

4. Towards an Enactive Development Strategy

In this chapter I will explore possible applications of the enactive framework in practice. In particular I will analyze development strategies informed by postdevelopment theory, the Community Culture School of thought, and also Buddhist Economics by use of the theoretical basis laid out in the first two chapters. Bringing together Gibson-Graham's community economies approach with the enactivist framework appears especially productive in refining enactive development in practice. In their action research projects Gibson-Graham make use of discourse theory as developed by Laclau and Mouffe to deconstruct or "dislocate the unity and hegemony of neoliberal global capitalist economic discourse through a proliferative queering of the economic landscape and construction of a new language of economic diversity" (Gibson-Graham 2006a: 56 and 2006b: xli). In contrast to other postdevelopment authors and practitioners, they not only apply discursive tools in their development work, but also aim at validating a new economic language through experiential interventions: By referring to William Connolly, for instance, they also target a pre-representational "visceral register" (Connolly quoted in Gibson-Graham 2006a: 24) of being, including "affective responses, gut reactions, and embodied actions." I will thus attempt a re-reading of a community economies project undertaken by Katherine Gibson and her colleagues in terms of the enactive framework, drawing on the analytical tools as developed in the first chapter, and on mindfulness-based therapeutic approaches as treated in the second chapter. In order to further clarify the relationship between discursive practices and micro-practices (meaning subdiscursive constituents of meaning) I will then briefly outline the Economy of Communion project. The economic project has been initiated by Chiara Lubich, the leading figure within the Focolare movement, which is a community of goods established by Lubich and her companions during World War 2.

Whereas Gibson-Graham mainly describe projects in their early stages, I wish to illustrate the long-term potential of the community economies approach for social

change by drawing on the example of the Inpaeng Network in Northeastern Thailand. Together with secondary data about the network, I will refer to data and on-site findings collected over a two week period in January 2012, including fifty random household interviews in the village of Ban Bua, eleven expert interviews with Inpaeng leaders from four provinces, and participatory observation during two network meetings and a village ceremony. The village of Ban Bua – in which most of the field research took place - is officially subdivided into four administrative units, each containing different numbers of households. Prior to conducting semi-structured interviews with household heads I therefore subdivided the sample of fifty according to the percentage share of each unit's households in a total of 770 households. Together with an interpreter we conducted the interviews for five days starting in the morning and finishing in the early evening. Standardized interview questions concerned foremost quantitative data, such as age-structure of households, livelihood activities, farm size, acreage per crop etc.

The origins of the Inpaeng Network date back to the mid-1980s, when a small group of farmers in the village of Ban Bua (located about 600 kilometres northeast of Bangkok, in the province of Sakon Nakhon) joined together in order to identify local assets and skills to pursue a development path, which sustains local communities, instead of eroding them. The network's strategies are inspired by the Community Culture School (see Sutee 2013: 193/94). In the first part of the section discussing the network I will show that the economic strategies pursued by Inpaeng members should be seen in relation to the socio-economic context of small-scale farmers in the region. Inpaeng not only draws on existing economic and cultural activities of local villagers, but also seeks to realize further development strategies inherent in these existing practices. In order to ensure the continuation of the network's activities by future generations of farmers, Inpaeng is moreover trying to strike a balance between network objectives – sustainable agricultural activities that strengthen communities and preserve environmental resources - and aspirations of modern farmers. These economic activities will be examined in more detail in subsection 4.2.2, using analytical tools developed by Gibson-Graham. In the final

section I will draw conclusions, trying to delineate an enactive development approach.

4.1. Community Economic Projects and Micro-Political Interventions

Whereas the 1990s have seen a proliferation of theoretical postdevelopment works, these have largely focused on criticizing the core assumptions and failed strategies put forward by earlier development approaches. Only some authors have pointed out a number of elements that could be part of “alternatives to development,” but these have been posited as theoretical “signposts” rather than applied in alternative projects (Escobar 1995: 215; Rahnema 1997b). As shown in the third chapter the lack of empirical alternatives had invited publications critical of postdevelopment, doubtful about its practical relevance. In part inspired by this critique, authors, such as George N. Curry (2003), Sally Matthews (2007), and J.K. Gibson-Graham (2005a) have since the early 2000s developed the theory further with regard to its practical applicability. Whereas Curry illustrates existing alternative economic practices of small-holder farmers in Papua New Guinea, Matthews focuses on the role of development professionals in postdevelopment practice. J.K. Gibson-Graham include both aspects in their work. In contrast to the former authors however, they have not only been involved as researchers in alternative projects, but have in some cases facilitated the emergence of alternative initiatives from the very beginning. Through their experiences they have developed a certain procedure and broad guidelines in order to explore economic possibilities to foster a postdevelopment practice.

4.1.1. Applications of Postdevelopment in Practice

Based on Karl Polanyi’s work, Curry (2003) aims to show that economies, including capitalist economies, cannot function solely through an assumed inherent logic, but are always constituted by particular social arrangements both in Western and Non-Western societies. “[S]ocially and culturally embedded place-based” capitalism thus

gives rise to diverse “alternative modernities” (Curry 2003: 406, 408). In his case study of small-holder farmers growing oil palms for multinational corporations, Curry shows that the farmers do so by reinforcing communal ties by raising and pooling the money needed for social obligations, such as paying the bride price for a male relative, paying for funerals etc. The author’s quantitative data even indicates that spikes in productivity coincide with the timing of these gifts (414/15). The maintenance of communal identity is therefore what determines the mode of inclusion of these farmers in the market economy. The production of cash crops is here integrated into a framework of a traditional gift economy.

A large variety of alternative and non-capitalist economic arrangements is also documented in the action research project undertaken by J.K. Gibson-Graham in the Jagna Municipality on the island of Bohol in the Philippines: The community under study earned some cash by selling rice and bananas, and by exporting contract labor overseas. Beyond these market-economic activities local households were engaged in a number of traditional economic practices, including forms of gifting, of unpaid labor, and practices involving the whole community, such as fundraising activities for funerals or celebrations (Gibson-Graham 2005a). The authors illustrate that conventional development projects frequently ignore these practices and their inherent potential for alternative development by referring to a state-sponsored development plan designed for the community before Gibson-Graham’s action research initiative. Accordingly, the initial exercise of “neutral’ information gathering” (Gibson-Graham 2005a: 10) had already been biased toward depicting local deficiencies: The indicators chosen – such as number of malnourished children, access to potable water etc. - highlighted what was lacking in the community, instead of local strengths: lack of skills, of entrepreneurship, of capital etc. Based on this assessment the development team followed preconceived development strategies - production of cash crops, employment through foreign investment, export of contract labor etc. – in which existing traditional mentalities figured as obstacles to development (see also Latouche 1993: 27).

Structuralist approaches define economic activity in relation to capitalism, thus “limiting possibilities for alternative conceptions of economy” (Curry 2003: 407; Gibson-Graham 2006a: 56). This is the case for modernization and dependency theories, but also strategies that imply a capitalocentric understanding of economy, since they downplay and ignore the role of non-capitalist practices and meanings. Ignoring place-based economic practices, and thus local values held by the “target group,” has in many cases led to failures of NGO initiatives; this experience has prompted a number of NGOs to change their approach in order to improve development work (see McKinnon 2007). Both Katharine McKinnon and Sally Matthews (2007) describe corresponding shifts as responding to local conceptions of development and at the same time making these alternative practices visible. Such development initiatives provide important insights about how external professionals can contribute to alternative communal development in a postdevelopment framework. One such organization is the NGO Enda Graf Sahel in Senegal. After a decade of work in a suburb of Dakar, the country’s capital, the staff concluded that many of their initiatives had been rejected by the local community. The NGO thus changed its approach from identifying the needs and problems of the community based on allegedly superior “expert” knowledge to assisting community members in meeting what these perceived to be their real needs (Matthews 2007: 133).

Matthews describes how the staff therefore stopped initiating projects by themselves and came to support community activities already taking place, accompanying existing “popular dynamics” (Matthews 2008: 1044) This reorientation within the NGO was matched by changes in organizational structure into a loose network of relatively autonomous branches throughout the country. These changes facilitate the integration of staff into communities in order to more effectively respond to local demands. The different roles that Enda Graf Sahel has come to play are nevertheless characterized by its privileged access to technology and information: Network staff make use of communication technologies by establishing contact between independent community organizations throughout the

country. By developing such links, the community projects benefit through mutual support and the sharing of knowledge and experiences. NGO members moreover know how to access donor funds to support community initiatives. They provide information about the embeddedness of local problems within a greater regional or international context, and they encourage locals to appreciate their traditions and ways of life as a source of self-confidence (see Matthews 2007: 137/38). Breaking up the “discursive violence” of modernist development discourse thus serves the dual purpose of legitimizing local cultural practices and of enabling community members to recognize the economic quality of many of their activities, which do not figure as economic in a language that stresses capital accumulation and rational self-interest. Gibson-Graham therefore suggest to set the preconditions for a place-based postdevelopment initiative by collecting data that holistically reflects the concrete design of the “diverse economy” (see table 1) at a certain place.

Table 1: The Diverse Economy

ENTERPRISE	LABOR	PROPERTY	TRANSACTIONS	FINANCE
CAPITALIST	WAGE	PRIVATE	MARKET	MAINSTREAM MARKET
ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST State owned Environmentally responsible Non-profit	ALTERNATIVE PAID Self-employed Reciprocal labor In-kind Work for welfare	ALTERNATIVE PRIVATE Publicly accessible privately owned property State-managed assets Customary (clan) land Community land trusts Indigenous knowledge	ALTERNATIVE MARKET Fair trade Alternative currencies Underground market Barter	ALTERNATIVE MARKET Cooperative Banks Credit unions Community-based financial institutions Micro-finance
NON-CAPITALIST Worker cooperatives Sole proprietorships Community enterprise Feudal Slave	UNPAID Housework Volunteer Self-provisioning Slave labor	OPEN ACCESS Atmosphere International Waters Open source IP	NON-MARKET Household sharing Gift giving Gleaning Hunting, fishing, gathering Theft, piracy, poaching	NON-MARKET Sweat equity Family lending Donations Interest-free loans

Source: Gibson-Graham (2011: 13)

Making visible the specific design of the diverse economy of a community reveals possibilities inherent in local cultures and ways of life. Gibson-Graham advocate a path-dependent step-by-step process that builds on the evaluation of local practices. Whereas positing the Western experience of industrialization as a universal development trajectory usually invites solutions from outside the community, the authors promote an approach, which is free from any precast solutions, and which proceeds by “building on what is there and producing the steps of the process as it goes” (Gibson-Graham, 2005a: 19; N’Dione et al. 1997: 373/74). It is up to the respective community to negotiate development possibilities based on the inventory of existing economic potentials. To Gibson-Graham it is important to remain as open as possible to development potentialities throughout the process; thus, they state that there is no pre-specified common substance shared by diverse community economies, and they refuse to define them by positing them as necessarily local or self-reliant. They moreover refuse to posit common characteristics *within* communities – be it a shared culture, history, or ideal. They therefore stress interdependence instead of sameness, which means that members recognize their differences as a way to start envisioning ways to improve communal wellbeing. Instead of offering elements of a shared ideal, Gibson-Graham suggest four ethical coordinates, or conceptual tools, around which such communal negotiation may take place (Gibson-Graham 2006a: 88-97):

- **Necessity:** Awareness of this element enables a “socially embedded ethical decision” about the boundary between labor necessary to fulfill needs and surplus labor. Recognizing mutual interdependence, the “ethical” definition of individual needs always takes into account the needs of others and the effects of personal consumption on the requirements of others. In their later works the authors include the requirements of the natural environment into these considerations: i.e. that agricultural activity should “take into account the water that is necessary for river systems to sustain themselves. When the food needs of humans conflict with the needs of rivers, the ability to sustain agriculture is undermined.” (Roelvink & Gibson-Graham 2009: 152).

- **Surplus:** Ethical decisions can be made about the use of surplus, the modes of its appropriation – e.g. through capitalist business, worker cooperative, community enterprise etc. - and the ends towards which it is distributed. Again, a truthful estimation of surplus must account for its effects on environmental sustainability by awareness of toxic waste and depletion of environmental resources.

- **Consumption:** “By highlighting the sociality of all economic relations, the community economy approach seeks to recognize the interdependence of a broad variety of economic and so-called ‘noneconomic’ activities.” Gibson-Graham mention the example of rural people contributing savings to a community “fiesta,” which according to mainstream economic conceptions is an unproductive activity. To community members such celebrations confirm local beliefs and social cohesion, and thus replenish a cultural commons. Whether deploying profits and savings to such activities that directly contribute to “social wellbeing” or to reinvestment in surplus-generating activities is another possible ethical choice. Different case studies across alternative capitalist and non-capitalist enterprises illustrate that some communities allocate profits to reinvestment purposes, salaries, and social welfare activities according to a predefined formula (see Gibson-Graham 2006a: 182; see also section 4.2.2 in this chapter).

- **Commons** provide “direct input into social and physical well-being” and are constitutive of the existence of a community: They constitute the inheritance or shared product of its members (Helfrich & Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung 2009: 24). Commons can be global (e.g. atmosphere), material (e.g. forests or community-oriented enterprises), or immaterial goods (e.g. shared traditions). Use rights extend to a group of people, which in each case can be a community, citizens of a state (e.g. healthcare system), or all humanity. The sustainable management of a commons by a community is crucial to that community’s survival, since overexploitation of common resources

denotes competition rather than cooperation and the recognition of mutual interdependence. In today's diverse alternative movements, some of which are represented at the World Social Forum, "the commons is already being recognized as an ethical coordinate of an alternative politics" (see also Brand 2009: 237/38). Authors writing about the issue stress that commons are not simply about a form of legal property rights, but that values and traditions are involved that constitute the identification of members of a community managing a commons (Bollier 2009: 28).

Gibson-Graham frequently use the term "ethical" as an adjective for the choices and practices that create a community economy. Ethical choices are already made on the discursive level, since the scholarly work of representing "reality" is a "performative action": By describing the functioning and dynamics of neoliberal capitalism scholars contribute to capitalism being "strengthened, its dominance performed, as an effect of its representations" (Gibson-Graham 2008: 615). Putting forward such structural views thus has the "performative effect" of discouraging anti-capitalist initiatives in the present, and of postponing liberating actions and emancipation. As the above examples of alternative modernities show, non-capitalist economic activities exist and are prevalent around the world, although hidden due to a lack of attention both from academics and the media. Making them visible or invisible through discourse – confirming the universality of capitalism, or highlighting cracks and openings – is therefore something that academics (though often inadvertently) choose to do. Being aware of this responsibility gives a new meaning to academic ethics. Not only narratives, but also practices "bring principles into action" (Gibson-Graham 2008: 620): Acting in a way that takes into account the interdependence of our wellbeing with that of others consequently means making an ethical choice.

In the case of the community in Jagna Gibson-Graham document the local economy by trying to capture all economic practices taking place by making use of an earlier version of table 1: In doing so they avoid value judgments by also

including illegal and exploitative practices, such as theft and slave labor (Gibson-Graham 2005a: 12). Based on this illustration of livelihood strategies the authors involved the community in discussions about which practices should be strengthened vis-à-vis others. They found that traditional collaborative practices sustained community, whereas remittances from family members working abroad were used to enhance the standard of living, such as education for the young and housing improvements. The development challenges, according to the authors, were to strengthen the “traditional practices and relationships of gifting, sharing, borrowing, volunteering, and reciprocated individual and collective work” (Gibson-Graham 2005a: 16). These practices “enacted” community by supporting subsistence and wellbeing through mutual care. At the same time there were few surplus-generating activities taking place, which had been the reason for locals to seek employment abroad. Building community enterprises was seen⁶⁹ as a promising way to enhance local surplus in order to further strengthen communal practices and to enhance standards of living. Inspired by a system of worker-owned cooperatives in the Basque region of Spain it was found that remittances from community members working abroad as contract laborers could be pooled in saving funds. With the help of two NGOs, one specialized in forming savings groups, the other in providing the entrepreneurial skills - these funds were then used to start community-based businesses producing local agricultural goods. Instead of serving consumption and the improvement of single households, the surplus from overseas contract labor provides the means for income generation at the community level: employment for local people and the marketing and sale of local products.

The works of Gibson-Graham illustrate potentials for alternative development pathways by challenging dominant discourses and the meanings these put forward. In the above examples such challenges can be derived from alternative discourses inscribed in traditional practices and values. In the works of Curry and Gibson-

⁶⁹ The publication does not indicate exactly who identified these challenges and development pathways: the authors constantly refer to “we” and “us,” which keeps the question open to which extent this “we” includes community members. In either case the authors actively contributed ideas and information, which has drawn criticism from authors responding to this publication (see next subsection).

Graham about communities in Southeast Asia the orientations of community members reflect a mix between traditional and modern aspirations; this means that capitalist development discourse may transform, devalue, and erode traditional orientations, but has so far not erased them in many places in the Global South. In cases, in which such alternative practices are not readily visible, dominant ideas can foreclose alternative livelihood visions altogether. Such lack of alternatives can have a paralyzing effect on transformative action. More than in the examples in Papua New Guinea and the Philippines, it is the case studies that Gibson-Graham have undertaken in Australia and the United States – thus, in so-called “developed nations” – in which the significance of “constructing a language of economic diversity” (Gibson-Graham 2006a) is most explicit.

One project, in which the authors intervened to create an awareness of economic alternatives, took place in the Latrobe Valley, a former power generating region with a monopoly supplying electricity throughout the state of Victoria (Australia). The state-owned complex had offered employment, modern housing, education facilities etc. for the people inhabiting the valley for about sixty years. Following the privatization of the power complex, large-scale layoffs and rising unemployment in the course of the 1990s, the working-class identity, once invested with a sense of pride about being part of the “powerhouse of Victoria,” turned into a precarious form of self-identification. This was reflected in the ways outside institutions, including the media, started to perceive the region, now depicting the Latrobe Valley as “the valley of despair” (Cameron & Gibson 2005a). Thus, the discourse, which had once positioned local inhabitants as privileged state-employed workers, continued to be the source of identification without any available alternative storyline, which could have offered a positively valued positioning following the decline of the state sector. The approach Gibson-Graham developed in this setting, and which they consequently applied in the Jagna community, includes three common elements: “a politics of language, a politics of the subject and a politics of collective action” (Gibson-Graham 2005b: 120). The way each element has informed the

development processes in the Latrobe Valley, as well as in the US (Pioneer Valley in Massachusetts), will be described in what follows.

Language Politics

This aspect denotes the discursive displacement of capitalist enterprise as the sole site of economic activity. In this the authors make use of poststructuralist tools, foremost drawing on the work of Laclau and Mouffe (Gibson-Graham 2006a: 54-57 and 78, and 2006b: 12). Accordingly, the dominant discursive formation puts all possible forms of economic activity and behavior in relation to capitalism as the defining element for different economic aspects; thus, whether different forms of exchange are deemed “economic” depends on whether they correspond to market exchange, whereas different motivations underlying economic activity are pitted against the “norm” of rational self-interest. Gibson-Graham thus aim at dislodging capitalism from its position as a central signifier and suggest to institute “community economy” as a new nodal point in economic discourse, which is meant to be far more inclusive of alternative aspects. The initial stage of the project thus consists in “reframing and renarrativizing” (Gibson-Graham 2006a: 148) exercises, which take different shapes according to the economic identifications of the local community.

Gibson-Graham’s project in Australia and the US started out by recruiting community researchers among the locals.⁷⁰ These researchers were unemployed, young to middle-aged volunteers, who shared the storylines prevalent among people in both places. These recruits were the first to be exposed to the idea of the diverse economy; for instance, Gibson-Graham arranged excursions with them to visit community-based enterprises already operating within the respective region

⁷⁰ Since the objective of postdevelopment practice is to identify development trajectories that respond to the development needs of the local community, this is an important way of making locals *own* the process. David Blake and Rattaphon Pitakthepsombut have in their study of dam-impacted community researchers in Northeastern Thailand termed this research method “Tai Baan Research” (Blake & Rattaphon 2006a). This method makes it possible to utilize local knowledge, which is otherwise ignored in scientific studies. Official statistics moreover often ignore data making up the diverse economy, especially non-market and non-capitalist activities. Giving a holistic account thus “would involve enrolling people to collect indicative data about the economic activities they care about” (Gibson-Graham 2011: 13).

(see also Cameron & Gibson 2005b: 279). This discovery of real-life examples, as well as conversations with people engaged in alternative businesses, gave rise to feelings of surprise and of possibility among the recruited researchers. Another way to elicit feelings of surprise and openness is illustrated by Gibson-Graham's approach in the "Pioneer Valley" in Massachusetts. Here, the researchers were tasked to interview locals about their daily activities. These activities were then situated within a four-cell matrix with the vertical rows categorized "market" and "nonmarket," and the horizontal columns each termed "paid" and "unpaid." It turned out that the researchers classified less than 10% of the activities as capitalist (market/paid). Here again, a discursive tool was used in order to bring an economy of care into visibility.

Following the recruitment of community researchers for the project, focus group discussions were organized, including the community researchers, city council representatives, and business representatives (Graham et al. 2002: 4). These events served to explore existing representations of the socio-economic context in each region. Here, Gibson-Graham attempted to shift conversations from the identification of what each place lacked in terms of the capitalist discourse, towards the various assets – or "gifts" – of the valley and the people: In the Latrobe Valley this exercise resulted in a "Portrait of Gifts," which depicted abilities ranging from "creative writing skills" to craft and computer skills. Included were moreover forms of knowledge, which people intended to acquire or share. This inventory of skills was distributed among the people in the Latrobe Valley in the form of brochures and transmitted through the media. Based on this list of gifts, the research team organized a community conference, where together with locals they discussed ways to engage in a community economy (Gibson-Graham 2006a: 148/49): Almost fifty ideas were mentioned involving an economy of sharing (e.g. of garden tools), gifting and neighborly assistance (e.g. fixing bikes, mowing lawns), communal events (e.g. "communal cooking kitchen") etc.

Having acquired training and knowledge through the above initiatives the community researchers were sent “into the field” to engage in conversations with people in their region. The objective was to identify economic activities, which, though undervalued in the mainstream narrative of the economy, provided possible elements of a community economy. Especially in the Latrobe Valley the researchers were confronted with deep-seated attitudes of frustration and victimization during their interviews; former electricity workers in particular held on to their working-class identities, which informed both attitudes of anger and feelings of nostalgia. Gibson-Graham realized that in order to present community economy as a real possibility, they first needed to destabilize such entrenched “identity of unemployed worker of an immoral capitalist order” (Gibson-Graham 2006a: 140; 129). In this they drew inspiration from Lacanian psychoanalysis. The objective was thus not to replace a working class identity with another form of identification. Rather, the project aim was to transform underlying emotions of antagonism (towards the state, capitalism, etc.) towards an attitude of “being-in-common.” The authors summarize the attitudinal objectives as “loving, compassionate, happy in the happiness of others, responding with equanimity to life’s constant changes, however uningratiating” (130); thus, in terms of the Buddhist teaching of the Four Divine Abodes. Gibson-Graham note that the challenge consisted not in instilling these dispositions from outside, but to extend them from existing associations with family and friends towards a wider circle of people.

Gibson-Graham’s emancipative strategy is thus inspired by insights from psychoanalysis and Buddhist philosophy. The normative orientation in their project is derived from the latter source: that is acknowledging “non-self,” the “shared identity” of individuals, society, and nature (Gibson-Graham 2011: 3; Wanna 2005: 1174). Similar to the Thai academic Wanna Prayukvong, who has conducted a study on community projects using a Buddhist Economics framework, Gibson-Graham believe that the long-term survival of such initiatives depends on the recognition of mutual interdependence, since community economies in every case

imply the joint sustainable management of commons⁷¹, be it in the form of shared knowledge, natural resources, or economic surplus. With reference to fostering dispositions of other-directedness as a necessary precondition for community economies, Gibson-Graham acknowledge the limitations of utilizing solely poststructuralist methods. Although their discursive intervention had been “a powerful tool” in enabling community members to perceive themselves differently, they recognize that these insights and feelings were fleeting moments, which could not be sustained in everyday life by new narratives alone. “Rather than working mainly with language and discourse and counting on that to release and redirect affect, we found that [...] we needed to directly address embodied, habitual, and emotional practices of being.” (Gibson-Graham 2006a: 152).

The authors have thus devised “micro-political” interventions in addition to their language politics, and they consequently speak of a “post-post-structuralist practice” (Gibson-Graham 2006a: 131). Whereas Wanna draws on Buddhist concepts, which provide her with analytical tools to normatively assess whether the community initiatives in her study conform to “reality” (Wanna 2005: 1173), postdevelopment theory lacks normative notions for development work. In Buddhist Economics terms Gibson-Graham act as “good friends,” who help community members develop “right understanding” (see Wanna 2005: 1176), since their subject politics fosters emotional dispositions, which motivate other-directed actions. Since postdevelopment values neither certain development ideals, nor specific underlying attitudes as “better” than others, Gibson-Graham’s involvement departs from postdevelopment initiatives as described by Matthews, for instance.

Subject Politics

This aspect involves breaking up entrenched patterns of thinking and feeling that curtail the self-confidence of the subject, and that limit the individual’s perception of what is possible. As the interviews with people in the Latrobe Valley showed, many

⁷¹ See Gibson-Graham (2006a: 95) and Essen (2013: 158). In identifying the commons as a central aspect of community the authors in both cases refer to Stephen Gudeman’s work.

former electricity workers were reluctant to give up their ideas, which – though painful – were familiar, whereas the idea of a community economy meant opening up to new ways of thinking and feeling, which bore the risk of disappointment. This was not a matter of understanding or lack of imagination; most respondents during the interviews grasped the ideas brought forward by the community researchers, but were fearful about exposing themselves to a new situation. As Gibson-Graham note, such responses are of a psychosomatic nature, involving “amygdalic reactions” to situations that are perceived as new and threatening. In order to engage with these processes, discursive tools of resignification were complemented by the cultivation of “positive affect” as new experiences were made (Gibson-Graham 2006a: 152/53). Gibson-Graham organized various events, which exposed community members to new situations, especially to experiences of togetherness: People thus came together in informal cooking events, where they cooked meals and consumed them together. Although everyone knew about the objective of creating a community economy, these were unstructured events, where various people from different backgrounds became acquainted with each other. Speakers from community organizations were invited and bus trips to alternative businesses were undertaken. These activities likewise encouraged a feeling of community among the participants, including capacities of attentiveness, and a “generous spirit” (156) towards former strangers.

Collective Action

The interplay of discursive shifts (language politics) and micro-political interventions (subject politics) cultivates dispositions and motivations for collective action. In the Latrobe Valley for instance, four development projects emerged from the intervention, the first of which was a cooperative community garden (see Gibson-Graham 2006a: 162). Wanna’s study of three community projects in Southern Thailand (2005) shows that there are similarities as to how development is understood both in a Buddhist Economics perspective, as well as in Gibson-Graham’s community economies project: In both cases underlying dispositions of interconnectedness and non-identification are emphasized. However, Wanna’s

work does not overcome the shortcomings of Buddhist Economics as outlined in the previous chapter, although attitudes of being-in-common appear central to her assessment of the success of development projects. Gibson-Graham's detailed study, on the other hand, indicates how corresponding insights can be actively developed in a community development setting. They moreover touch on subdiscursive cognitive mechanisms, mainly by referring to Connolly's work (see Gibson-Graham 2006a). I will therefore assess their community initiatives from an enactive perspective based on the methodological tools developed in the first chapter.

4.1.2. An Analysis of Gibson-Graham's Micro-Political Interventions Using the Enactive Framework

Since the 1920s and throughout the 1970s the economy of the Latrobe Valley was marked by steady economic expansion driven solely by a growing electricity generation sector. Throughout this period the State Electricity Commission of Victoria (SEC) offered secure jobs, comparatively high incomes, as well as modern housing and community services. To the people in the valley the SEC provided a sense of status compared to workers in the private sector, as well as a sense of belonging and identity in being included in a regional project of supplying the state with power; of being the "powerhouse of Victoria." Workers in the region felt bound to the enterprise by a "social contract," in which the SEC provided "paternalistic state care" for its employees and their children in return for their loyalty. When a conservative government gradually disbanded the SEC and privatized its operations, about four fifth of the former SEC employees lost their jobs in the process, and only a minority has become subsequently employed by successor companies (Cameron & Gibson 2005a: 315; Fairbrother & Macdonald 2000: 320).

These events have led to a reversal in the self-perception of the former workers, as well as in the way people in other regions viewed the Latrobe Valley. It has become apparent to the workers that their feelings of pride and self-worth had been almost

entirely dependent on care by the SEC; Gibson-Graham note that the provisions delivered by the state had effectively “infantilized” the labor force (Gibson-Graham 2006a: 38; Rainnie et al. 2004: 33/34). Now they found themselves excluded from the economic process and unable to provide for their families. Instead, they have become recipients of social benefits. The former sense of pride gave way to feeling powerless and hopeless. Former workers directed much of their frustrations towards themselves, feeling self-hatred and shame for their own inability to change their situation. Much of their anger has been directed at other social actors, namely the SEC, conservative state governments, and the “Economy.” The positioning triangle in figure 6 is meant to capture this interpretation. Specifically, the ex-workers’ sense of injustice is directed at the polity on all levels from the state level down to the local council. Thus, these institutions and actors for many stand in for the SEC (Gibson-Graham 2006a: 153), which had broken the social contract. On a more abstract level the Economy was identified as another antagonistic force: Whereas centralized state planning had ensured the provision of high living standards, capitalist notions of rationality and efficiency have led to mass lay-offs, replacing human capital with state-of-the-art technology. Finally, university staff and researchers have undertaken numerous studies following these economic changes in order to analyze and document its impact. These soon became perceived as viewing the locals as “lab rats” in order to write reports with no impact (Cameron & Gibson 2005b: 277).

Figure 6: Representations Among the Target Group in the Latrobe Valley Prior to Gibson-Graham's Development Intervention

Positions:

The powerless "Us"

"reserve army of labor" with the right to indignation in an "immoral capitalist order" (Cameron & Gibson 2005: 318; Gibson-Graham 2006a: 140)

"Them"

- State actors (state government in Victoria, local city council), who have broken the "social contract"
- Private enterprises refusing to offer employment, which is sanctioned by the economic system
- Academics who could use their expertise to help, but instead conduct research on the valley for their own careers

Acts:

Privatization of the SEC since the mid 1990s, withdrawal of state control, mass lay-offs

Storyline:

Exploitative power relations in a world capitalist system

From the "powerhouse of Victoria" to the "Valley of Despair"

Cameron and Gibson note that a familiar alternative development intervention would have consisted in locating the local issues in a global structural context: “This would have meant introducing the neo-liberal political agenda (which has led to privatising state-owned assets such as the SEC) and development of global capitalism (which means there are capitalist corporations eager to snap-up these assets in any location across the globe)” (2005a: 324). This would have introduced awareness that numerous people around the world are suffering from the same hegemonic power relations, that the local problems are situated expressions of world-wide structural inequalities. This strategy thus aims at deepening an existing precarious identity and sense of righteous anger in order to direct these feelings towards collective action against neoliberal globalization. Gibson-Graham do not follow this strategy, partly because it limits the scope of possibilities for endogenous development solutions. A related consideration, which motivates discarding “strong theories” about relations of dominance, is that they entail predefined attributes of subject positions and fix their relations with other elements of the social formation (Gibson-Graham 2005b: 122 and 2006a: 4-6). Laclau already warns against the obstacles, which strong identification poses for social transformation; specifically, he cautions that holding on to class-based divisions after successful social change would lead to the perpetuation of the same antagonisms, although under reversed circumstances. Moghaddam and Harré make a similar point when they state that revolutions have historically brought about practices and institutions, which “mirror” those of the previous order. Deliberate efforts of social transformation, the authors conclude, have failed because they have ignored the “psychological limitations to political change” (Moghaddam & Harré 1996). They therefore believe that “private revolutions,” those aimed at micro-practices, are crucial for the success of social transformations.

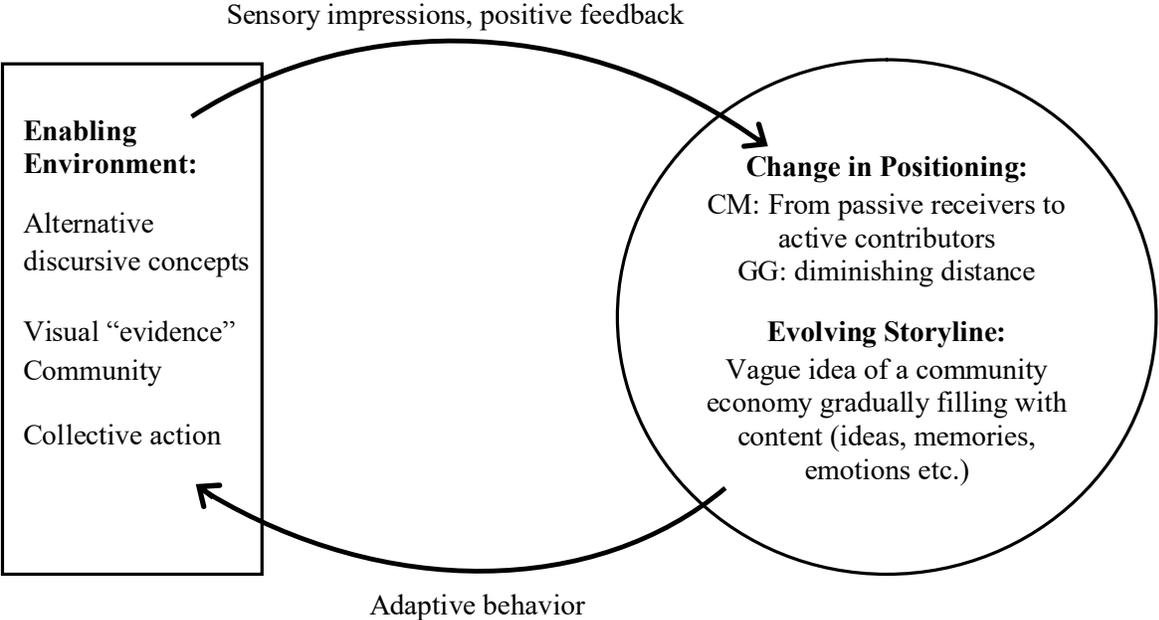
Gibson-Graham’s approach recognizes the need for subjective transformations as a pre-requisite also for changes on larger social scales (Cameron & Gibson 2005a: 320). In their action research projects participants engage with entrenched representations and subject positions, but this acknowledgment is seen as a

necessary precondition for traversing these interpretations. The objective here is to leave behind the predefined categories of an existing discourse and to open up possibilities for new ways of being. This involves not pursuing the problems as posed and articulated within the common discourse of “unemployed worker in a neoliberal economic system.” The intention underlying the process is comparable to Buddhist mindfulness practices: Labeling exercises are meant to bring automatic representations and feelings into consciousness in order to divest them of their conditioning effects. If not attended to in this way, they give rise to habitual patterns of thinking and feeling determining the cognitive categories for subsequent lines of thoughts and actions; this points to the somewhat paradoxical situation that while we aim at overcoming a certain state of affairs, our strategies remain confined within the framework of a problematic condition. By being aware of patterns of thinking and at the same time not following their logic, radically new strategies become possible.

What is moreover interesting is that Gibson-Graham acknowledge the possibilities and limitations inherent in discursive interventions to achieve such shifts (Gibson-Graham 2006a: 152): They mention instances, in which discussants in a focus group articulate new thoughts and they describe how these foster new feelings of surprise and curiosity among the participants; or cases, in which the community researchers break up familiar narratives of victimization and lack, as they introduce questions about existing skills and capabilities outside the mainstream storyline. These instances, in which respondents from the Latrobe Valley have come to realize new perspectives, thus evoked novel reactions also on an embodied level. The authors note that in order to maintain the impact of this realization on the process of becoming new subjects, they had to devise “micropolitical” interventions in addition to discursive initiatives in order to target different cognitive levels – including “visceral and affective registers” (Cameron & Gibson 2005a: 320). Their initiatives can be summarized in figure 7, in which a positioning analysis is integrated into the enactivist action-perception-loop model. Such an illustration can only serve to provide an overall outline of the dynamism of the process; the

individual elements and the part they play in the process of forming novel adaptive strategies are listed below.⁷²

Figure 7: Action-Perception Loop Process Depicting Gibson-Graham's Development Intervention



Community members (CM) develop a new understanding towards their situation in the action-perception loop process. This also includes their relative positioning compared to the community researchers, including Gibson-Graham (GG).

The community development processes in the Latrobe Valley, as well as in the Pioneer Valley in Massachusetts, involve operations on environmental factors as opposed to pursuing a known ideal state. The authors note that the storylines circulating among the inhabitants of the Latrobe Valley, as well as in the media and

⁷² Although positioning theory emphasizes the fluidity of attitudes, selves, and meanings, studies involving positioning theoretical analysis usually include illustrations of the positioning triangle, when positions, speech-acts, and storylines remain constant during an interaction (see Bartlett 2008; Harré et al. 2009). This static depiction does not lend itself to the description of processes, in which these elements are subject to change, and in these cases the conceptual framework is often used without graphical illustration (see Davies & Harré 1999; Redman 2008).

the academia reinforced a representation of the area as abandoned, hopeless, and lacking outside help in the form of corporate investment. This discourse not only masks the existence of local resources, which could potentially be mobilized, but also existing forms of the care economy, especially among female household heads (Gibson-Graham 2006a: 150). Language politics, subject politics, and politics of collective action are each designed to break up the dominant representation by revealing objects, themes, and articulations, which evoke novel responses from the community members. Each of these three domains stimulates new thoughts, feelings and emotions, as well as behaviors. These interventions differ in terms of emphasis as to how they target these cognitive levels:

Alternative discursive concepts: The researchers introduce a wider scope of activities covered by the term “economy” by introducing the notions of the diverse economy and by highlighting their existence in current practices. In their interviews community researchers direct the focus from what respondents lack to what skills they possess by asking corresponding questions. In addition to making new concepts consciously available, this recognition moreover evokes surprise and attitudes of curiosity.

Visual evidence: Jeffrey Schwartz, describing his Four Step treatment method for OCD patients, notes that relabeling exercises must be reinforced through “retribution”: He achieves this through visual illustrations, which provide a sense of concrete “proof.” This notion is reinforced by the fact that an “expert,” i.e. someone with formal authority in the field, is using these images and challenges a more familiar representation. Visual illustrations, such as the diverse economy table, the “portrait of gifts,” the four-cell matrix used by community researchers in the Pioneer Valley etc., induce a deeper affective response than verbal conceptualizations by themselves. Gibson-Graham are aware of the power effects coming from their quasi-positioning as “therapists”; making reference to psychotherapy interventions they mention a “desire” of the community members projected at the qualities they seem to embody (Gibson-Graham 2006a: 133/34;

Fennell & Segal 2011: 130). As is the case in MBCT the aim is to use this power differential as a catalyst for community members to acquire an active stance in their development as subjects.

Conscious and careful positioning is probably a crucial aspect of development work at this stage and it can be decisive about the success or failure of the project. This also concerned the community researchers, who avoided positioning themselves as university staff, since this would have triggered associations with familiar narratives, following the pattern of “us,” the victims of the Economy, and “them,” who represent the indifferent researcher. Instead, the community researchers referred to those aspects of themselves, which resembled the self-identification of the respondents from the valley, such as “single mother” or “unemployed worker” (Gibson-Graham 2006a: 153). The significance of ways of positioning and of power imbalances diminishes in the process, as community members actively engage in the development process, especially as they leave behind the initial discourse in the course of communal activities.

Community: Whereas authors describing mindfulness-based therapies have acknowledged that a “group or community context has been an integral part” (Dimidjian & Linehan 2003: 169) both in mindfulness-based therapy as well as in spiritual traditions, this aspect plays a central role in the politics of the subject. It has been the communal events, such as excursions and workshops, in which community members engaged most actively with the project. In fact, from the accounts given about these events, it appears that the experience of being-in-common was the most important aspect during the events. For instance, the connections fostered during bus rides seemed to have left a deeper impression on participants than the actual destination of their travel or the project objectives (see Cameron & Gibson 2005a: 326/27; Gibson-Graham 2006a: 157). Opening up and listening to former strangers, and at the same time discarding preconceptions and breaking up habits of suspicion, seemed to have provided the most profound impetus for subjective change. The experience of accepting others and being

accepted fostered novel dispositions of other-directedness and kindness. The cultivation of these ethical qualities in an embodied sense is seen as possibly the most important result of the project (Graham & Cornwell 2009: 48).

Ethical dispositions, as pursued in LKM and CM, and theoretically expounded by Varela (1999), are here fostered through the experience of community. Exposure to the experience evokes new forms of interaction, in which familiar attitudes give way to new forms of emotional categorization. Out of this Knowing How the idea of community economy becomes positively charged in the course of these experiences. Out of this “excess of affect” yet “unamenable to argument or representation” (Connolly 2002: 74) community members were thus looking for conceptual and economic expressions of this way of being. This resulted in collective action, the next step in the project.

Collective Action: The material expressions of this new economic subjectivity range from cooperative ventures, including community gardens, to business models that combine commercial activities with social objectives.⁷³ Some activities have failed; in the case of the Latrobe Valley this includes the community garden project, which had been the “biggest and most ambitious project” (Cameron & Gibson 2005a: 328). On the other hand, small, spontaneous, or initially unorganized activities can unexpectedly become major projects (Graham & Cornwell 2009: 57). It would be interesting to find out, what part the academic researchers played at this late stage of the project. What is evident from the variety of activities they describe is that the creation of community economies is an ongoing exploratory process, in which the participants remain open to experimentations with different forms of economy.

Although Gibson-Graham (2006a: 132) and Cameron and Gibson (2005b) describe the interventions on language, the subject, and collective action in terms of a linear

⁷³ See Gibson-Graham (2005a), Cameron and Gibson (2005b: 282), and Graham and Cornwell (2009). Karen Werner describes two further projects, including that of a time bank (Werner forthcoming).

sequence, each of these elements works back and forth on the other aspects: Visual evidence reinforces shifting representations and identifications, and novel dispositions towards former strangers encourage expression through new activities and representations. A new economic language not only designates emerging economic practices, but works back on affective categorizations. This dynamic movement in which community members are engaged fosters a growing sense of empowerment through positive feedback. This changes the relationship the participants develop with their social and economic context. On this basis they “enact [...] economic realities” (Gibson-Graham 2008: 619). In his Four Step treatment method, Schwartz calls the corresponding final stage of the therapy “Revalue” (Schwartz & Begley 2002: 87/88). Here, patients have developed a new connection with their OCD symptoms, as they have ceased to be subjected to a single adaptive strategy. At this point patients are empowered to choose and to pursue alternative courses of action. Using neuroimaging technology Schwartz has been able to illustrate the neuronal correlates of the perceived ability to choose whether to “walk to the garden to prune roses” or to “rush to the sink to wash” (Schwartz & Begley 2002: 93). Thus, brain activity indicates the activation of the OCD circuit alongside a newly established pathway, now termed “therapy circuit.”

Schwartz’s study shows that old habits continue to persist as a set of available responses to future situations, both on a phenomenological level, as well as on an embodied level. The notion that somatic changes including neuroplasticity are part of successful behavioral change⁷⁴ helps to better appreciate Gibson-Graham’s development interventions, which target all cognitive registers described in the first chapter, including consciousness, somatic emotions, and – through behavioral adaptations – sensorimotor mechanisms. However, in contrast to Schwartz, Gibson-Graham ascribe a crucial role to an enabling environment and positive feedback in the process, noting that the “individual needs nourishment and

⁷⁴ In the case of the community economies project this means that the intensity of neuronal activation in certain parts of the brain is likely to change over the long term as people respond more readily with feelings of empathy and loving kindness in a greater number of situations. For the parts of the brain likely to be affected in this context see Hofmann et al. (2011: 1130).

encouragement from without to sustain acts of self-cultivation” (Gibson-Graham 2006a: 162). Considering the physiochemical mechanisms underlying thoughts and feelings it becomes clearer what they mean when they describe community members as “reluctant subjects”⁷⁵ at the beginning of the development process. People do not choose the cultural context they are born into, including the representations sanctioned by this context. The discursive regularities in a certain cultural environment have constraining effects on their freedom (Harré & Gillett 1994: 122); the way the unemployed workers in the Latrobe Valley reacted to their situation was validated by how they were represented and their story narrated by most agents and institutions. What Gibson-Graham have done is to affirm and expose project participants “in nonthreatening ways to the alternatives presented by different constructions” (Harré & Gillett 1994: 127). “Alternative meanings,” Harré and Gillett continue explaining, “have to arise and be validated in some way.” The adaptive strategy introduced in the course of the project was experienced as “real” in the sense that it was associated with actual experiential qualities, including feelings, actions, memories etc.

4.1.3. The Efficacy of Micro-Practices: The Economy of Communion

The ways in which Revalue, understood as the conscious, emotional, and behavioral resignification of situations, affects social practices can be illustrated by the activities of members of the Economy of Communion project. In terms of Gibson-Graham’s diverse economies table, the businesses operated by members of the Economy of Communion (EoC) can all be classified as “capitalist” or “alternative capitalist,” as they are private for-profit organizations, with hierarchical management structures, and operating according to the rules of market economies (see Silva et al. 2013; Gold 2004). In this the catholic-inspired movement follows

⁷⁵ See Gibson-Graham (2005a and 2006a: 23). The expression has given rise to less favorable interpretations as well. Curry’s response to Gibson-Graham’s paper on their action research in the Philippines suggests that the perceived reluctance among the target group may actually express a form of “passive resistance” (Curry 2005). For instance, he identifies the authors’ language politics of resignification as a form of discursive violence e.g. by endorsing certain communal practices and thus masking their exploitative character, and rejecting others (see also Aguilar 2005: 27).