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### Rethinking Economy for Regional Development: Ontology, Performativity, and Enabling Frameworks for Participatory Vision and Action

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Abstract

The stories we tell about "the economy" in discourses of regional economic development play an active role in shaping our economic realities. The construction of more equitable, democratic and ecologically-sound economies must involve an interrogation of our assumptions about what "the economy" is, how it works, and how these conceptions shape our senses of agency and possibility. I argue in this thesis that key texts in regional economic development present a concept of economy that renders the interrelationships between social, economic and ecological processes invisible or beyond ethical contestation, restricts the field of economic possibility, and generates a problematic sense of necessity in the pursuit of endless growth and competition. Effectively enacting

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different forms of economic relationship requires different economic ontologies. After exploring in some detail, through engagement with the work of Butler, Laclau and Mouffe and Latour, the proposition that "the economy" is socially-produced and that economic ontologies can be "performative," I investigate the alternative economic ontologies of Karl Polanyi, Stephen Gudeman and J.K. Gibson-Graham. Offering a conceptualization of economy as a process of actively constructing livelihoods in which human and more-than-human participation are recognized and the ethical nature of this interdependence is placed at the forefront of economic negotiation and construction, I distill a provisional toolbox of economic questions, concepts and coordinates which might become sites of new learning, imagination and construction when placed in the hands of communities who seek a different kind of development.

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