

# Counteracting the Great Disembedding: the role of the participatory paradigm, the third sector, community food security and social inclusion in North-West Tasmania

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My research contends that a process of a “great disembedding” has led to our current crises (in the sense of a crucial or decisive moment) requiring decisions to be made regarding transitioning to a post-carbon economy. It is contended that three processes in particular over time have combined to create the need for this transition. These are the change from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle 10,000 or so years ago to agriculture, the introduction of instrumental rationality, and the gradual conversion of most societies around the world to the capitalist mode of production. The accumulated effect of these processes, the great disembedding, involved a transition to “a new self-understanding of our social existence that gave an unprecedented primacy to the individual” (Taylor 2004). We have become disembedded environmentally, socially, politically and economically, and are now dependent for fulfillment of important human needs on a techno-scientific “system”. The latter system incorporates rational enquiry, which in effect ignores real human need in order to remain objective, its defining characteristic, and which acts to entrench power and privilege.

A prime example of the reproduction of the position and interests of the powerful and the privileged is attempts at finding ‘truth’ via conventional social science. Important knowledge of the world, however may be more about how the consciousness and intentions of individuals and groups interpret, mediate and in effect structure the world, implying that the knowledge’s of a diversity of people, not just scientists and those in power may be equally important and valid (Pepper 1993). Likewise, many attempts at participation, for example in terms of re-engaging in politics and economics from which we have become estranged, have also been to some extent subsumed, that is, they may mask and perpetuate power and structures of privilege.

Overall it is claimed the greatest thing that oppresses us is our thinking, which has been significantly shaped by our systems. However this research concurs with Graham (2001), when she stated “we would like to extend the range of left emotions—to include not just anger at what is, but pleasure in what we do, and desire for what might be.”

Congruent with this view, participatory action research also encompasses the view that through collective action people can work towards transforming oppressive structures, while emphasising the revival of practical and critical reason, the exercising of personal and collective agency for the common good and the importance of reconnecting with questions of meaning, value and significance (Kemmis and McTaggart 2000). It aims to lead to not just new practical knowledge, but to new abilities to create knowledge; most importantly and radically, the ideal is to share power.

My research question involves investigating the participatory paradigm, the third sector, community food production and social inclusion via community-based participatory research (CBPR), to help meet human needs without adding to our socio-ecological problems. My hypothesis is that community food

production within the third sector can provide a model for a post-carbon economy, whereby market and non-market strategies can be combined to create economic, social and ecological sustainability. Non-market strategies it is contended ultimately emanate from a recognition of other means of fulfilling human needs than a focus on exchange in the market-place. Specifically I am currently interested in ideas of possible approaches to using CBPR within a community food security project for PhD research, with an emphasis on the potential to share power.

## REFERENCES

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