

DOUGHNUT ECONOMICS: SEVEN WAYS TO THINK LIKE A 21ST CENTURY ECONOMIST

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Raworth, K (2017) *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st Century Economist*, London: Penguin Books.

‘What enables human beings to thrive?’

‘What enables human beings to thrive?’ (Raworth, 2017: 44). This is the guiding question behind the model of Doughnut Economics, originally presented as a discussion paper for Oxfam in 2012, where Kate Raworth worked as a researcher for ten years. (Raworth, 2012). From the outset it captured the imagination, as for many it visualised what they already thought about sustainability. The visual was even used by negotiators

in the development of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a reminder of the ‘big picture goals they were aiming for’ (Raworth, 2017: 24). The book *Doughnut Economics* followed in 2017, and became an international bestseller, translated into twenty languages (Nugent, 2021). The *Financial Times* (2017) listed it as their business book of the year in 2017 and a 2018 TED talk has received 4.5 million views to date (Raworth, 2018). The concept and thinking behind the doughnut has been quoted by David



Figure 1: ‘The Doughnut of social and planetary boundaries’, (Raworth, 2017: 44).

Attenborough, Pope Francis and President Michael D Higgins (Nugent, 2021; Áras an Uachtaráin, 2020).

Inspired by those already attempting to apply the ideas, Raworth co-founded Doughnut Economics Action Lab (DEAL) in 2020 as an online, community platform to connect and support change makers (DEAL, 2022a). In 2020, Amsterdam adopted Doughnut Economics as part of their Circular Strategy to guide their city development plan, as they emerged from COVID-19. The idea stemmed from an initiative of C40 cities, a coalition of ninety-seven cities committed to action on climate change and following Amsterdam's decision, other cities and municipalities and regions have since followed (Nugent, 2021).

The concept generated much wider interest and traction than Raworth could have imagined (Raworth, 2022: 294). From the outset she was clear that the ideas are not new, and beyond being presented through a playful doughnut image, the work is based on decades of existing work and thinking on sustainability and humanistic economics. Raworth credits some of the success to good timing and the power of pictures to shape our world view and a goal to strive towards (Robin, 2022).

The doughnut as a compass for humanity

The goal of the doughnut is 'to meet the needs of all, within the means of the planet' (Raworth, 2017:10). The basis and arguably the main strength of Doughnut Economics is as a model built on a clear set of social and ecological indicators, representing an 'ecological ceiling', beyond which lies planetary degradation and a 'social foundation' which sets out the basics of life, beyond which no one should be left behind. The space between the rings is the 'ecologically safe and socially just space in which humanity can thrive' (Ibid: 45). The metrics used in the doughnut are derived from the earth system science on planetary boundaries from researchers at Stockholm Resilience Centre and the social priorities of the Sustainable Development Goals (Raworth, 2017: 295-299).

The book lays out seven steps and aims to replace the economic mantra of ‘growth at all costs’ (Ibid: 264), measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a key indicator (Ibid: 31). It presents a new economic story, using words and pictures. The starting point is to embed the economy within society and the living world, and highlight the role and interaction of the ‘household, commons, market and state in meeting our many needs’ (Ibid: 286-287). Raworth addresses rising income and wealth inequality and highlights the negative impact of inequality on society, democracy and the environment (Ibid: 170-173). Chapters five and six present alternative views on the distribution of resources and reimagine production, business and design, in an attempt to rethink growth and shine a light on fundamental issues, which are externalised in current economic decision making (Raworth, 2017: 213).

Contrary to the critique that it discards existing economic theory (Schokkaert, 2017), the invite is to make it relevant to the twenty first century context. The conclusion and challenge to change makers and policy makers and economists and decision makers is to become ‘agnostic about growth’ and design an economy that prospers and ‘thrives’ regardless of growth (Raworth, 2017: 30).

Why economics?

Raworth names economics as ‘the mother tongue of public policy, the language of public life and mindset that shapes society’ and economists as having the ‘front row seats’ to determine future policy’ (Raworth, 2017: 5). However, the path of prevailing economic development is caught in a trap of ‘growing social inequality and deepening ecological destruction’ (Ibid: 131), based on outdated theories and often flawed assumptions (Ibid: 8). The Doughnut Model was designed to offer an alternative, with up to date and evolving tools, replacing the goal of exponential economic growth, with a new goal of ‘thriving in balance’ (Ibid: 53).

The book is a valuable reference, placing ‘values and goals’ at the heart of an economic mindset and revisiting the work of thinkers, who placed humanity at the centre of economic thought (Ibid: 42). Raworth’s background

as a student of economics and career in overseas development with women in Zanzibar, the United Nations and Oxfam and as a mother of twins all lend context and credibility to her holistic reframing of economics and proposal of alternative metrics to measure prosperity (Ibid: 9).

Doughnut economics and global citizenship education (GCE)

Education is identified as the key to bring about the ‘scale of transformation required’ to move to the ‘safe and just space’ of the doughnut (Raworth, 2017: 57-60). There is a clear symbiosis between the values and approach of ‘Doughnut Economics’ as a theory and practise and GCE, as outlined by UNESCO (2018). The doughnut model is built on human rights, social justice, and climate science. The aim of the DEAL platform is to turn the ideas in the book into action, using an approach rooted in collaboration, participatory methodologies, reflection and learning through experimentation (DEAL, 2022a). The social foundation of the Doughnut Model is based on the SDGs; it offers a complementary framing of the SDGs, contextualising them within a circular framework that can highlight the interconnectedness, and impact of decisions.

Applying the ideas of Doughnut Economics has become more accessible and practicable thanks to a series of tools to ‘unroll the Doughnut’ available since April 2022. They explore citizenship through exploring ‘local aspiration’ in a context of ‘global social responsibility,’ using four lenses combining a local, global, social and ecological perspective (DEAL, 2022b). The strength of GCE is to hold the global context and draw local and global interconnections. An approach of collaborative consultation has the potential to create space for ‘debate and new thinking’ (Kirby, 2012:19) and engage in ‘unlearning’ and ‘relearning’ to bring a ‘different reality into being’ (Andreotti, 2014: 57 cited by Alldred, 2022: 117). Through these methodologies, Doughnut Economics provides an opportunity for GCE educators to engage outside the sector.

Doughnut Economics offers practitioners a viable pathway and methodologies to engage with economics, and a platform to engage on active

citizenship. It also offers opportunities towards SDG 4 and ‘Vision 2025 Towards a Society of Global Citizens’ (IDEA, 2022).

‘We are all economists now’

Raworth set out to write the book that she would have liked to have in her own university education and the result is a book, she contends that should be part of every ‘economist’s toolkit’ (Raworth, 2017: 11). The concluding chapter is titled ‘We are all economists now’ (Ibid: 286) and this review concludes that that the concept of Doughnut Economics and the book, tools and peer support from the DEAL community make this resource very valuable in all our toolkits. Whilst outside of the scope of this review, the skills of ‘emotional literacy’ (Bryan, 2020) for practitioners and participants to enact transformational change amidst social and ecological crises are also critical.

The transformational action and thinking required to adopt and move into Doughnut Economics is indeed radical and may seem naïve (Ibid: 286) as Raworth wrote in 2017 as the tools and thinking are still only evolving. Arguably it seems significantly less naïve or radical in today’s context. The question can legitimately be asked whether it is any more radical than the policy choices made to bail out the banking system in 2008 or the radical policy decisions and measures put in place to tackle COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021?

Doughnut Economics as a compass and map, has the potential to be a very powerful tool and provide focus and direction in a time of crisis. It offers methodologies, metrics, vision and hope, as well as an invitation to all to participate and co-create. The spirit of this review is to open the conversation and explore the framework of Doughnut Economics within GCE practice. It offers exciting prospects for collaborative action and draws clear connections between people, places and issues. Integrating the doughnut into GCE has the power to address values and behaviour change, reflecting back values that have led to today’s many crises and opening a space to learn and take action to move towards a ‘safe and just space’ (Raworth, 2017: 293).

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Carol Doyle recently graduated in Sustainability and Enterprise (HDip) at University College Cork. The course has brought her back full circle to her roots in Fairtrade and raised the question about the potential of GCE as a missing link to integrate critical and systems thinking, and a global, interconnected and creative mindset into formal education. She is involved in Community

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