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CHAPTER 12

Libraries in the Doughnut Economy

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THE CURRENT CHALLENGES BROUGHT ON BY CLIMATE CHANGE REQUIRE BOLD thinking and action to turn the tide. Small, incremental changes are absolutely necessary to help us think differently in our everyday lives so we become more aware of our personal impact on the environment; however, the level of change necessary to rapidly respond to the current effects of climate change and to mitigate the severity of future effects of climate change require a significant shift in the economics of our world.

Current economic thinking drives much of the damage done to the natural world. From excessive exploitation of natural resources for speedy production of consumer goods, to unscrupulous encouragement for mindless consumption and blatant negligence of massive wastefulness, our current economic model does not heed our planet and biodiversity as important sustainability issues.

In this chapter we will explore how libraries can lead the way to a bold new way of thinking that creates an inhabitable world centered on our well-being which supports the principles of doughnut economics. Our hope is that libraries can help break our culture from an addiction to growth and “business as usual” and transition it to be in service to humanity in a way that is regenerative and distributive by design.

What Is Doughnut Economics?

The principles behind doughnut economics were conceived by revolutionary economist Kate Raworth to address and remedy current economic thinking and transform it for the twenty-first century.¹ Her work in economics spans the globe and

reveals that mainstream economic ideas have trapped us in a narrow and biased view of the purpose and function of an economy. These outdated models must be replaced with new ideas that inspire and enable us to meet the needs of every person, allowing them to live with dignity and opportunity, within the bounds of the Earth's life-sustaining capacity. Economics is the language of public policy and this language shapes the mindset of society. What better way to change how we live on the planet than to change our thinking about how we make and spend our money?

The blueprints for this genesis are in the book, *Doughnut Economics*, where Kate Raworth questions the models that underpin our mindset, behavior, and fundamental understanding of economics. Raworth presents familiar graphs and demonstrates with research and compelling narrative that our twentieth-century economic models are outdated, unscientific, and destructive to the very foundation of life on the planet.

The effects of these models are far from neutral. For instance, the figure for supply and demand includes a fallacy that equilibrium is attained naturally through the interchange of competitive buyers and sellers and, therefore, total utility will be maximized and the best possible outcome will be realized for society through the free market. In reality, markets are complex, interconnected, and difficult to predict.

Likewise, she examines the concept of gross domestic product (GDP) and questions the goal of continuous growth by equating it to a plane that has taken off, but can never land. This economic concept also fails to answer why growth is the ultimate purpose of a culture. In addition, the GDP model operates under a misguided belief that prosperity is an inevitable outcome of growth, when, in reality, continuous growth depletes natural resources, destroys the planet's life support system, and eliminates human habitat.

Raworth goes on to ask the reader to bypass entrenched economic theories and instead begin with the basics of life where no one should fall short. With this as the starting point, we then create the economic thinking that would enable us to achieve an economy in service of life. In pursuit of this idea, the author created an illustration of what this balance would look like, and the image emerged in the shape of a doughnut (figure 12.1).

A pair of concentric rings is found in the diagram. The inner ring represents the social foundation and the outer ring represents the planet's ecological ceiling. Below the inner ring, the social foundation, we find "critical human deprivations such as hunger and illiteracy." Outside of the outer ring, the ecological ceiling "lies critical planetary degradation such as climate change and biodiversity loss." In

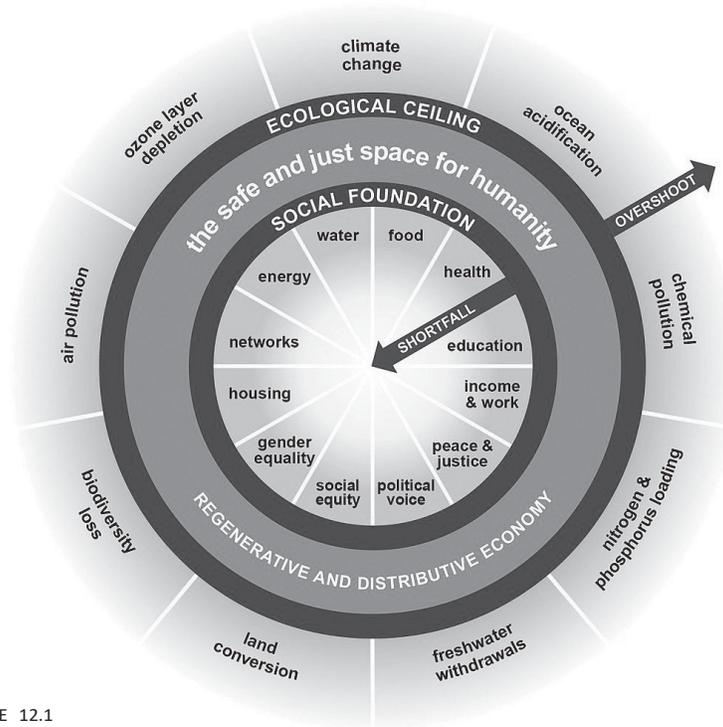


FIGURE 12.1
Doughnut Economic Model

Credit: CC BY-SA 4.0 Wikimedia
Doughnut (economic model); image
adapted to black and white

between the two rings is what the author describes as the doughnut, the sweet spot in which humanity can meet the needs of everyone within the limits of the planet.

The image of the doughnut, conceived in 2011, drew international attention and was used as a reminder of the big picture during late-night meetings to finalize the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 17 goals were globally agreed upon by 193 member countries in 2015 and adopted by all member states of the United Nations. Raworth used the priorities specified by the United Nations SDGs, which consists of twelve social dimensions to establish the social foundation for the doughnut's inner boundary and thereby measure its shortfall.

Libraries worldwide are working to achieve the SDGs. The vast majority of the goals are set for 2030. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) is the international body representing the library and information profession and fully supports library integration of the SDGs. IFLA has

prepared a variety of booklets, reports, data briefings, and an SDG storytelling flowchart for the Library Map of the World. The potential of libraries to improve the social foundation for human well-being is well recognized.

Seven Ways to Think Like a Twenty-First Century Economist

Although libraries are reimagining new ways of sharing resources, writing sustainability policies, starting green teams, establishing seed libraries, planning sustainably resourced events, organizing repair cafés, providing disaster preparedness events, acknowledging racial injustice and working toward equity, and preparing the next generation of librarians to engage in the work of community empowerment, there is still much work ahead. For inspiration, we can look to Raworth who takes pencil to paper and crafts seven new economic principles designed to enable humans to thrive. These new economic principles are compatible with the core values of librarianship and in this chapter we propose that libraries can engage in the seven concepts to create services to address climate change, social injustice, and economic instability (table 12.1).

TABLE 12.1
Seven ways to transition into doughnut economics

Seven ways to transition from twentieth-century economics to twenty-first century economics		Seven ways libraries can help society transition to a twenty-first century economy
1. Change the Goal	Transform the GDP growth-driven model to a doughnut economics model.	Understand that the value of libraries is not what they provide for free, but instead the equity they can provide through the distribution of equitable services. We must work for the equitable distribution of library services and areas with the greatest needs should receive an abundance of support.
2. See the Big Picture	Transition from the notion of self-contained, disconnected markets, and instead embed the economy within the society and nature and power the economy with the sun.	Reimagine and measure how the library functions using the triple bottom line definition of sustainability: environmental stewardship, economic need, and social equity, and embed the library in the economy by actively engaging with community leaders, local governments, and local businesses. Continually identify emerging needs that expand access to community-driven services.

3. Nurture Human Nature	Transition from the notion that humans are self-interested and self-sufficient to an understanding that humans are social and dependent on the living world.	Highlight and value human relationships that exemplify our care for one another and care for nature. Apply the principle that human relationships are at the heart of our workforce as well as how we design and provide services and programs. Increased empathy, diversity, collaboration, compassion, and justice are the best benchmarks for success.
4. Get Savvy with Systems	Transition from the idea that economic principles adhere to a simple supply and demand model and instead approach the economy as a complex and ever-evolving system.	Understand that everything is connected and interrelated. Every action has a reaction. Library systems and processes will need to be developed and redesigned to respond to evolving needs. Systems thinking is needed to solve some of our most difficult problems and address the underlying feedback loops in resource allocation, information delivery, and accessibility. To understand the feedback loops, we can measure the impact of our interactions on human life rather than the number of transactions.
5. Design to Distribute	Inequality is a design flaw; therefore, the redistribution of wealth is needed particularly for wealth created through the control of land, technology, knowledge, enterprise, and creation of money.	Sharing is the most recognizable service that libraries offer. Redistributing the wealth of information empowers individuals and communities. Innovation in the information commons must continue and include the expansion of fair use, universal broadband service, access to technology, community makerspaces, and a reduction in disincentives including the elimination of fines.
6. Create to Regenerate	Reposition humans as fully participating in the Earth's cyclic processes of life.	To honor the Earth's replenishing cycles of creation, decay, and renewal, we can evaluate our buildings for energy and water conservation, and design programs and practices that recognize we are part of nature. In the natural environment, biological nutrients are in an endless cycle of consumption and regeneration. For the built environment, where technical materials eventually break down, we can reduce inefficiencies by extending the useful life of items by restoring, reusing, and recycling materials.
7. Be Agnostic about Growth	We need economies that produce humans thriving whether or not they grow.	Reprioritize our services in response to our users' needs rather than based on what we think they need. Services may not necessarily need to expand to be successful. Letting go of legacy services and refocusing can bring success.

Libraries Can Shape Human Nature

To create a new economic system, one based on meeting the needs of all without exceeding the planet's limits, we need an understanding of what shapes human nature. With this as a foundation, we can develop programs and services that bring out the best in people.

For example, a tool-lending library with companion programming to encourage and empower individuals to do their own repairs may create a slight dip in tool rentals at the rent-a-center or a minor reduction in sales at the big box hardware store, but what is gained are all the repairs and upgrades that would not have occurred had it not been for access to free tools. Home improvements can reduce urban blight, boost home values, and correct problems before they grow into serious issues. Likewise, holding events where people can bring small appliances and learn how to repair them extends the useful life of items on the technical side. But on a larger scale, engendering the right to repair in our communities, rather than promoting a throwaway culture, ultimately saves natural resources and decreases the amount of solid waste that ends up in our landfills. And it is ultimately better for the planet.

In her book, Raworth also explains that the presentation of ideas influences people's behaviors. For example, when we shift our language from talking about library visitors as customers to community members, we can subtly but deeply change their attitudes and behaviors. The term customer is limited to a person's behavior in the marketplace, but the community member can address every aspect of a person's cultural, social, and economic life as well as convey a personal responsibility to the collective that is the local and global community.

Changing the Story

Raworth encourages the reader to reimagine themselves and their organizations as people who thrive by connecting with each other and with the planet that is home to more than just human beings. To do this she presents five broad shifts, which libraries can use to construct a new and life-supporting economic persona:

1. *From self-interest to socially reciprocating.* Over the course of two centuries, economic theory came to be built on the assumption that competitive self-interest is humanity's natural state and the primary strategy for economic success. In reality, humans are one of the most cooperative species, as evidenced by our willingness to come together and help

those outside our family unit during catastrophic circumstances like Hurricane Sandy and the 9/11 tragedy. As an organization with a practice of cooperating and reciprocating, libraries can use their networks to support local communities by sharing and distributing resources and, thereby, increasing community cohesion.

2. *From fixed preferences to fluid values.* In doughnut economics, Raworth explains how Shalom Schwartz and his colleagues identified ten basic personal values, which are present within us all. These values are self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power, security, conformity, tradition, benevolence, and universalism. Each of these values can be engaged if it is triggered. The strength of these values changes as a person switches between societal roles, and the more one value is engaged the stronger it becomes. What this demonstrates is that people do not have preset preferences and that human nature can be nurtured. Libraries can communicate and strengthen values that support the common good. For example, libraries could trigger the value of benevolence by holding a community food drive and reminding people that food insecurity is a national problem that can be addressed locally. Or they could encourage the tradition of being quiet in some areas of the library, allowing users to know there is a place where the behavior of silence is practiced and valued.
3. *From isolated to interdependent.* Depicting the rational economic human as an isolated individual was convenient for economic modeling, but in reality, social networks shape our preferences, purchases, and actions. Therefore, it may be possible to use libraries to harness the interdependence of individuals to influence the behavioral changes we seek. One example of this that we have recently witnessed is the rise of local seed libraries where community members work together to save and share, at little cost, the genetic bounty of the local vegetation in their area.
4. *From calculating to approximating.* The actions of humans are not as predictable as the economic models forecast due in part to the role cognitive bias plays in our lives. To counteract this, Raworth describes how researchers Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, uncovered a process known as “nudge policies,” which are defined “as any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people’s behavior in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives.” Advertisers have been nudging our behaviors for close

to 100 years! The best way for libraries to promote actions to address climate change and sustainability may be to use behavioral nudges to influence personal behavior. A nudge action can be as simple as posting a note next to a light switch to turn off a light when leaving a room or installing reusable bottle refilling stations that displays a calculation of the number of plastic bottles saved from the landfill.

Libraries can nurture or nudge societal behavior by centering ideas and communication in the emotion of hope rather than fear. Next, by understanding what motivates people to change behaviors we must communicate *why* the change is needed. Libraries can then be an “evangelist” for ideas that help improve people’s lives. And above all libraries need to exemplify the Core Values of Librarianship² by working for the common good.

5. *From dominant to dependent.* A new economic model must change the way we see humanity’s place on the planet. Rather than placing ourselves at the pinnacle of life’s pyramid, humanity must be woven into nature’s web. Libraries too must find their place in nature’s web. As more and more libraries embrace green architecture, environmentally sustainable practices, and valuing diversity in their workplaces and communities, libraries move closer to mirroring behaviors that are successful in the natural world.

The Knowledge Commons

When envisioning the twenty-first century economy, Raworth dissects how the current economic system contributes to social inequality and environmental degradation. She highlights two strategies to address these problems: (1) redistribute wealth in its various forms, including knowledge; and (2) harness the power of the knowledge commons, which consists of knowledge and resources that are shared and equitably accessible by all via the internet, e.g., Wikipedia, GitHub, and open educational resources. In addition, she advocates for a circular economy that mirrors the natural life cycle and thus is regenerative by design. Even though Raworth’s discussions center on economic activities, the principles behind her thinking can be applied to the library context and translated into library practices.

Raworth proposes different ways for the government to cultivate the knowledge commons and grow its potential. Among them is the recommendation that there be a policy to “ensure that all publicly funded research becomes public knowledge

by contractually requiring it to be licensed in the knowledge commons.” In the United States, the federal government has already taken a step in this direction with the Office of Science and Technology Policy’s (OSTP) 2013 memorandum on increasing access to the results of federally funded scientific research.³ This policy has provided academic librarians with valuable opportunities to educate faculty and researchers about open access and the pathways to achieve it. Meanwhile, academic libraries and consortia representing them may want to strategize and leverage their resources to support promising and ingenious access models. With the rising global trend of requiring immediate open access to funded research, libraries can voice their support for an update of the OSTP memorandum in order to further people’s access to and reuse of outputs (including published research, data, computational codes, etc.) emanating from federally funded research. Similarly, libraries everywhere can stand behind the UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science in order to build a global framework for efficient knowledge sharing.⁴ Such actions would be especially beneficial to expanding the knowledge commons and facilitating innovation, which is essential in tackling a wide array of issues arising from climate change.

Another strategy Raworth brings up to strengthen the government’s support for the knowledge commons is to “roll back the excessive reach of corporate intellectual property claims in order to prevent spurious patent and copyright applications from encroaching on the knowledge commons.” Library workers can play a crucial role in this area by informing their user communities of copyright and the significance of fair use. ALA and the Association of College and Research Libraries have identified online resources that help people better understand how fair use is relevant and important to daily life and educational activities. Free online courses are also available for library workers and users alike to deepen their understanding of copyright and fair use.⁵ Additionally, library workers can shed light on open licensing and the public domain when introducing users to the knowledge commons. Open licensing enables a copyright holder to share some of their exclusive rights with users under specified conditions, thus contributing to the dissemination and reuse of knowledge. The public domain is comprised of objects that are out of copyright and can be reused without restrictions. One effective way for libraries to raise the awareness of the public domain is to celebrate the Public Domain Day, which is the first day of every calendar year.⁶

To bolster the knowledge commons, Raworth also mentions “the set-up of community makerspaces—places where innovators can meet and experiment with shared use of 3D printers and essential tools for hardware construction.”

Some public and academic libraries have already stepped up and provided their user communities with access to equipment and resources for experimenting and prototyping. Some have gone further and designated spaces for research, learning, or entertainment with the aid of virtual and augmented realities. Others have reserved space or organized events for the incubation of innovative ideas or group projects. In sum, there exist a variety of examples that illuminate how public and academic libraries can actively support and strengthen the knowledge commons.

In addition, as a steadfast advocate for sustainability, Raworth recommends that society adopt a circular economy that follows the “take-make-use-restore” cycle to minimize waste and ensure that resources become renewable. This regeneration-oriented mentality can be put into practice in education and lifelong learning through libraries’ promotion of open educational resources (OER). Similar to open-source software, OER are openly licensed and thus enable users to retain, revise, remix, reuse, and redistribute (the 5R activities described by David Wiley).⁷ When promoting OER, library workers can educate users about copyright and open licensing. They can also encourage users (especially instructors) to give back to the knowledge commons by applying open licensing to new educational materials they have created or derived from existing OER. If the users become contributors to the knowledge commons, they expand and enrich what is already available there and actualize the “take-make-use-restore” cycle. In other words, library workers’ promotion of OER can serve as a catalyst that helps make the knowledge commons more vibrant and sustainable.

As librarianship continues to evolve, it is likely that there will be other avenues for library workers to engage in the distribution and regeneration of knowledge. As long as we keep this goal in mind, new strategies to support and sustain the knowledge commons will likely emerge and grow.

The Mindset Challenge

As described in the beginning of this chapter, our current economy is designed as a plane that takes off but never lands, going higher and higher, without acknowledgment that there are physical boundaries for that plane which make that flight trajectory unsustainable. The goal of doughnut economics is to create an “S curve,” bringing the global economy face-to-face with the “carrying” capacity of the Earth.

Common sense is noble as well as practical, and the theory behind doughnut economics makes perfect sense. There is work to be done at many levels of society to address the changes necessary—but how do we as library workers contribute to

the massive mindset shift necessary in a way that makes a difference?

We will need to allow the traditional roles of library professionals to emerge in both proactive and innovative ways. This will prove to be one of the most transformative methods of redistributing wealth in this country as we double down on the importance of owning our role as intellectual freedom fighters; using our purchasing power to preserve access to information, literature, and art; and taking a leading role to encourage the rise of an open-source knowledge commons that empowers people as policy makers, fixers, farmers, and entrepreneurs.

But a true mindset shift, one that moves unfettered growth for opportunistic monetization out of the center of existing economic theory and puts the well-being of people and our planet at the center of the future economic system, is the challenge of this century.

To ask people who are working to earn money to survive; to feed, house, and clothe their families; to ensure the health and safety of their children; and to work toward building a new economic system is a tremendous ask, one that will require clarity that we are not just dismantling the current economy and leaving people to their own devices but that we are building a new economy, and one that respects workers' rights, planetary boundaries, and puts well-being at the heart of decision-making.

This mindset shift requires the celebration of place, local businesses, and social entrepreneurship. It requires connecting more people with nature, with their neighbors—particularly connecting people with those in the community that they otherwise would not interact with through their usual social circles.

This will require library leaders to talk differently about what a library is and how we do business. It will require us to participate in workplaces that are centered in well-being. It will require youth service librarians to embed eco-literacy, empathy, and civic mindedness into services and programs at a deeper level. It will require collection development managers to connect with readers and researchers in new ways and to define collections more broadly, beyond traditional library materials. It will require adult programming librarians to have an ethos that puts social cohesion, engagement, and empowerment at the center of their thinking. It will require the operation and construction of library facilities that do not just use up natural resources but put back positive assets into the ecosystem.

As library workers continue to embrace new ways of serving their users, there is a clarion call to help our communities and those we serve to focus on what truly matters in life and break what has become an addiction to a consumptive, extractive, and exploitive mindset that currently drives our economy.

Going forward Raworth shares in her book the findings of a study conducted by the New Economics Foundation which identified five simple acts that are proven to promote well-being.⁸ Libraries of all types are perfectly positioned to assist their users and communities with these five behaviors:

1. *Connecting to the people around us.* There are both passive and active examples of how libraries can and do connect people, from how we design and furnish our indoor and outdoor spaces to the experiences we design for library users and the wider community through the library. Libraries as connector is a clear role for libraries of the future.
2. *Being active in our bodies.* Although nostalgia for libraries of the past may mean many people do not imagine libraries as an active or activating force, modern libraries can reflect a core value of sustainability by having a focus on helping library workers, library users, and the wider community connected with ways to ensure their physical well-being. This could be as simple as offering yoga programs at the library, or providing exercise equipment for checkout, or hosting community meet ups for exploring the local community on foot or by bike.
3. *Taking notice of the world.* Library workers take great delight in helping library users understand how things work, the history of a place and things, as well as helping people understand current events. Through print and digital collections, programs, and access to a library of things, library users can explore cultures, events, and ideas from around the world. Libraries are unique in their intense devotion providing and preserving access to resources that enable this.
4. *Learning new skills.* As part of the education ecosystem, libraries routinely provide leadership to help library users learn new skills. The expansion of traditional literacies libraries teach within has been expanding and will continue to do so. Newer examples such as digital and media literacy combined with the advent of makerspaces and repair cafés, encourage community members to be engaged and empowered with how the world around them works.
5. *Giving to others.* Libraries by their very nature are gifts we give to each other. The extension of that founding principle to address acute needs in a community driven by disruption—from food pantries and technology distribution points to organizing platforms for programs like the Great Give Back⁹ in New York State, where libraries facilitate community

volunteer efforts—build on the strengths of libraries to bring out the best in ourselves.

Going forward, we see that libraries have a clear role to play in the transition of our economic system, but we must embrace this role and work at it deliberately with other libraries in our networks. The power of libraries must be harnessed, moving in the same direction, for our legacies to reflect that we not only participated in the necessary mindset shift in the interest of sustainability and resilience, but that we did so with an eye toward equity, diversity, and inclusion of all.

NOTES

1. Kate Raworth, *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2017).
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