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'The Map is Not the Territory' for a Community Economy

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Tuesday, November 18, 2014 -- David LePage

I am starting to understand my continual aversion to the on-going efforts to “map social economy” or “map social enterprise.” And it may not be just my irrational, obstinate character.

This new perspective comes from having just spent some time reading about “the map is not the territory,” a phrase coined in 1933 by the father of general semantics, Alford Korzybski; and following Dr. Peter Hall’s suggestion, reading the book “Seeing Like a State.”

I am realizing the difference is between static pictures of what is there in a snapshot at the time of the mapping, and being able to express the dynamic relationships of what is happening among the components of the map.

The “territorial relationship” perspective also appears in an academic review of business guru Peter Drucker’s organizational analysis. The concept reflects the early ecosystems analysis by author Fritjof Capra. (The Tao of Physics and The Turning Point particularly.) And I am learning it is common in some therapeutic models.

One author describes mapping alone as an Aristotelian view of reality (cause and effect), rather than the capacity to reflect the vibrancy offered by a quantum analysis (relationships). The framework is so much broader than I had anticipated.

Peter Pula of Axiom News, in a [blog post](#), adds “Over lunch one day, a day in which David Cooperrider was incredibly generous with his time, we were discussing the

work of discovering strengths in people, organizations and systems as an approach to constructive journalism. He said, it's about even more than discovering strengths these days; it's about discovering where the energy is in a system. Another clinker. Where is the energy in the system?"

Anne Jamieson of Toronto Enterprise Fund (TEF) and Chair of the Ontario Social Economy Roundtable helped my understanding as well:

"“My thoughts are that mapping can be useful — for people who are new to the sector and are trying to navigate the ‘who’s who’ of the social economy/social enterprise sector. I have always worried about ‘mapping’ being a distraction, and requiring an investment of resources far greater than the benefit. Not to mention, that maps are static, quickly out-of-date, and in no way able to explain the dynamic relationships that exist.

“Let’s avoid ‘mapping’ and focus building our networks, so that newcomers can join them and learn about the relationships that way. Let’s also build good directories that are targeting specific audiences (consumers or corporations, geographic regions), and are commonly accepted in the business world; keep them simple, and as up-to-date as possible, and avoid worrying about duplication — again, businesses are used to registering on many different directories, and purchasers are used to searching in a variety of places.”“

All of these discussions are leading to some fascinating and evolving considerations of how we map, design, and participate in these dynamic relationships, the “territory” of a community economy.

So, more to follow...

This blog was originally posted to the [Accelerating Social Impact CCC, Ltd. site](#), and appears here with permission.