

Post-industrial Pathways for a “Single Industry Resource Town”: a Community Economies Approach

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Introduction

The City of Powell River in the Canadian province of British Columbia (BC) has been synonymous with pulp and paper production for most of the twentieth century. Situated within the traditional territory of the Tla’Amin (Sliammon) First Nation, this mill town on BC’s Sunshine Coast is found just 30 km south of the northern end of Highway 101 which hugs the west coast of the United States all the way from Baja, Mexico to Canada. The settlements around the industrial port of Powell River are scattered along a narrow coastal corridor backed by dense forest and rugged topography and, due to the inlets interrupting Highway 101 north of Vancouver, the region is accessible only by ferry or airplane. The deep harbor and energy potential, once the Powell River itself was dammed, were sufficient attractors to industrial investment at the turn of the twentieth century.

With the incorporation of the Powell River Company and the opening of an industrial capacity mill in 1909, a mill town was established and grew rapidly as workers and their families arrived from other parts of the country and overseas, especially Italy (Townsite Heritage Society of Powell River, 2013; Powell River Diversity Initiative, 2010). From the end of World War II until the mid-1970s, the mill was the backbone of Powell River’s formal

economy: in the 1950s (when it became part of MacMillan Bloedel) it was reputedly the largest newsprint mill in the world; and in 1974 it employed its peak of 2527 people (Hayter, 1997:32). In the 1980s the mill produced 471 000 tonnes of paper and still supported 2300 employees, but faced with international competition and financial difficulties, production and employment rates were beginning to drop (31). From the 1990s on, the pulp and paper industry has significantly downsized all over Canada leaving single industry towns such as Powell River with what many perceive as major material and symbolic challenges. The Powell River Regional Economic Development Society notes that today the mill employs less than 400 of the region's nearly 20,000 inhabitants (2011: 45). Although it still plays an important role in the town's collective identity, the mill is no longer the economic "driver" it once was and the void left by its downsizing presents a challenge familiar to all single industry resource towns when the long boom is over—what now?

In a valiant attempt to rebrand Powell River, the City Council has been marketing the region to outsiders not on the basis of logging and the paper industry, but as "the Pearl on the Sunshine Coast." A pearl is a rare gem and an accident of the natural world, not entirely unlike Powell River itself, due to its isolated location and temperate climate. There is a great deal of concern for the future of this pearl and how it can continue to produce value for the community. In recent years public debate has intensified about how to respond to Powell River's crisis of economic identity. Some in the community are keen to find "replacement" secondary industries, others are interested in rethinking what constitutes a sustainable "economic base." This chapter reports on an on-going research intervention aimed making a contribution to this public debate.

Co-author Janet Newbury has been a resident of Powell River for 7 years and is a founding member of Powell River Voices, a civic organization aimed at widening the debate

about Powell River's social and economic future.¹ Co-author Katherine Gibson recently visited Powell River to participate in a "public conversation" around post-capitalist community economy approaches to economic development organized by Powell River Voices. Together we are actively involved in a form of "desire-based research" that "makes room for the unanticipated, the uninvited, the uncharted, and unintended" (Tuck, 2010: 641). We are committed to working with community members who are interested in building a resilient economic future for Powell River.

In this chapter we reflect on the role academics can play as members of hybrid research collectives concerned to experiment with non-linear and uncertain futures. Using the lens offered by Gibson-Graham's research on post-capitalist economic development, we situate the mainstream responses to industry decline advocated by established economic interests within a diverse economy framing. We trace how at a citizen level other possibilities that might contribute to different post-industrial pathways are also being actively pursued. We consider how such pathways might enact community economies centered on ethical interconnection, resilience and the growth of wellbeing for people and the planet.

The first section of the paper introduces the social and economic setting of Powell River. Drawing on secondary sources we briefly identify some of the different social groups that comprise the current Powell River "community" and their history of settlement and migration within the context of colonial and capitalist development. In the next section we discuss the role of hybrid research collectives in creating new futures. We situate our own actions in the context of an emerging method of participant activist research and we outline the ethical concerns of community economies that we bring to this project. The last section highlights diverse economic practices and organizations already underway in Powell River

¹ Janet is currently engaged in postdoctoral research based in Powell River entitled "Moving beyond disciplinary boundaries: the symbiosis of diversified approaches to economic development and human service practices". This research is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

and discusses how community economy discourse can deliberately engage with current concerns and open space for new directions.

A Mill, and More

Though most commonly recognized as a mill town, Powell River consists of a cluster of scattered settlements separated by tracts of forest. Travelling from north to south, these include the community of Lund; Sliammon (which is a reservation of land that was allotted to Tla'Amin people under Federal jurisdiction, although the entire region sits on unceded Tla'Amin territory); various neighborhoods within the municipality including Wildwood, Townsite, Cranberry, Westview, and Greif Point' the rural community around Kelly Creek south of town; and Saltery Bay. All these settlements result from a complex history of waves of newcomers arriving for reasons related to colonization, capitalism, and other political and material realities. To more fully convey the nature of Powell River today it is useful to briefly introduce the main social groups who make this heterogeneous entity into a distinctive place.

The Sunshine Coast has been home to the Tla'Amin people for an estimated 5,000 years. As one of the Coastal Salish peoples, this group lived for generations as stewards of an environment that supported their livelihood. With the coming of European settlers and the logging industry in particular, they were forcibly removed from their original village site (where the mill currently sits) and relegated to a small "reserve" of land, just north of what is now formally known as the City of Powell River. By the turn of the twentieth century waves of disease introduced by European settlers had reduced the population to a small group of some 300 individuals (Sliammon Treaty Society, 2013). The damming of what became known as the Powell River destroyed the salmon run and the Tla'Amin people saw their land built over by industrial infrastructure. Today Tla'Amin people live all around the City of

Powell River and beyond, but the community of Sliammon, located approximately 7 kilometers north of the mill, is where their cultural institutions are centered. The population had grown to 730 people in 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2013). With subsistence livelihoods increasingly threatened, Tla'Amin men have paid jobs mainly in logging, fishing and construction, and women in administration and healthcare (Statistics Canada, 2013).

The twentieth century has been a time of great sorrows and challenges for the Tla'Amin people, but their fortitude has resulted in the successful and precedent-setting negotiation of a treaty with the Province of British Columbia and the Federal government in 2012, which will move the Nation out from under the jurisdiction of the "Indian Act" to self-government (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2012). For the people who have lived through them, these changes have been a long time coming. As these comments by respected Tla'Amin elder, Dr. Elsie Paul, illustrate, the Indian Act enforced restrictions on lifestyles, promoted segregation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and was frequently accompanied by State violence:

But things are improving, they are. We can talk to our MLA now. We couldn't talk before. At least we're talking ... Police didn't need a search warrant to come kick your door in and search your house. You can't get away with that today ... Now I can sit down and have my glass of wine with my dinner if I choose to ... (Newbury 2013a: 105)

The treaty enacts increased land ownership, control over land use, and expanded hunting and fishing rights (Sliammon Treaty Society, 2013). This long overdue recognition of Tla'Amin sovereignty will potentially usher in significant changes for the fortunes of Aboriginal people in the Powell River region.

While the newly settled treaty signals future change, the downsizing of the Powell River mill has also had a massive and on-going impact on the region over the last 20 years.

For over ninety years a single pulp and paper mill shaped daily lives and generational expectations for many in Powell River and for older residents and the established business sector it is hard to imagine a future for the city that is not connected to the mill. In the early part of the twentieth century the Powell River Company built a “company town” to house its workers. This aspect of capitalist colonization set up a longstanding distinction between mill workers and other inhabitants in the region. The three founders of the company, who moved from Minnesota to establish the mill town, were convinced by current philosophical ideas about the civilizing influences of aesthetics and the environment (Townsite Heritage Society of Powell River, 2013). The townsite was pre-planned and laid out according to the principles of the Garden City Movement which placed emphasis on ensuring a humane environment for industrial workers largely via the inclusion of nature in the form of home yard gardens, parks in the city and green belts to buffer residential areas (Howard, 1902). The original houses for millworker’s families were built in the Arts and Crafts style that valued quality building and aesthetic designs. Single family dwellings with spacious gardens were built along well laid out on tree lined streets arrayed parallel to the coast.² The employment hierarchy of the mill was written into the landscape. Managers occupied more ornate and larger mansions along the first tier of streets with views of the ocean and the mill, and workers were allocated to houses according to rank, with engineers in streets behind managers, foremen behind technical staff and unskilled workers in the streets furthest from the coast.³

Spatial proximity to the mill meant that its rhythms of work permeated the consciousness of workers, wives and children, as John Campbell recalls:

² Designated as a National Historic District in 1995, these streets are one of best preserved streetscapes of 1910-30s vernacular architecture in Canada (Townsite Heritage Society of Powell River, 2013).

³ This has been a classic feature of resource based company towns the world over and was believed to be a strategy for labour management that maintained micro-class distinctions and provided incentives for promotion. In Australian coal towns built by transnational companies in the 1970s and 80s in Queensland it was highset and lowset houses that were used to mark of management from workers (Gibson, 1990).

Growing up in the townsite, the mill was always part of your life. Your life ran by the mill whistle. You always knew what time it was because the whistle would let you know when it was time to go for supper, or when it was time to go for lunch at school.

(Levez 2002: viii)

Roma Urquhart's memories are of the comforting presence of the mill:

Something that I can remember ... is that I used to love to fall asleep. We lived in the front row [of houses] ... right above the mill. To hear the saws cutting the logs, it was such a nice sound. I felt so comforted by that sound, and I've never forgotten it.

(Levez 2002: viii)

But it was not only work and housing that the Powell River Company provided; it was involved in all aspects of people's lives. Roger Taylor, a ninety-one year old former carpenter who started working in his teens, remembers with fond pleasure the paternalism of this resource company before World War II:

They were a darn good company to work for. It didn't matter what it was, they'd donate for this and donate for that. If a sports team was going away, they'd sponsor them. On Halloween they'd put on a big party at the Dwight Hall for the whole community. Every kid would get a present. It didn't matter how many kids there were. Christmas was the same. They would put on a huge do there in the Dwight Hall.

(Bolster 2012)

As the mill and town grew in size after World War II, what is now the neighborhood of Cranberry (a close walk to the mill) became its first suburb, followed shortly thereafter by the development of Westview, which was itself incorporated as a village in 1942. In 1955, Townsite, Cranberry, Wildwood, and Westview were amalgamated to create the municipality (Powell River Historical Museum and Archives, 2011). Today remaining and ex-mill

workers live all over Powell River and the company-built houses are privately owned and no longer occupied exclusively by mill employees.

Given the generational attachment to a single industry and a single company, the decline of the mill has shaken the foundations of the Powell River community. While job losses associated with technical change and rationalization of production began to occur in the 1980s (Hayter, 1997), until relatively recently the mill was still the provider of many of the most stable jobs in the region. An ex-mill worker recalled to one author how, when he heard that we had won a job at the mill in the 1980s and was to move to Powell River, he and his wife felt they were “set for life”. The wealth of the community was remarkable and, as this man commented “There was no value put on education because at 17 you could walk into a well-paying job in the mill—people wanted for nothing, they could buy anything they wanted.”

It was not just mill families who enjoyed the wealth that flowed from the mill; schools and other infrastructure were built by the mill in earlier years (Powell River Historical Museum and Archives, 2011), and industry taxes have provided what has been considered an important economic base for the community. It should be noted that this stability can no longer be taken for granted, however, with a 40% tax reduction having been granted to Catalyst (the current owner of the mill) in 2010, meaning a \$2.25 million drop from 2009 to 2010 (Dobbin, 2011). Given this recent history, many of the mainstream responses to the downsizing of this industry have focused longingly on finding a sizable industrial replacement.

In addition to the two mutually implicated histories of Tla’Amin First Nation and the influx of mill workers beginning in the early 20th century, there is also a more recent history of socio-demographic changes in the Powell River region. Subsequent migrations have seen the settlement pattern spread to the north and south of Sliammon and the old mill town. In the

1960s, the conservative working class community of Powell River experienced a wave of immigration in response to the American draft. By this time, the mill was no longer the global force it had once been. Small-scale agriculture had now become a significant part of the Powell River economy, as had fishing. During the Vietnam War young draft avoiders escaped the U.S. and flocked into Canada. A good number ended up in Lund, just north of Powell River, developing collective homes and farms in the bush both north and south of the municipality. This influx of “hippies” contributed to an emerging counter-culture in the otherwise relatively staid community.

After the early twentieth century wave of Italian immigrants who arrived to work in the mill, there was another wave of international newcomers beginning in 1947, followed by those who arrived to avoid the American draft in the 1960s. In more recent years immigration rates have declined (attributed to the slowing down of mill activity), with approximately 14.7% of Powell River citizens arriving from outside of Canada in 2006 (Powell River Diversity Initiative, 2010: 6). The relative proximity to Vancouver and low housing prices, however, have drawn people from other parts of BC to buy property in the region for both vacation and retirement purposes. These migrant retirees and the aging mill workforce mean the population is now significantly older than the rest of the province. In 2011 the median age in Powell River was 50.1 years, in comparison with a median age of 41.9 years in the rest of the province (Statistics Canada, 2012). The number of young children also continues to drop, and the size of the population has not changed significantly in the last five years (Statistics Canada, 2012).

The face of the town has thus changed drastically. Despite its still current industrial image Powell River is already a post-industrial city. By 2011, as many people were employed in the mill (some 340) as in the education sector (320), and social services was the next biggest employer providing jobs for 204 people (Powell River Regional Economic

Development Society, 2011: 45). Many residents derive their income from outside the region, including a contingent of men who fly off on a regular basis for work in resource industries elsewhere.

From this description, it is clear that Powell River is a heterogeneous entity both socially and economically and has been in a constant state of becoming under the influences of colonialism, capitalist industrialization, and other internal and external dynamics. The most formative, productive, and environmentally disruptive influence on the region has been the mill, but it is no longer in the “driver’s seat”. While those traditionally in political power in the region have reflected the values and interests of the old industrial identity, there is increasing involvement of other, less-industrially identified groups in the public sphere. This is an important juncture in which Powell River’s future is being hotly debated and as such offers a context in which to engage in discussion about a range of post-industrial pathways.

Participant Activist Research

The research upon which this chapter is based draws on insights generated from a mix of methods. As mentioned in the Introduction, the site of this inquiry is the hometown of one of the authors. As an “insider”, albeit a more recent resident who derives her primary income from outside the region, Janet has for many years been a community participant, activist and “researcher in the wild”, that is, a lay researcher whose observations, reflections and analyses emerge from immersion in actions around matters of concern (Callon and Rabeharisoa, 2003). She has occupied (and continues to occupy) voluntary positions on the Powell River Diversity Initiative (PRDI) board and steering committee, Community Resource Centre (CRC) executive committee, Powell River Child, Youth, and Family Services Society board, and Sunshine Musicfest board. Most recently she co-founded the civic engagement

organization Powell River Voices.⁴ The experience of these involvements has provided input into a formal postdoctoral research project which she is conducting as a professional academic researcher (or “confined researcher” in the language of Callon and Rabeharisoa) at the University of Victoria, with mentorship from academic colleague (and non-Powell River resident) Katherine Gibson.

We have called this project a participant *activist* research project to denote the difference with a more classic participatory action research (PAR) approach. PAR typically works with vulnerable and marginalized groups and has an emancipatory focus. The object of critique is clear, as is the target for transformation. The mode of participant *activist* research introduced here involves working on matters of shared concern with already mobilized collectives of researchers in the wild to foster emergent possibilities. As academic researchers we bring to this process an interest in reframing the economy as diverse and proposing post-capitalist development pathways that activate ethical rather than structural dynamics of transformation (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

The impact of capital mobility on livelihoods in place has been a longstanding research concern of J.K. Gibson-Graham and members of the Community Economies Collective. Their action research has been conducted with communities experiencing the detrimental effects of economic restructuring who feel that there is no alternative but to be the victims of the business-as-usual capitalist development promise. In the Latrobe Valley of Victoria where, after decades of employment growth in the mining and electricity generation, privatization of the state power industry caused massive retrenchments, Gibson and Cameron worked with unemployed youth, single parents and retrenched power workers to reimagine the people of the Valley, rather than its brown coal, as the primary resource to be mobilized

⁴Powell River Voices is a voluntarily run community group, and acknowledges financial support from The Taos Institute.

(Cameron and Gibson, 2005a). In the rural communities of Jagna and Linamon in the Visayas region of the Philippines capital investment is largely absent and residents are forced to become contract migrant workers overseas to make ends meet. Here Gibson et al. (2010) worked with unskilled workers, young mothers and older farming women to mobilize local assets and generate employment in community based enterprises. In the coastal fishing communities of the NE USA, where the livelihoods of independent fishers are threatened by the overfishing of industrial scale capitalist fishers, St Martin (2005; 2009) has worked with fishers to map their ocean floor commons and experiment with community-supported fishing, modeled on community-supported agriculture, as a way of strengthening economic and social wellbeing directly. All these projects have employed a language of the diverse economy with which to reposition residents as activated subjects, rather than deactivated victims, in processes of local economic development.

The common conflation of economic development with capitalist, or mainstream, business growth is one of the unexamined “truths” that Gibson-Graham’s work has been keen to expose and deconstruct (1996; 2006). Their contribution has been to rethink economic identity outside of a capitalocentric framework in which capitalist economic relations are taken to be what constitutes and drives a “real economy” while all other economic relations are positioned in relation to capitalism as the same as, a complement to, subordinated by or contained within (1996: 6). Gibson-Graham’s diverse economy framing releases economic diversity from this straitjacket and allows for the imagining of very different dynamics of development and growth (see Figure 1). A heterogeneous range of economic practices are seen to contribute to our material wellbeing, not just the production and distribution of goods and services by waged and salaried workers, monetized market transactions, capitalist business, and mainstream finance, all built upon the institution of private property. Taken alone, these activities do not offer a complete picture of a community’s economy but are,

rather, the tip of the iceberg.⁵ When it comes to making decisions about economic futures public discourse usually limits us to think only of the growth of wage labor, commodity markets, capitalist business, and access to mainstream finance.

Figure 1 The Diverse Economy

This indeed has been the response in Powell River as it has become increasingly clear that the mill can no longer be relied upon for industrial tax revenue and job creation. The Powell River Regional Economic Development Society (PRREDS) was formed in 2001 after community consultation to “diversify the local economy through new investment attraction, as well as support and strengthen existing businesses and industries” (2011: 2). The diversity mentioned here is sectoral. Instead of pulp and paper, the range of investment possibilities that have been most actively pursued by Powell River’s city council include industries such as power generation, garbage incineration and waste treatment. Like the pulp and paper industry, these activities require abundant water and a measure of pollution tolerance within the community. Somewhat in contradiction, the other industries being courted are tourism, the arts and retirement villages. PRREDS actively pursues potential investors with such services as its “site selection profile” which highlights opportunities for people- or resource-based capitalist industries to enter the region from outside, and paints a picture of the area as one which is “continuing to grow,” and with plenty of room for more growth.

At the same time as pursuing this pro-growth strategy, the City of Powell River contracted the Helios Group management consultants, who advised that cut backs on public expenditure were necessary in order for the City to remain afloat with declining revenue

⁵ Indeed we have often used an iceberg image to represent the diverse economy when working with communities (see www.communityeconomies.org/Home/Key-Ideas).

(Helios Group, 2011). This dual pronged strategy of making the region more “investment ready” by offering incentives to private capital investment and cutting back on community services that support wellbeing directly, especially for those who are less well off, are highly risky, even as they are well-travelled policy pathways. The era of long term investment and commitment by private corporations to places and labor markets is over. Companies are now looking for quick financial returns and are happy to use state subsidies to bolster their bottom line when poor market performance and bad planning erodes their profits. In addition there is little modeling of the economic impact on the local economy of maintaining services that support those who are income limited. This region has Canada’s highest per capita population of artists, artisans and craftspeople, and retirees form a major segment of the population (Sunshine Coast Canada, 2013). These groups stimulate the local economy but their quality of life and allegiance to place is enhanced by having access to what a recent survey identifies as ‘gap reducing’ services, that is those that shrink the gap between rich and poor (Powell River Community Foundation, 2011).⁶ Such services include the Community Resource Centre, Family Place, Career Link, Food Bank Action Centre Society, Skookum Gleaners, and the Good Food Box program, all of which struggle to stay afloat by seeking funds beyond government support. It seems that there is room for more innovative thinking about how to better grasp the interdependencies that might be stimulated to create a viable and sustainable future for Powell River.

Our participant activist method involves joining hybrid collectives comprised of researchers in the wild and provoking discussion and reflection in such a way as to open up

⁶ The *Vital Signs* report was commissioned by the Powell River Community Foundation to investigate twelve key issue areas regarding the health and vitality of the community. The report indicates that although Powell River’s economy as measured by retail sales, tourist visits, family income, and average individual income is lagging in relation to the rest of the province, it is fairly stable (though not growing). The distribution of the wealth in the community, however, is another story. Child poverty, overall poverty, and dependence on social safety nets are all higher in Powell River than most of British Columbia, while high school completion and the average earnings of both male and female workers are lower (Powell River Community Foundation 2011).

hitherto un-thought pathways for economic and social post-industrial development. The approach developed here extends the post-structuralist action research that Gibson-Graham (1994; 1996; 2006) and colleagues have pioneered in regions where there has been some interest in rethinking economic development pathways (Cameron and Gibson 2005b; Gibson et al. 2010). Central to this methodological approach is reading the landscape for economic difference to see the economy as already more than capitalist. A second research method involves identifying and highlighting examples of existing ethical economic practices that are oriented directly to the growth of wellbeing.⁷ We use the language of community economies developed by Gibson-Graham (2006) and Gibson-Graham et al (2013) to denote these ethical practices as involving negotiation around:

- *surviving* together well and equitably
- *distributing surplus* to enrich social and environmental health
- *encountering others* in ways that support their wellbeing as well as ours
- maintaining, replenishing and growing our natural and cultural *commons*
- *investing* our wealth so that future generations can live well, and
- *consuming* sustainably.

A third research method involves working with hybrid collectives to initiate discussion about the possible development pathways that might emerge from these two different reading practices. In Powell River the challenge continues to be that of ensuring that hybrid collectives are truly heterogeneous, thus allowing for democratic discussion. In the next section of the chapter we present the results of our initial reading exercises and report on on-going attempts to gather heterogeneous elements of Powell River society into conversations about widening the economic development agenda.

⁷ Clearly there are many activities included in the diverse economy framing shown in Figure 1 that are not likely to be seen as desirable, such as slave enterprise, indentured labor, theft or loan shark lending.

Participant Activist Research on Rethinking Development in Powell River

Among those rethinking development pathways in Powell River there is considerable interest in conducting a full inventory of the diverse economy of the city and region. Clearly the contemporary local economy of Powell River is comprised of much more than the mill and an industrial workforce. People are making livings via a range of modes of work, including paid and unpaid work; a variety of forms of enterprise, including corporate capitalist, family business, self-employment and artisanal enterprise; and diverse transactions involving formal and informal markets and non-market exchange, such self-provisioning. We report here on the ongoing practice of reading for economic difference in Powell River.

At present there is a good understanding of the activities and enterprises that comprise the diverse cultural economy of Powell River. Local artist Meghan Hildebrand has represented this diversity in her wonderful ‘map’ of Powell River’s cultural capital (see Figure 2). In it we see the large number of small businesses, many of them run by self-employed owner-proprietors, in the Creative Cultural Industries and Occupations cluster. This Figure also indirectly points to the huge contribution of volunteer labour to the cultural economy. The Festivals and Events and Community Cultural Organizations, for example, are largely run by unpaid volunteers with some employed administrators. As the footnote to the biennial Kathauwmixw Choral festival notes, this event enrolls 560 volunteers for the 5 day event and attracts an audience of 14,500 people. In addition to giving insight into the types of labour and enterprise involved in this sector, the ‘map’ also documents the forms of property that support cultural activities. The Spaces and Facilities cluster inventories publically owned facilities like schools, library and parks as well as individually and collectively owned private property that community members can access, use and benefit from, such as galleries, studios and halls.

Figure 2: A Cultural Map of Powell River.

Source: *Powell River Arts & Culture Initiative Final Report*, June 2012. Design by Meghan Hildebrand.

More detailed research is needed to trace the diverse transactions that knit this cultural economy together and connect it to regional, national and global flows of value. Certainly all of these activities generate commodity transactions in formal markets—ticket sales, art and handicraft purchases, hall rentals, wage payments and so on. Consumers and audiences from outside the region flock to Powell River to purchase the goods and services offered by these cultural activities. There are also a huge number of mostly undocumented gift transactions, payment in kind, barter, cooperative exchange and state allocations taking place to maintain these activities. The financial backing for this sector would also be very diverse ranging from family investments in choir members traveling from all over the world to the Kathauwmixw Choral festival, to community financed museums, to mainstream insurance for performers and infrastructure.

A similarly complex ‘map’ is yet to be made for the diverse food economy of Powell River, although there have been the beginnings of such a process as part of a larger ‘Mapping the Heart of Powell River’ project (PRDI, 2013). This has been a year-long participatory arts-based project that engages diverse groups of Powell River citizens to ‘map’ (through experiential and visual collaborations) the multiple narratives of livelihood in the community, including its past, present, and future. With food production being a significant aspect of life for many in the region, one of the maps this initiative produced was a food security map. Participants at 2013’s annual *Seedy Saturday* event (a day of seed swapping, seed selling, and food-related workshops) collaboratively constructed this

map by identifying which foods they source locally regularly, and where in the region these foods are produced and distributed. This map is useful not only in identifying assets, but in making gaps in food security visible as well.

A full food production inventory would extend this map to include the numerous capitalist food marketing companies which offer wage employment in addition to the many small self-employed and family businesses and farms, and cooperatives such as the Skookum Food Provisioners' Co-op. This is a co-operatively run organization incorporated in 2010 that saw membership rise from 30 to over 130 in the 2011-2012 fiscal year (Skookum Food Provisioners' Cooperative, 2013). The Co-op includes a bulk-buying club, fruit gleaning, seed sharing, a community cider press, and runs a variety of workshops about food growing, harvesting, and preserving. The Co-op thus supports practices of individual and collective self-provisioning that takes place via non-market transactions with the natural environment and local residents.

By broadening the scope of what is taken into economic consideration in these ways, including all activities that fit the definition of “production and distribution of goods and services” (cultural activities, food production, or other initiatives), we gain a more encompassing description of Powell River's economic landscape. Clearly there is more work to be done to complete this task of reading for economic difference. But without completing this inventory it is possible to begin to identify activities that could be seen as building community economies centered on ethical concerns.

The Skookum Food Provisioners' Co-op initiatives, for example, provide opportunities for local consumers to establish ethical trade relations with local food producers that support them through good times and bad with a constancy of commitment. The gleaning and seed saving activities enact responsible relations with the productivity of land now and into the future. The co-op disperses surplus among local families in need of

healthy food, thereby enacting an ethic of care for the survival needs of those beyond the network of cooperative members. The organization also deliberately supports other local services and businesses when it comes to space rentals, catering, web design, and more. In these ways a complex network of interconnections weaves together market and non-market transactions, co-op and volunteer labor, capitalist and non-capitalist enterprise and care for humans and non-humans alike to produce a resilient economic web that fuels and refuels itself and supports the wellbeing of families, workers, enterprises, and land and plant species.

Volunteer services in the community support various thrift shops, sports teams for youth and adults, extra-curricular activities for young people, a vast range of community festivals and events, and ongoing services that provide wellbeing directly to many citizens, such as free church dinners on offer most nights of the week. Including these in our diverse economic framing helps us to better incorporate the often overlooked economic contributions of women in this community. These voluntary initiatives have been relied upon by families for generations, which calls into question the suggestion that “alternative” economic initiatives are driven primarily by newcomers, well-to-dos, or people of particular political allegiances. Opening up our definitions of significant economic activity helps us to see important points of connection in the community that could easily be overlooked, and which serve as potential assets from which we can collectively draw.

The development of a local currency called Powell River Money embraces a notion of “investment” that is not only fiscal, but is also an investment in the future of the community (Powell River Money, 2013). Participating businesses accept a percentage of the costs of their goods in PR\$, which keeps money circulating in the community. Furthermore, citizens can access PR\$ from a number of “cashpoints” in the community, and when they do so a direct contribution is made to a local non-profit organization, making for a doubled benefit of

using PR\$. This builds a direct link between the business community and the non-profit community, recognizing, once again, that our points of connection are greater than might otherwise be assumed. The “bottom line” for this currency is not growth in terms of profit, but growth in terms of community wellbeing. It does this by adding an ethical option for consumers in the region in a way that *also* supports for-profit businesses.

Currently members of the community are negotiating and struggling to defend commoned property—that is, places that are accessible to all, where people share experiences, ideas and interconnections that build and sustain community. One group, for example, called “Friends of the Library” has formed to lead a campaign to ensure the library remains a vital and accessible resource for Powell River citizens. The Youth Resource Centre has recently had to reduce its services to one day a week due to financial constraints. Family Place (a family resource center) struggles to stay afloat. And a range of forest areas are being defended from logging.

As a more in-depth example of these commoning practices, a committee (of which Janet is a member) has formed to ensure that the Powell River Community Resource Centre (CRC) can continue its work in the absence of stable government funding. Over the five years since its opening the CRC has pieced together public grant funds to maintain its operations. Currently it regularly supports 60-100 citizens a day through both direct services (which include legal services supports, healthy food, a range of free workshops, a drop-in café, a community garden, computer access, and laundry facilities among other things), and important opportunities for socialization and informal connections. These opportunities are particularly significant for the clientele who are otherwise extremely isolated due to mental illness, physical challenges, poverty, or addictions. Without public investment, the wellbeing of these community members is severely threatened.

The committee has secured core funding for three more years, but is committed to finding ways to ensure the CRC does not find itself in this crisis situation again at the end of that period. To sustain the center's work they recognize the need to draw together a variety of economic flows apart from grant funding—such things as in-kind donations, volunteer opportunities, and space rentals. They are exploring possibilities for a social enterprise based out of the center which can be both income-generating and capacity-building. Importantly they are building relationships with a range of existing organizations where partnerships can be mutually beneficial. They are campaigning to raise both awareness and funds at a citizen level and creating a community-driven steering committee to ensure multiple voices are included in future directions and to create pathways for collaboration. The Committee is tapping into a deep understanding among Powell River citizens that the Community Resource Centre is an asset to the community, not a liability. It appears that the work of these organizing groups is shifting the discourse about what matters in Powell River.

Caputo (2000) reminds us that allowing our imaginations and actions to extend beyond inherited discourses *will* alter them. The challenge is to build on and strengthen the practical and discursive movements taking place. When we embrace a performative ontological approach to change (Gibson-Graham 2008), in contrast to a technical-rational one (Blades 1997), we are uniquely positioned as researchers and authors to participate in making some things more “real” than others. The examples of Powell River's diverse economy and efforts to enact ethical community economies that we have offered here convenes a wider set of economic practices on the “economic playing field”. Our interest is in engaging more deliberately in public conversations around this emergent community economy that supports wellbeing directly. This is not merely an academic exercise; we believe it is in fact something citizenship in a climate changing world demands of us all. We conclude with some reflections on the role of experimental hybrid research collectives in this process.

From Inventories to Action: Hybrid Research Collective Interventions

In the documentary video “Defining Diversity, Creating Community” produced by the Powell River Diversity Initiative (of which Janet is also a member), Michelle Washington, a Tla’Amin woman from Powell River, offers these thoughts about the future:

You can’t just have one plant or one animal and have biodiversity and a healthy ecosystem. For us to have a great community—not just a Tla’Amin community and a Powell River community, but a great community together—we need the ideas and different teachings and backgrounds of many, many people (Powell River Diversity Initiative, 2011).

According to urbanist Jane Jacobs, these observations about what constitutes a healthy ecosystem can be applied in the economic realm as well. Economic development, she argues is connected to the expansion or decline of economic diversity and resilience (Jacobs 2000). When it comes to fostering economic diversity, however, planners usually refer to increasing the number of industrial sectors in a region (Gibson, 2012). So in the case of Powell River this means diversifying away from logging and paper and pulp manufacture by attracting investment into tourism, aged care and possibly waste management. There is little attention given to the diversity of ownership of property or enterprise and who has claims to the surplus generated by business or the benefits bestowed by access to land and resources. Likewise, there is little recognition of the diversity of forms of work and the interdependency of paid work with a wide range of unpaid forms of labor in the community, as briefly outlined above. And the contributions of market transactions are valued while non-market transactions are ignored.

A community economies approach to development reminds us that rather than seeking the next big industry, post-industrial communities like Powell River can establish

fruitful paths forward by nurturing *multiple* entry-points within a diverse economy. Powell River is well positioned to embrace a more participatory and diversified approach to economic development because of the many grassroots efforts to bolster the community from within that innovative groups of citizens are already actively pursuing. To conclude this chapter we review some of the concrete ways in which we are acting within hybrid collectives of long term residents, newcomers, the first people of the land, non-human actants (such as old growth forests and fish populations) and multiple others to make real a community economy in Powell River and prepare the ground for greater support from government and non-government institutions.

As we have demonstrated, bringing economic diversity and ethical interconnection to visibility and theorizing their contribution to wellbeing is an important step towards imagining and enacting post-industrial development pathways. The *Powell River Chamber of Commoners* is a celebratory intervention that Janet Newbury along with others initiated to do just this. In most communities the Chamber of Commerce is a well heard voice in discussions about economic futures. As representatives of private business interests, Chambers of Commerce are keen to highlight the contribution their members make to economic health. The *Chamber of Commoners* is a playful riff on this theme. Rather than an on-going organization, the *Chamber of Commoners* is an annual event that presents a fun opportunity to connect with and celebrate all the great “hand and heart” work that goes on in Powell River on a regular basis.

There have been four such events so far, the most recent of which explicitly incorporated notions of community economies.⁸ It is an all-ages event which involves plenty of time for informal networking over food and drinks, participatory activities, information tables about local initiatives, and an opportunity to celebrate (often unsung)

⁸ See <http://prpeak.com/articles/2013/04/26/community/doc51771f711f725773958720.txt>

heroes with the “Commoners Choice Awards.” These awards are bestowed upon local citizens, groups, organizations, or businesses that contribute a lot to the community, nominated by the public. At the most recent event, Powell Riverites were invited to specifically consider contributors to the “Diverse Economy” for their nominees so that they might better collectively recognize and support that which can so often otherwise get overlooked. The process of nominating widens the circle of who might initially see themselves as part of the ‘chamber of commoners’. And by inviting key community stakeholders (such as the Mayor and a representative from the local Chamber of Commerce) to present awards, the event has been attracting an increasingly diverse group of attendees each time around.

As we have argued, building a post-industrial pathway towards an uncertain future must involve a truly democratic process of citizen participation, which requires that we learn about the issues that matter to us. The *Chamber of Commoners* is a fun and welcoming way to begin inviting citizen participation. At the center of any community economy is negotiation around how to live together with each other and earth others on this planet. When it comes to the democratic process, voting is just the tip of the iceberg, a true democracy requires civic engagement between elections, and this is at the heart of the community economies approach. In an effort to create opportunities for more in-depth information-sharing and discussion around these kinds of matters, a volunteer group called *Powell River Voices* (noted earlier) has begun hosting a speaker’s series, which includes follow-up dialogues and other activities as well. *Powell River Voices* deliberately partners with different community organizations, institutions, businesses, and groups. The aim is to provide opportunities for people to become more informed before the time comes to vote on major issues, and perhaps more importantly, to find ways to share views before and after voting day. Its events are advertised widely in an effort to enlarge the circle of who

might choose to populate these events, but the challenge of diversifying this group remains a real one.

The first event, a talk by Ken Wu of the Ancient Forest Alliance (AFA), was co-sponsored by both the mill workers' union and the Sierra Club. It focused on the ecology and history of the region and ways of weaning ourselves off the practice of exporting raw logs. The AFA is committed to ensuring the survival and the thriving of people *and* ecosystems. Wu presented valuable insights into preserving old growth trees and developing a viable second-growth forestry industry. This post-industrial pathway would require investment into building a sustainable forestry industry that treasures the old growth commons. The event was well attended and led to some exciting rhizomatic developments. A filmmaker in the community decided to record the talk and share it widely as an educational tool, the community radio shared it online, a list of concrete recommendations for action from the speaker was published in a free local magazine (Newbury 2013b). Both the *Chamber of Commoners* and *Powell River Voices* are experimental hybrid collective activities that are providing opportunities for new identities, new visibilities, new collaborations and negotiations to occur.

The exciting reality that becomes evident at the events described above is that perhaps the changes needed in Powell River are not as great as initially expected. As these reflections from Tony Culos (a former mill worker) and Lyn Adamson (director of the local employment services agency, Career Link) suggest, people have already begun to move on from the belief in the need for a next "mill":

I used to believe that the closure of the mill would spell the end of the town, but I don't believe that anymore. I have enough evidence in front of my eyes to see that the town will keep going, and even growing, without the mill. (Tony Culos, Powell River Diversity Initiative, 2011)

People used to be really proud that we were a mill town, making paper, good jobs. Now, people are really proud that we are no longer a mill town. (Lyn Adamson, personal communication 2013)

Conclusion

As members of the communities we live in, academic researchers do not exist outside of our areas of study as purely objective observers. Instead we can understand ourselves as part of dynamic and emergent hybrid research collectives. By engaging with(in) our places and subjects of inquiry, we can enhance our capacities to deeply integrate theory and practice through a process we have come to call participatory activist research.

The current chapter is not the culmination of a study, but rather the entry-point into one—keeping in mind of course that the complex processes into which we inquire do not have clear starting or ending points. Although communities are constantly undergoing processes of becoming, this particular community, Powell River, is in a unique transitional moment when it comes to possibilities for post-industrial economic pathways. With the downsizing of its main industry and employer over the past 3 decades, community members are currently exploring a diverse range of economic possibilities that extend beyond strictly capitalist options. Reading for economic diversity can help us to identify and pursue existing and potential economic pathways that enhance wellbeing for human and nonhuman community members. Knowing that outcomes of such an emergent process cannot be taken for granted, tracking ideas and practices as we have done here is critical for this kind of collaborative research, as it helps to enhance reflexivity and inform decisions.

As conditions continue to change in Powell River, due in part to some of the local activities identified here and in part to broader political, ecological, and economic dynamics,

the active elements of the hybrid collective will also continue to change. Our intention, through the participatory research activities described here, is to introduce a community economies approach into this changing landscape in order to see how it may play a part in informing emerging realities.

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