

Action Research: Making Other Worlds Possible

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Abstract

Members of the Community Economies Collective have developed a distinctive brand of action research, informed by the approach to 'a post-capitalist politics' laid out by J.K. Gibson-Graham in their 2006 book of this name. In this lecture I lay out this approach and reflect on the legacy of more than two decades of doing performative, action-oriented, research in a number of contexts. I ask: Has this work made other worlds possible? What have been its strengths, what its challenges? We now have a body of work that includes both long-term place-based research connections and shorter-term interventions from which lessons can be learnt. We also see our approaches changing as we develop new ways of including the more-than-human in the action research frame. In a time when it is hard to hold onto a hopeful stance, I broach the question of how to engage in generative and life-affirming research.

Short Bio

Professor Katherine Gibson is internationally known for her research on rethinking economies as sites of ethical action as well as rethinking urbanism in the light of feminist, postcolonial and queer theory. She trained as a human geographer with expertise in political economy and, with her collaborator for over 30 years, the late Professor Julie Graham, developed a distinctive approach to economic geography drawing on feminism, post-structuralism and action research. The diverse economies research program they initiated has become a vibrant sub-field of study within the social sciences. Gibson-Graham's work on a post-capitalist economic politics has had a widespread readership among those interested in economic alternatives and has been translated into Chinese, South Korean, Turkish, Spanish, Greek and French. She has directed action research projects with communities interested in alternative economic development pathways in Australia, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and the Philippines.