

Exploring local economic systems

Tim Crabtree

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Course Tutor

Tim Crabtree, MA (Oxon), has 25 years experience of social economy development, in policy (with New Economics Foundation), in economic development agencies, and at a practical level on the ground. Currently working as a part-time researcher with Cardiff University, and also in south west England helping to develop a range of social economy organisations.

Course description

The course tutor will explain his own experience of developing local food initiatives, and associated enterprises in the fields of community finance and renewable energy. These practical examples will be used as the basis for exploring the problems associated with the global food economy, including pollution, resource depletion, land and commodity speculation, inequality and health issues. The course will then explore the practical mechanisms and structures which could be used to develop local food systems that are more sustainable, resilient and just.

Learning outcomes

At the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Understand the rationale for local economic systems, and the problems associated with globalised economic systems, using food as a focus for the analysis.
- Apply concepts such as basic systems thinking to local economic development.
- Understand the impacts of environmental limits on economic systems, and explain the social, economic and environmental benefits of activity at a local level.
- Understand the key features of the social economy – including organisational structures, financing, operations, ethos, the role of collaboration and secondary structures, etc.
- Apply learning from the course to the design of an eco-social enterprise.

Summary of lectures:

1 Local economic systems - Food as a starting point

The first lecture will begin with a presentation of the tutor's work in Dorset, England over the last 15 years. The practical initiatives presented will then be used as a basis for the development of a framework for classifying food enterprises at a local level, and this framework will be used by students to compare the situation in England with the situation in the Czech Republic. The lecture will conclude with an exploration of how food can link in with other key issues such as energy use and pollution.

2 The development of successful eco-social enterprises

The second lecture will begin with an exploration of the 5 capitals model, and the way in which these can be combined to create economic goods and services. This will entail:

- Understanding the importance of the environment as a provider of resources and a sink for wastes.
- Assessing the requirement for physical equipment and buildings.
- Understanding the motivations and potential roles of the people involved in an enterprise, including the potential for citizens to become active agents within the enterprise (for example as investors or volunteers).
- Understanding the role of money – including grants, equity, debt and retained surpluses.

- Exploring the importance of social capital and legal structure and the inter-relationship with finance.

The lecture will then explore the area of operations, and the potential to create a “circular” model of enterprise which entails recycling wastes, eliminating pollution and being powered from renewable sources.

3 Applying the theory to a hypothetical eco-social enterprise

Students will be asked to choose and describe a local food enterprise – this can be real or hypothetical – and describe the key inputs required. They will then be asked to describe the key operations of the enterprise and the way in which those operations will be managed. Students will explore how outputs will get to consumers, through marketing and distribution. They will also how waste will be eliminated or recycled. Finally, students will explore opportunities for collaboration with other local food initiatives.

4 The development of local economic systems – networking, collaboration and support mechanisms

The final lecture will explore how individual local food enterprises could collaborate with other organisations. Such collaboration could be at a less formal level, for example the creation of networks or “communities of practice”, or through “secondary structures” designed to provide inputs (the 5 capitals) or allow collaboration around operations, marketing & distribution or waste recycling.

Evaluation:

Students will be asked to prepare for the third lecture, by researching in advance a real or hypothetical local food enterprise which they can explore further during the session. They will then be asked to prepare a 1000 word paper summarising their learning during the course.

Recommended reading

- Bakan, J. 2004 *The Corporation* London: Constable
Blythman, J. 2005 *The Food our Children Eat* London: HarperCollins
Douthwaite, R. 1996 *Short Circuit* Dublin: Lilliput Press
Ekins, P. (ed) 1992 *Real Life Economics* London: Routledge
Meadows, D. 2008 *Thinking in Systems. A Primer* London: Earthscan
Polanyi, K. 2001 *The Great Transformation* London: Beacon Press
Porritt, J. (2009) The Three 'Rs' - Three fundamental principles should under-pin any approach to food security: resilience, re-solarisation and re-localisation. *Resurgence*, [On-line] Nov-Dec, Issue 257. Available at: <http://www.resurgence.org/magazine/article2948-the-three-rs.html>
Schumacher, E.F. 1973 *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* London: Sphere Books