

Doughnut Economics– What on Earth??

UN Secretary General Guterres recently said “We simply cannot return to where we were before COVID-19 struck Now is the time to redouble our efforts to build more inclusive and sustainable economies and societies that are more resilient in the face of pandemics, climate change and other global challenges. The recovery must lead to a different economy.” (The Guardian, 1 April). Though we understood the financial and environmental issues linked to the 2008 recession and the climate change emergency, nations and states failed to implement the systemic changes so desperately needed. The current pandemic and the vulnerabilities it reveals presents an opportunity for action towards a healthier and more equitable society on our journey to recovery.

It takes political will to make real change such as paying essential workers what we now know they are worth, ensuring a basic income for all, or treating the climate crisis as a real emergency. Why is it so difficult to muster wide political support for the needed changes? Would effective communication and conceptual tools aid in a common understanding and plan for action? Doughnut Economics, derived and developed by Kate Raworth (kateraworth.com) may be one such tool.

What is Doughnut Economics? It’s simply a way of looking at many things at once, and quickly understanding how well or poorly we are managing major social and environmental factors for the long-term well-being of all. The outside boundary of the ‘doughnut’ is the environmental ceiling which consists of 9 measures (e.g. biodiversity, climate change, freshwater withdrawal...). Beyond this lies “unacceptable environmental degradation and potential tipping points in Earth’s systems” (this and following quotes and illustration from Raworth website). The inner boundary of the doughnut defines the social foundation for broad well-being. This is based on 11 social measures, such as health, housing, social equity, and education.

Between these boundaries of intact and fully functioning nature and our basic social foundation is the ‘meat’ of the doughnut, the “environmentally safe and socially just space in which humanity can thrive.” By portraying how well we are doing at achieving each of the key environmental and social factors, the doughnut shows quickly and clearly where change is needed.

Originally designed for the global economy, recent work has focused on using the concept to help achieve real sustainability at regional and municipal levels. On April 8th, the Amsterdam City Doughnut was released. Looking at Amsterdam’s environmental and social health in both a local and global context, it asks what would it mean for the people of Amsterdam:

1) to thrive?

2) to thrive within its (sic) natural habitat?

- 3) to respect the health of the whole planet? and
- 4) to respect the well-being of people worldwide?

Rather than producing a report and assessment, Doughnut Economics is a tool and starting point that recognizes economic complexities, and is ideal for discussions that bring about meaningful action – and political will.

Have a look at Raworth’s website, and consider the usefulness of Doughnut Economics for getting people on the same page. Share your own ideas about how we can design an economy that will get us to a more just and sustainable North as we move from the pandemic crisis of today to the ‘new normal’ of tomorrow.

The illustration below is from <https://www.kateraworth.com/doughnut/>

