with local residents where people document this economic diversity, and follow it up with conversations, discussions and workshops with other community members (see Cameron & Gibson 2005b). In these discussions and so on economic diversity gets talked about and made familiar. (And the Portrait of Gifts is one example of how this diversity can get talked about, and we've also used other techniques like photo essays).

Of course, there also needs to be a shift in how others view marginalised people and places. ABCD has taught us how important it is that policy makers, program workers and others shift their understanding. Instead of seeing marginalised areas as deficient and needing expert solutions, it is important that policy makers, program workers and so on, take a more back seat role and lend their support to projects that 1) are initiated from within communities and

2) build on existing assets. So too in building economic diversity, the conversations, discussions and workshops need to involve not just those who are marginalised, but a wider audience.

2. The next strategy is to develop a sense of collective possibility. This largely involves opportunities for play, for experimental thinking, for tossing ideas around—without commitment. We've used "how to" workshops, brainstorming sessions, and bus trips, for example, so people can just find out more about what others are up to and what might be possible—but again, with a sense of fun and play, without commitment.

3. The third strategy is to act on the changed sense of self and collective possibilities. This is where local residents take a leading role in developing the possibilities that have emerged—with support from governments and NGOs. In the process of working with communities in Australia and the Philippines who are acting on a changed sense of self and collective possibility, we have found some key lessons around three critical moments of community enterprise development:

Starting

- Starting with the assets that are already at hand (including people, skills, materials and economic diversity).
- Is money really a resource that helps? (Too often money can undermine community assets and increase the scale of an initiative before it's had time to consolidate).
- Testing interest and commitment. (Yes it's important to have a good idea, but it's even more important to have an idea that people are interested in and willing to commit to. Fig Tree found this out by advertising a working bee on the last Sunday in the month and having 40 keen people turned up. The working bee on the last Sunday of the month, with a pizza lunch provided, has now become a tradition. In the case of something like Santa's Workshop in the Latrobe Valley, it meant running a trial Workshop around Nov/Dec in 1999 and finding that people were so interested that almost ten years later it continues to operate almost all year round (see Cameron & Gibson 2005a)).
- Knowing the "market". For commercially oriented enterprises, this means knowing that there is a market for the service or product. In the case of Laca Ginger Tea this was confirmed through visiting the local markets, finding that people would buy the product and building relationships with store holders (see Community Economies Collective & Gibson, 2009). Likewise in the case of Fig Tree there has been considerable effort put into building relationships with local restaurants and organic fruit and vege shops, so there is a market for the herbs and lettuces.
- Aiming high but starting small. This is important for two reasons, one is that it's important to get something doable happening fairly quickly so there is a sense of achievement. But it is also important that if things start small and then interest and commitment wanes not a lot has been lost. So for example, if there was little interest on that first Fig Tree Working Bee or the first Santa's Workshop then it was not a big deal to let the idea drop.

Consolidating

- Taking advice – from where? (Here it is important to get advice, particularly strategic advice, that acknowledges both the economic diversity and strong values, particularly the social and environmental values, that characterise community enterprises).

- Building support networks (One characteristic of many community enterprises is that they are strongly embedded within a network of relationships that help sustain their diverse economic practices. Fig Tree provides a good example of this; another is Sustainable Gardening Services in Brisbane (for more on this example see Cameron 2009)).
- Reflecting and reviewing (The reflecting and reviewing is critical for community enterprises to monitor how well they are going, particularly how well their values are reflected in their practices (for more on this see Cameron, 2008)).

Ongoing

- Dealing with tensions (Tensions are perhaps an inevitable part of working in a group, so they are not something to be shied away from, rather tensions need to be raised and discussed early on, particularly to ensure that they don't grow into larger conflicts and disagreements).
- To grow or not to grow? (A key issue for community enterprises is whether or not to grow, and the concern is that social and environmental values may well be compromised by growth. As a result community enterprises have developed different "models" of growth, including growth by replication and growth by deepening (see Cameron 2008).
- Is closing a bad thing? (Sometimes community enterprises reach a stage where they have to consider closing; however, closure need not be viewed as failure but as a signal that an enterprise has successfully achieved its purpose (for more on this see Cameron 2009).

Conclusion

When ABCD meets DEF a new asset emerges—existing economic diversity. In this paper we have discussed how by expanding our understanding of "the economy" we can see that there are a host of economic activities that people in marginalised communities (in both the Majority and Minority worlds) are already practising—and that can be built on and proliferated. Through our action research with local communities in Australia and the Philippines people have built on this economic diversity and developed community enterprises that serve not only economic goals, but also social and even environmental goals. Just as ABCD involves people shifting their sense of self so that they no longer view themselves in terms of deficits, so too the DEF involves people seeing themselves as already active economic subjects in a diverse economy that is filled with collective economic possibilities, possibilities that are perhaps critical to develop in a world that seems beset by social, economic and environmental uncertainty. And just as ABCD involves outside "others" (like policy makers, program workers and academic researchers) lending their support to initiatives that local communities lead, so too in the DEF outside others might lend their support to help collective economic possibilities, such as community enterprises, through the critical moments of start-up, consolidation and ongoing development.

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