

**Action research tools for growing community food economies
in Mindanao, The Philippines**

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This paper explores research methodologies of story telling and intentional conversation in relation to community-based food initiatives in Northern Mindanao, Philippines. It draws on my experiences of documentary film making mid year and related work on an action research project at ANU. It also provides early reflections on my own PhD action research.

I adopt a conscious performative approach to scholarship centred on community engagement and action research in relation to local economic development. Researching in a post-structuralist vein, I adopt the stance that people and the places they inhabit, are always in the process of 'becoming'. Community action need not stem from people being of common mind and purpose. Rather empowerment can come through their simply 'being, in common' and their willingness to explore new avenues for growth and development. This awareness presents enormous opportunities for collective action and personal transformation.



People are creating new food initiatives through conversation, action and exchanges of power and possibility

They are doing this against a backdrop of globalised food and agricultural production which is heavily embedded in a globalised economic system



Building community food economies through 'action research'

Guiding Idea 2 of the Community Partnering process is that these practices must be safeguarded, built upon and strengthened in any local development initiative.

Guiding idea 3: Community members as action researchers



A community researcher

Community as action researchers

Action research involves finding out about a situation and working to change it for the better. Community members know a lot about their local place and people. Though they are usually not formally trained, local people can become researchers of their own situation. They are crucial to any process of change. The Community Partnering process puts people at the centre of the research and development agenda. Guiding Idea 3 is to involve local people in changing their situation through research and subsequent action. Anyone can become a researcher and a change agent.

Guiding Idea 4: Growing community enterprises

Community enterprises are businesses and organizations that produce direct social benefit as a primary output rather than being driven to maximize profit for benefit of shareholders

Community partnering
Starting with what you know

Lots of questions and still developing ideas

Exploration of new territory

Seeing people and places as always in the process of becoming

(Left) from *Community Partnering for Local Development* CD-Rom written and developed by Gibson with Hill and LINK web services 2008

Through conversations, action and exchanges of power and possibility people are creating new food initiatives in all kinds of communities.



Tuning into their stories enables us to see that food systems are a work in progress and together, we write the story of food economies through our conversations and actions.

In this presentation I consider not only methodological strategies an action researcher might employ but also the language and framing a scholar might adopt to think about and promote community food systems as viable constituents of a diverse economy.

In June 2008, an ANU based film crew of three persons went to the Philippines to make a documentary about social enterprise development, in partnership with NGO Unlad Kabayan. This project was an ambitious and challenging undertaking. Travel advisory warnings necessitated additional paperwork and special approval. We had a two week tightly packed schedule filming, traveling long distances and passing through some higher risk areas.

Writing the script in Australia prior to departure proved vital and enabled us to develop a list of required shots prior to each day of filming. We filmed locations in a different order from where they appeared in the story. So decisions about the filming were guided by the shot sheet and the script and we had to shift between these two modes of thinking several times each day. We managed to log the filming as we went. This involved recording time

codes of footage, a description of each shot and the script location. We included editing notations to help us keep track of material.



Making a documentary about social enterprise development in the Philippines

Pre-scripting and story telling

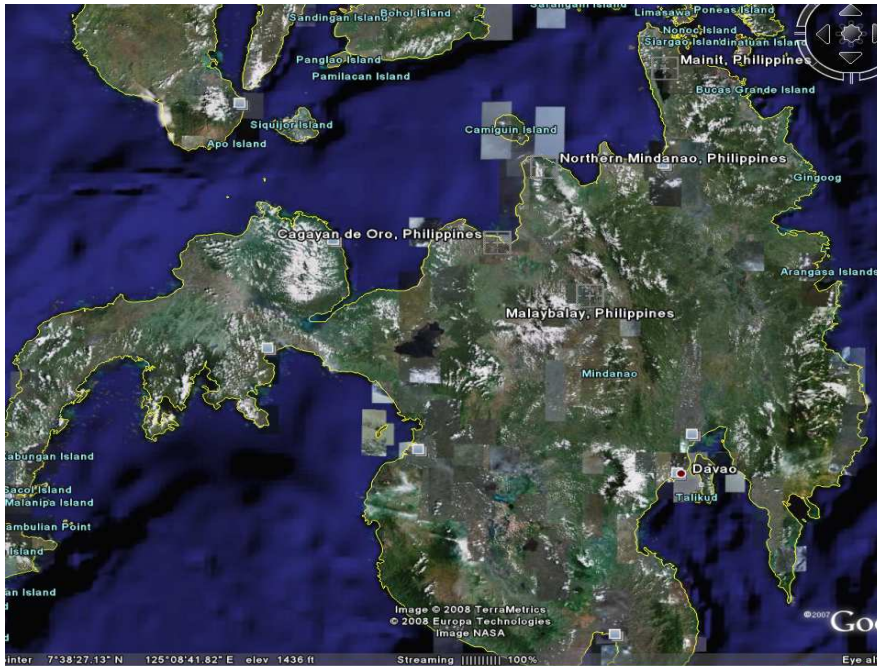
Operating with a small crew

Including local voices

Transforming moments in the action research

Local voices brought the story to life in various modes. Some Filipinos wanted to speak in English and others in visayan. Sometimes we mixed speaking visayan to camera with a voice over in English. We recorded music in a comfort room (CR) or restroom. One of the Filipino crew sang and played an old guitar. We also used staged group settings where people spoke in turn to answer a question. Sometimes this worked, other times this process was more challenging.

Between us the ANU crew handled the script writing, directing, camera, sound, lighting, and the post production work in Australia. NGO staff provided support on location with translations, logging and logistical tasks.



On this map I have marked locations where we filmed in Mindanao:-

In Mainit, the Matinao rice centre which is an agricultural service provider and near Malaybalay, FAM-Dev farm which I will show a film clip in a moment. and the urban centre of Cagayan de Oro

(Show film clip)

In the film clip we are introduced to

Northern Mindanao - an agribusiness landscape with large scale hogg and chicken production and pineapple plantations.

Fam-Dev - an integrated demonstration farm and a social enterprise established through overseas contract workers or migrant savers interested in local community based enterprise development.

Cagayan de oro - an urban market for produce from farms like FAM-Dev and the site of planned action research involving allotment gardens.



So what are some of the ways in which scholars might choose to talk about and represent an agricultural landscape like Northern Mindanao? One way is through using binaries. Export driven, foreign investment supported agribusiness, can be positioned as commercial, large scale, market orientated, and capitalist. This is what connects this region to the “developed” world and globalised food system. Agribusiness workers are often landless tenant farmers, poor, otherwise marginalised, and representative of the ‘informal’ economy. Their traditional practices such as household gardening, gleaning and reciprocal labour are seen as subsistence practices that meet household basic food requirements. These dualisms often guide research agendas and encourage local development in two areas; diversifying household livelihoods and increasing capacities for participation in a formal market economy.

Food and food systems binaries (Post WWII onwards)

commercial	subsistence
regulated	unregulated
productive	inefficient
mechanized	labour intensive
first world	third world
north	south
capitalist	non-capitalist
economic	non-economic
large-scale	small-scale
market	non-market
formal economy	informal economy
developed	underdeveloped/developing

The interest and growth in community-based food in recent decades has gone hand in hand with the development of new binaries. In the community food arena, it is as though there has been a third-worldisation of the first world marked by a return to more labour intensive practices and the ethic of many hands make light work. Using these binaries FAM-Dev farm, can be positioned as ‘alternative’ sustainable, small-scale, local, and more ethical than the large scale agribusiness sites which surround it.

Food and food systems binaries (1990's - present)

alternative	mainstream/ conventional
sustainable	unsustainable
small scale	large scale
local	global
slow	fast
quality	price
organic	chemical
safe	contaminated
healthy	unhealthy
ethical	unethical
good	bad
fresh/raw	manufactured/packaged/frozen

There are clear areas of limitation to a dualistic analysis of foodscapes.

In relation to majority world contexts like the Philippines, focus on household livelihood strategies and on participation in a globally connected economy, has meant that the zones ‘in between’ - community-based, city-wide and regional sites for development, are often missing from economic analysis. Community and social enterprise development for example, and interest in fostering collective power and community mobilization is often lacking or piecemeal in research and policy agendas.

Second community based food initiatives like FAM-Dev framed as “alternative” modes of production, consumption and exchange are often seen as peripheral, relatively powerless and socially insignificant; merely the efforts of a self-conscious few at the local scale. It is this underlying, often subliminal spatial ontology that keeps the alternatives peripheral (Healy forthcoming).

To think about the various kinds of community food initiatives shown here as economically viable and significant requires a different theoretical framing. Gibson-Graham attempts to replace the binary opposition of mainstream and alternative with the conception of the economy as a space of difference.

Figure A Diverse Economy*

<i>Transactions</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Enterprise</i>
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 Neighborhood work Volunteer Self-provisioning labor Slave labor	NON-CAPITALIST Communal Independent Feudal Slave

*Note: The figure should be read down the columns, not across the rows.
 J.K. Gibson-Graham *A Postcapitalist Politics* 2006

The diverse economy framing offers a new economic ontology in which the economy is understood as being composed of many different processes of production, exchange, ownership, work, remuneration, and consumption without the presumption of necessary relations of dominance and subordination.

This thinking provides a framing which I will adopt in my research to consider various possible community food economies. Second this thinking is a starting place for conversations about how to affect lasting and crucial change in our food economies both large and small where practices are unsustainable, un-ethical and at times destructive for both people and place. I see my research as an intentional effort to create, contribute to and document these conversations.

I want to turn now to a consideration of action research planned for 2009 - 2010 and reflections from a first conversation with gardener entrepreneurs at the St Niño allotment garden mid year.

St Nino, is one of 8 allotment gardens in Cagayan de Oro City. Collectively, the gardens provide 100 gardener families with waste management opportunities; fresh food and basic income. In fact about 70% of the produce grown is sold, mostly in garden neighbourhoods and local markets. The social and educational benefits and future possibilities of this allotment scheme are visible. Gardens are generally in poor and marginalised neighbourhoods of the city, some are located in schools and one is a demonstration garden at Xavier University.

At present the gardeners generally operate on an individual basis selling their produce through their own supply chain of family members, door to door and so forth. There is little known about how many times produce changes hands before it appears for sale in street markets. It would be interesting to 'follow *their* food'. It would also be interesting to see what ways in which the eight gardens are connected? What benefit if any might there might be from further development of their connections across place?

Would they be interested in conversations with community gardeners in Australia and a transnational linkup for exchanging ideas?

There is a great deal of interest in replicating the model of allotment gardening talked about here, both across the city of Cagayan de Oro and across the region of Asia. This has implications for new forms of connection and new food economies. I plan to explore the extent to which these gardens and the local food markets could develop as more intentional community food economies.

Drawing all these ideas together leads me to consider the following research questions –

- What might constitute a ‘community food’ economy?
- What might constitute a community food economy at different scales?
- How do people involved in community food initiatives perceive and frame the activities they are involved in?
- What kind of personal transformations take place within community food initiatives? What might be the flow on effects of such transformations for community based food economies?
- What kinds of partnerships are supporting community food economies? How are they and can they be strengthened?

I am interested in promoting and developing teaching and learning about community food economies through:

- Documenting the ways in which food scholars and community economy advocates work together as part of community food initiatives rather than as external to them
- Organising and participating in regional food workshops to explore pathways for growing community food economies
- Fostering dialogue and connection between gardener entrepreneurs in Australia and Philippines through developing a transnational food collective
- Food collectives map making - How might a food collective look on a map? What kind of mapping might we do? Looking at different kinds of mapping for community-based food economies

Food scholars and academics, activists and all kinds of ‘foodies’ face crucial choices from the global right through to the local about the ideas we wish to think about and build on. It is said that food is good to think with. Sally Miller’s *Edible Action* raises the question – ‘if food is good to think with, what do we use it to think about?’ (Miller forthcoming: 10). At the risk of seeming idealistic, this paper is a conscious choice to think about food and food systems in a particular way; as an invitation to make a better world.