

# DOUGHNUT ECONOMICS

Seven Ways to Think Like a  
21st-Century Economist

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## AFTERWORD: DOUGHNUT ECONOMICS IN ACTION

When *Doughnut Economics* was first published in 2017, it sparked far more interest than I could possibly have imagined, generating discussion and debate – sometimes enthused, sometimes enraged – in classrooms and boardrooms, street protests and parliaments. I decided to spend the following year simply presenting the book’s core concepts wherever I was invited to share them. Then I asked myself, OK – who actually wants to do this? Who’s ready to go beyond debate, lift the ideas off the page, and put them into practice?

I soon knew the answer because I was getting messages every day from people who had already started turning the book’s ideas into action. They included teachers from Mumbai to Manchester who were introducing the Doughnut to their students, even though it wasn’t on the curriculum. Urban planners from Stockholm to KwaZulu-Natal who were working with residents to imagine and design ‘Doughnut Districts’ for twenty-first-century living. Local governments, from Cali, Colombia to Cornwall, UK who were engaging with the Doughnut as a tool for shaping new policies. Academic researchers who had downscaled the Doughnut with data from over 140 nations, revealing that no country in the world yet

lives within the Doughnut's ecologically safe and socially just space.<sup>1</sup> Community groups, from Amsterdam to Birmingham, who had started hosting Doughnut Meetups, and exploring what it would mean to create regenerative and distributive futures in their own neighbourhoods.

It quickly became clear that the most useful thing to do would be to connect these pioneering changemakers, along with many others around the world, in order to learn together what it means to start turning radical ideas into transformative action. So I found a fantastic strategic partner in the regenerative economist Carlota Sanz Ruiz and together we co-founded Doughnut Economics Action Lab (DEAL) as a place to connect everyone interested in putting Doughnut Economics into practice. The name is intentional, of course. It's all about taking ideas off the page and turning them into action. It's definitely a lab: DEAL's small team is continually learning by working alongside changemakers who are evolving the economy one experiment at a time. And, yes, aiming for economic transformation is indeed a big deal.

At the heart of DEAL's work is an online community platform, inviting people to become members, try out the tools, and share back their innovations and experience. We are blown away every day by the creativity of this community. We are also continually asking ourselves how we can best support people to turn the ideas of Doughnut Economics into practice at the speed and scale that these times demand. Here are some of the insights that we've been learning along the way.

*Go where the energy is.* As the mother of young twins, my time was tight when this book first came out and that forced me to start following a beautifully simple principle. Don't waste time knocking on shut doors; work with people who want to act, because there are plenty of them. Following this principle, DEAL has never lobbied or tried to persuade anyone to engage with the ideas of Doughnut Economics – we respond to changemakers who, knowing their own

context, believe these ideas will be of use in bringing about the transformations they are seeking. And while going where the energy is, we always ask: whose voice is not yet being heard, and how can they become part of the conversation?

*Embrace the power of play.* The ‘Doughnut’ is an intentionally playful name, sending a signal that everyone is invited to get involved in this work. That matters because many people are afraid of economics; say the word and they pull back, stiffen up or switch off. But no one is afraid of doughnuts. It turns out that the mere mention of doughnuts invites people to bring along their humour, mischief and fun, even when addressing some of the world’s most intractable challenges. So far, people have been inspired to design doughnut cartoons, street art and board games, perform doughnut dances and songs, and – crucially – get primary school pupils excited about imagining doughnut-shaped futures. Who knows what’s playfully coming next?

*Unleash peer-to-peer inspiration.* The most inspiring person is often not the one talking on a stage, in a book, or on TV. It might actually be someone just like yourself who is already doing something you thought was impossible, or hadn’t yet imagined. A teacher inspires a fellow teacher; a mayor inspires a mayor. When the City of Amsterdam put the Doughnut at the heart of its policy to create a circular economy in the city – and launched this commitment at the height of the covid crisis – it quickly triggered governmental interest and action from Copenhagen, Brussels and Barcelona to Curaçao, Barbados and beyond.

*Connect across cultures.* The ideas at the heart of Doughnut Economics call for a radically new starting point for the twenty-first-century economic mindset, but in many cultures these ideas are, of course, by no means new. Regenerative and distributive practices, rooted in humanity’s interconnectedness with all living beings, are foundational to the worldview of many indigenous cultures. It has been an honour to be invited to discuss Doughnut Economics

with Māori community leaders, Sami parliamentarians, Indigenous Australian educationalists, Bhutanese officials and Hawaiian scholars, all of whom have welcomed an exploration of the commonalities between their own rich cultural heritage and this emergent economic thinking. Such cultural generosity creates a much-needed opportunity to bridge worldviews and foster deeper intercultural understanding and connections.

*Focus on organisational design.* When we started working with organisations – from businesses to local governments – that wanted to put Doughnut Economics into practice, it quickly became clear that, more than the design of specific products or services, what matters most is the deep design of the organisation itself. Five design traits raise key questions. What is the organisation's purpose? How is it networked with others? How is it governed in practice? Crucially, how is it owned? And how is it financed? These questions – inspired by the next-generation enterprise designer Marjorie Kelly – are now an essential area of exploration for any enterprise or institution wanting to engage with Doughnut Economics. It's clear that the enterprise designs and organisational forms needed to create regenerative and distributive economies are still being invented – an intriguing opportunity for anyone interested in the deep design work of organisational transformation.

*Welcome innovation with integrity.* Ideas need to be adaptable so that they can keep evolving. At the same time, they need to be protected from being co-opted or greenwashed. So DEAL invites people who share our transformative ambition to adapt the core ideas of Doughnut Economics with integrity: make the concepts speak to your own culture, context and imagination, while respecting their essence. If the name 'doughnut' doesn't work for you, change the name to your culture's favourite ring-shaped food, be it a rosquilla, simit or jalebi. But don't lose the essentials: a social foundation for all people; an ecological ceiling for our planetary home; a thriving space between the two. And when putting the ideas into practice,

follow DEAL's guidelines based on the seven ways to think like a twenty-first-century economist.

*Don't try to be the movement – join the movement.* There are many compelling approaches to new economic thinking gaining momentum worldwide, and that's important because transforming the economy calls for teamwork on a global scale. No single idea or initiative can do it alone. It's going to take a whole ecosystem of ideas, organisations, experiments and social movements to bring new economic thinking into practice, so it's key to create concepts that connect with others, and respect others, in order to succeed in building the irresistible momentum needed for systemic change.

This is how we have started collaborating with changemakers worldwide to turn the ideas of Doughnut Economics into action. Will it work? Of course, we don't yet know – it's an experiment, after all, and one that is just getting going. But at this point in twenty-first-century flux and crisis, it's clear that economic transformation



*Putting Doughnut Economics into practice, one experiment at a time*

is essential, and we are convinced that open design coupled with collaborative co-creation is going to be one of the smartest and fastest ways to help bring it about.

So, if you are inspired by the ideas in this book, and want to be part of putting them into practice, check out what's happening at [doughnuteconomics.org](http://doughnuteconomics.org). Join the community, connect with like-minded changemakers, try out the tools, learn from the stories, and get involved. Because this is how the economy evolves, one experiment at a time. See you in the Action Lab.

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