

Economy Studies

Economy Studies

A Guide to Rethinking Economics Education

Sam de Muijnck and Joris Tieleman

Amsterdam University Press



Cover and interior design: Matterhorn Amsterdam

ISBN 978 94 6372 604 7
e-ISBN 978 90 4855 280 1 (pdf)
DOI 10.5117/9789463726047
NUR 781 / 840

© Sam de Muijnck and Joris Tieleman / Amsterdam University Press B.V.,
Amsterdam 2021

Open Access and Creative Commons (CC-BY)



Every effort has been made to obtain permission to use all copyrighted illustrations reproduced in this book. Nonetheless, whosoever believes to have rights to this material is advised to contact the publisher.

Table of Contents

Summary	9
Foreword by Martin Wolf	17
Acknowledgements	21
Introduction	27
Part I: Foundations	39
Introduction to the Foundations	40
Foundation 1: The Philosophy of Economy Studies	45
Foundation 2: Pluralism	57
Foundation 3: Real-World	75
Foundation 4: Values	89
Foundation 5: Diversifying and Decolonising Economics	105
Foundation 6: The Didactics of Economics Education	125
Part II: Building Blocks	141
Introduction to the Building Blocks	142
Building Block 1: Introducing the Economy	147
Building Block 2: Know Your Own Economy	161
Building Block 3: Economic History	177
Building Block 4: History of Economic Thought & Methods	187
Building Block 5: Economic Organisations & Mechanisms	201
Building Block 6: Political-Economic Systems	217
Building Block 7: Research Methods & Philosophy of Science	235
Building Block 8: Economic Theories	251
Building Block 9: Problems & Proposals	273
Building Block 10: Economics for a Better World	285
Part III: Tools	297
Introduction to Tools	298
Tool 1: Pragmatic Pluralism	301
Tool 2: Adapting Existing Courses	329
Tool 3: Curriculum Review	363
Tool 4: Example Courses	373
Tool 5: Example Curricula	387
Tool 6: Courses for Non-Economists	405
Tool 7: Learning Objectives	429
Conclusion	441
References	448

Additional online resources

www.economystudies.com



Part IV: Background Materials

Introduction to the Background Materials

Background Material 1: Economic Approaches

Background Material 2: Interdisciplinary Economics

Background Material 3: Rethinking the History of Economic Thought & Methods

Background Material 4: Coordination & Allocation Mechanisms

Background Material 5: Research Methods & Philosophy of Science

Background Material 6: Teaching Materials

Short Versions of the Book

Economy Studies for Students

Economy Studies for Program Directors and Deans

Economy Studies for Secondary Education

Economy Studies for Business Schools

Economy Studies for Public Administration & Law Programs

Economy Studies for Economics 101

Economy Studies for Microeconomics

Economy Studies for Macroeconomics

Economy Studies for Econometrics

Economy Studies for Labour Economics

Economy Studies for Public Economics

Economy Studies for Environmental Economics

Economy Studies for Development Economics

Economy Studies for Industrial Organisation

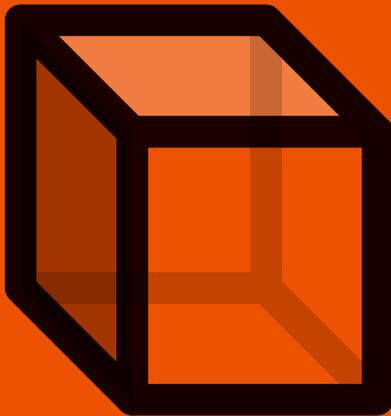
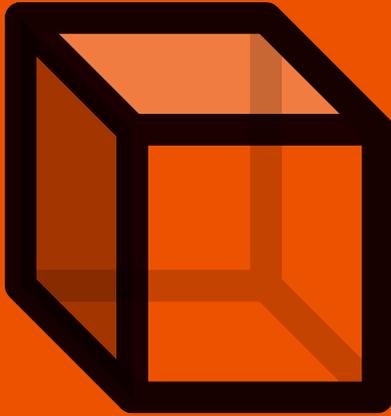
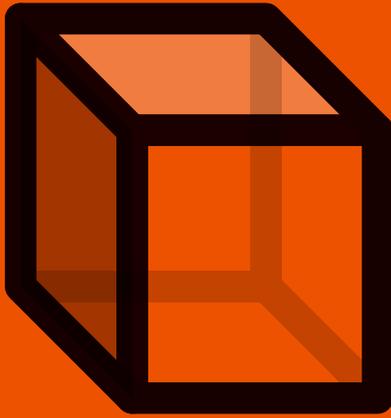
Economy Studies for Finance

Economy Studies for Monetary Economics

Economy Studies for International Economics

Economy Studies for Game Theory

Economy Studies for Behavioural Economics



Summary

1 Rethinking Economics Education

Humanity is wealthier, more connected and more technologically advanced than ever. Access to healthcare is rapidly expanding and poverty levels keep dropping in most parts of the world. At the same time, societies around the globe are facing a multitude of challenges. To name a few: climate change, biodiversity loss and resource depletion, growing inequalities and power concentrations, economic instability and soaring levels of private and public debt, ageing and migration, social polarisation and rising authoritarian nationalist populism. And, back on the table since 2020: pandemics.

Tackling such challenges requires a deep comprehension of the economy, which the current system of economics education does not sufficiently provide. Economists need a real-world understanding of how various industries work, how they are intertwined with each other, how economic power works, what roles states play and how these are embedded in our society at large. It also requires open minds which can look at issues from a variety of perspectives. A single theoretical framework cannot provide the answers to every question. A range of approaches which prioritise different methodologies, assumptions, units of analysis and outcomes, is necessary for gaining a good understanding of the economy and its issues. Economists need to be able to think critically, select the tools which are most relevant for the context and problem at hand, and understand the limitations and uncertainties of the conclusions that they draw from them. Finally, it requires an awareness and an explicit discussion of the moral dilemmas and normative trade-offs involved in economic decisions. In short, economists have a lot on their plate.

Economists also have a lot of influence, for good and for bad. Firstly, as key policy experts and advisors, economists largely run many of the most powerful public-sector organisations in the world: central banks, ministries of finance, social and economic affairs, the IMF and the World Bank. In the private sector, economists co-direct the behaviour of banks and other large companies. Secondly, the economic *ideas* that float around most prominently in our society exert an influence far beyond the formal advisory reports of professional economists, guiding decision-making of citizens everywhere. Economic thinking influences even those who do not become economists, as economists have a central role in the public debate and many citizens are taught basic economics in secondary or tertiary education.

The growing societal importance of economists and economic ideas has sparked a lively debate around the content and structure of economics education. A worldwide movement of students and academics calls for more pluralist, real-world focused and socially relevant programmes that would enable economics graduates to better understand and tackle the economic issues that the world faces today. This movement has accelerated over the last decade, spurred on by the global financial crisis of 2008, the climate crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under names such as *Rethinking Economics*, *Netzwerk für Plurale Ökonomik*, *Institute for New Economic Thinking (INET)*, *International Student Initiative for Pluralist Economics (ISIPE)*, *International Confederation of Associations for Pluralism in Economics (ICAPE)*, *Diversifying and Decolonising Economics*, *Economists for Future*, *Reteaching Economics*, and *Oikos International*, these groups come together for dissent, discussion, self-education, action, campaigning, disseminating ideas and engaging with wider audiences.

Research by these groups indicates that many current programmes are not sufficient to prepare students for their future roles in society. They are often organised around the notion of ‘*thinking like an economist*’: training students to think exclusively from the neoclassical perspective and having skills in econometrics, while neglecting other valuable theoretical approaches and research methods. Furthermore, these analytical tools are taught in an overly abstract way and are presented as being value-free.

These groups and others have also produced a growing amount of innovative teaching material, beyond how economics programmes are traditionally structured. From online educational resources such as the open access CORE project and the bottom-up e-learning platform Exploring Economics, to multiple new pluralist and real-world focused textbooks. Many departments have introduced a wealth of new courses, or even started entirely new programmes.

2 This Book: Purpose and Overview

What has been missing so far in this field is an integral approach for constructing economics curricula and courses. This book aims to fill that gap. We bundle the ideas and materials of renewal and reform into a coherent multi-level vision for economics education: its overarching structure, its goals and its principles. We also provide the concrete building blocks for this in terms of academic content, including detailed overviews of teaching materials and practical suggestions. Finally, we translate these to the level of actual programmes and courses, providing a wide range of practical tools for implementation.

This entire book carries a CC-BY Creative Commons licence, which means that any part of the book may be freely copied, redistributed, remixed, transformed or built upon, without restrictions. As such, our proposal for a new integral approach to economics education can also be adopted and used partially, rather than being accepted as a whole. Each idea and suggestion can be judged and incorporated independently. You can totally disagree with principle 1 yet support principle 3. Or you might find little value in building block 5 and yet fall in love with building block 9. That's the idea: it's modular. Thus, the book as a whole can be used as a source of inspiration and overview of options for improving and renewing economics education.

The first part of the book, *Foundations*, sets out our philosophy and the three guiding principles that should underpin any economist's education. In contrast to the currently common approach of teaching students to 'think like an economist', the *Economy Studies* approach is this: We envision an education where economics is not centred on a specific method of analysis or thought, but rather centred on a study matter, the economy. Economies can broadly be described as open systems of resource extraction, production, distribution, consumption and waste disposal through which societies provision themselves to sustain life and enhance its quality.

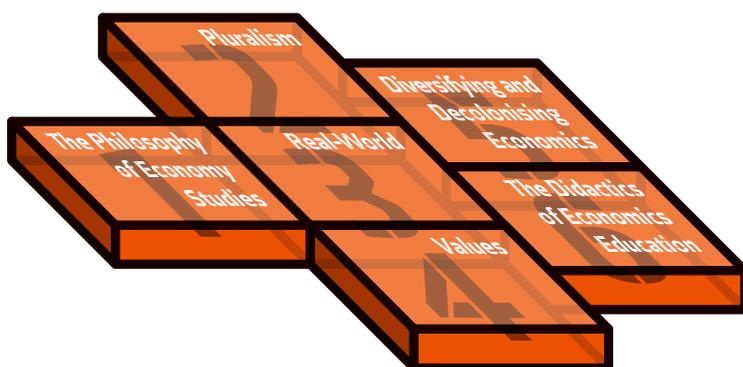


Figure 1: An overview of Part I: Foundations.

Based on this philosophy, we formulate three principles: Pluralism, Real-World and Values.

First, a discipline centred around a single subject matter requires a plurality of theoretical frameworks: one single set of basic assumptions is not enough to understand such a multifaceted subject matter. Here it is important that students learn which ideas are compatible with each other and which are in conflict with each other. Some of these theories fall within the current economic mainstream, others exist on its fringes,

and yet others are currently at home in other disciplines. It also implies a plurality of research methods, from basic statistics and regression analysis to interviews, network analysis and survey analysis. Such pluralism means that there is no single dominant framework, which might be more difficult for those receiving economic advice, but is ultimately beneficial for the quality of analysis and the resulting decisions.

Second, the notion of a programme centred on the subject matter of the economy implies a continuous and conscious orientation towards the economy as it exists in the real world. Students benefit from studying practical questions and gaining concrete knowledge, not just abstract analytical tools. For instance: How is the German car industry structured? What hurdles does the global energy transition face? What happens at a central bank? The Real-World principle ranges from studies of economic sectors and key institutions in the local or (inter-)national economy, to the histories of economies and case studies of specific economic challenges.

Third, we draw attention to the wide variety of normative principles and visions that can guide economic decisions and action, and which are often subtly embedded in economic theories. There is little sense in trying to ‘solve economics problems’ without considering what things exactly are worthwhile or problematic, and what values are at stake. Profits, sustainability, power, equal chances, equal outcomes, job creation, labour conditions, ownership, accountability, GDP growth, wellbeing – what should we focus on?

Economics has historically been, and is still, dominated by upper- and middle-class white men based in the Global North. This has consequences for each of the three principles. In terms of *Real-World*, it is important to pay attention to the lived economic realities of working-class citizens, women, minorities, and those living in the Global South. For *Pluralism*, we need to incorporate often ignored but valuable ideas and contributions of lower class, female, and non-western scholars. For *Values*, it is key to realise that people from different backgrounds have different priorities and values, and work to ensure that these are reflected in the questions we focus on and the theories and methods we use. In sum, we need to *diversify and decolonise economics education*.

The *Foundations* part ends with a chapter on didactics. Improving economics education is not simply a matter of changing *what* is taught, but also *how* it is taught. Various surveys among employers of economists show that more attention for communication and collaboration skills is needed. There are also worrying indications that economics classes often fail to facilitate open, critical, but also respectful, discussions. Finally, to make

economics education more lively, interesting for students and connected to the real world, a greater variety of teaching and examination methods could be used. On all these fronts we provide practical suggestions.

The second part of the book is devoted to the *Building Blocks*. Where the *Foundations* part discusses the purpose and principles of economics education in general, the building blocks are more applied: ten thematic areas of knowledge and skills, which form the meat and bones of the *Economy Studies* course design method. Each of the ten building blocks covers an area of knowledge and set of skills that we see as essential for the education of future economists.

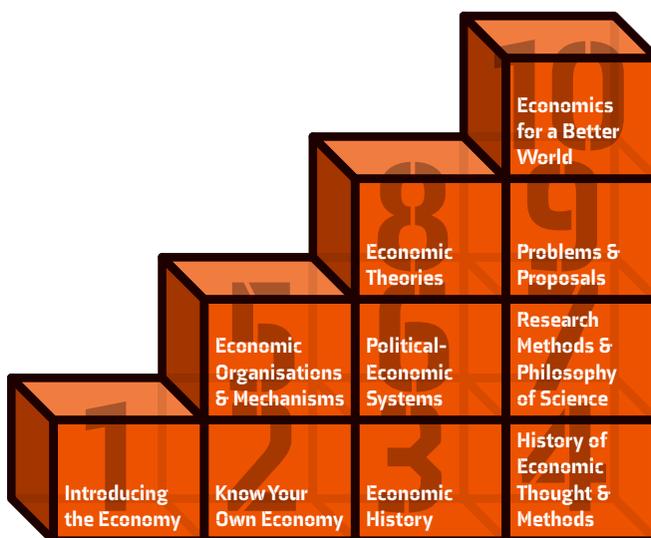


Figure 2: An overview of Part II: Building Blocks.

We start out with two building blocks that focus on acquiring basic economic knowledge, one conceptual and one focused on the real world. *Introducing the Economy* is about getting a feeling for economic matters, discussing what the economy is in the first place, why it is relevant, how it is related to other aspects of the social and natural world, and what societal roles economists have. *Know Your Own Economy*, on the other hand, has a more concrete focus as it is about knowledge of the actual (national and local) economy and its structures, institutions, and sectors. The third and fourth building blocks deal with history: *History of the Economy* and *History of Economic Thought & Methods*. The fifth and sixth building blocks are more conceptually oriented, dealing with how economies can and have been organised, at micro and meso levels – *Economic Organisations & Mechanisms* – and at the macro level – *Political-Economic Systems*.

The seventh and eighth building blocks provide a broad and diverse analytic toolkit: *Research Methods & Philosophy of Science* and *Economic Theories*. These two, especially the latter, are relatively large. In most programmes, they will require more space than the other building blocks. Finally, building blocks nine and ten deal with practically contributing as an economist: *Problems & Proposals* is about analysing concrete economic challenges and formulating or evaluating proposed policies and actions, and *Economics for a Better World* asks how normative principles and visions can guide action to address the major challenges of our times, and helps students to be reflective of their own role as an economist.

3 Using the Economy Studies Toolkit

These building blocks can be used as templates to create stand-alone courses or modules, or they can be combined in courses. They can be re-ordered, combined or integrated in many ways to suit the specific needs of each programme. For instance, *Building Block 3: Economic History* could be taught as a stand-alone subject, or integrated with the fourth building block into a course *History of Economic Thought and Reality*, or integrated as a minor component in an existing *Labour Economics* course. In our ideal world, these building blocks would be combined to form a wide range of economics programmes. Different contexts and challenges require differently trained economists.

The third part of the book, titled *Tools*, provides material that is directly actionable. It starts with *Pragmatic Pluralism*, a suggested format (including references) for teaching theory in a pluralist manner without drowning students in the enormous diversity of ideas out there. We list thirteen core economic topics and set out for each topic the two main opposing perspectives, a key complementary perspective and additional insights coming from other approaches.

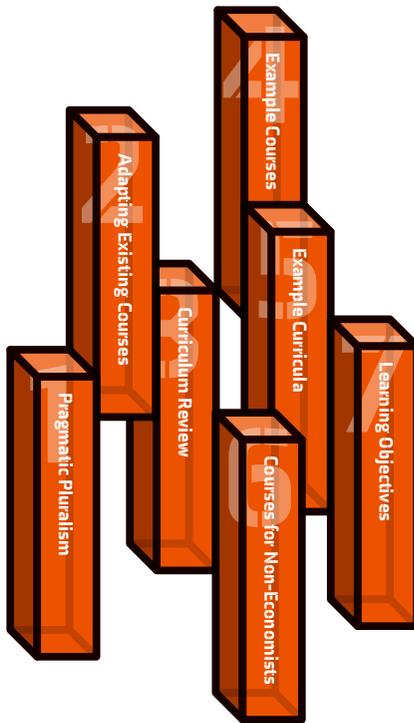


Figure 3: An overview of Part III: Tools.

Often there is no space in programmes for completely new courses but there is room for adjustment in some existing courses. In *Adapting Existing Courses*, we offer ready-to-use sets of suggestions and material to do so, for courses like Micro, Macro, Public Economics and Finance.

The *Curriculum Review Tool* offers a clear starting point for applying our building blocks to an existing programme. This tool helps identify possible blind spots of a programme and suggests ways to strengthen it. The *Example Courses* that follow illustrate how the building blocks can be used to create completely new courses. The next chapter maps out several complete *Example Curricula*, demonstrating how the building blocks might be combined to form a complete bachelor or master programme in Economics.

While this book is primarily oriented towards full economics programmes in academic education, in the chapter *Courses for Non-Economists* we suggest limited packages of core economic ideas that may be useful for secondary school economics programmes, in an academic minor or for self-study. Finally, *Learning Objectives* offers tools for designing the learning objectives behind economics courses, starting not from the question ‘what does the teacher know best?’ but from ‘what do the students need to know, to be prepared for their future societal roles?’.

Economy Studies is more than a book. On the website, we offer an extended version of the *Pragmatic Pluralism* chapter, a broader range of *Adapting Existing Courses* topics, additional *Example Courses*, *Example Curricula* and programmes for non-economists. We also provide background material on each of the *Economic Approaches* described in this book, as well as neighbouring sub-disciplines such as economic sociology and economic geography. In addition, we provide a more complete overview and discussion of research methods, coordination and allocation mechanisms, and the history of economic thought and methods. Finally, we offer much more extensive lists of teaching materials for each of the building blocks.

Online, we also work together with the INET Education Program, at the Institute for New Economic Thinking. This platform will host free educational resources online, accessible to students, teachers and the general public. This includes video lecture series, syllabi, teaching modules, lecture notes, readings, sample quizzes and exams. The platform will also serve as a center to build up an online community of teachers and learners, working together to improve the way economics is taught and learned. Each of the chapters in this book has a discussion page on that platform.

What kind of graduates would a programme based on these ideas and materials produce? It is important to acknowledge that they would not have all the skills that current-day graduates have. Less mathematical sophistication, less expertise in econometric analysis, less knowledge of neoclassical theory. In exchange for these losses, students gain: a deeper understanding and more concrete knowledge of the economy in which they live and will work. An awareness and understanding of the various ways in which economic processes are organised at the micro, meso and macro levels. Practical skills for investigating and tackling questions of economic policy: understanding the context and choosing the right tools, from a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches. And the ability to argue morally as well as analytically, and to clearly distinguish the two.

With this *creative commons* work, we hope to inspire economists and all students of the economy to rethink how we learn economics. The economic challenges we face as societies are enormous, so we desperately need well-prepared economic experts and a citizenry able to participate in economic discussions. Economics education has the vital task of preparing these people as best as possible.

Foreword

Martin Wolf

What is economics? It is the study of the economy. What then is the economy? It is how we humans “*earn our living*” – how we organise ourselves to wrest the means of individual and collective survival from the world in which we live.

As is true of all other living beings, humans must obtain the resources needed to survive from their environment. Most animals, even other primates, have relatively simple repertoires for finding and taking these resources. This is true even of the social insects, despite the complex division of labour within their nests and hives. Human activities are different in scale and kind. This is because human beings are intensely social *and* individually highly intelligent and adaptable. The complex human economy of today is the result. Moreover, since the human economy is entirely embedded in the natural and social worlds, economics needs to understand the natural and social contexts.

The classical economists did indeed attempt to do this, to the extent that this was possible in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Thinkers like Adam Smith, Thomas Malthus, David Ricardo, and Karl Marx were indeed interested in human motivation, resources, institutions, social classes, and political power. Yet such a wide canvas created problems for a discipline that wished to achieve a high academic status: it was felt to be inadequately scientific. In response, economics adopted the intellectual strategy that had worked so well for the physical sciences: reductionism. Thus, it assumed away many complexities: for it, humans were selfish, rational, and far-sighted, resources abundant, information perfect, externalities insignificant, monopoly irrelevant, interpersonal comparisons of welfare impossible, money neutral and financial markets efficient. Orthodox economics assumed away the complications created by unpriced assets, economies of scale, costs of innovation, uncertainty, stupidity, and the operations of human institutions and social values. It also assumed human beings away, putting robots in their place.

The advantage of this intellectual strategy is that it made it possible to analyse the economy as a simple equilibrium system. The disadvantage is that the assumptions are false. As the education of economists tended to become narrower and more mathematical, the nature and extent of the errors became even less apparent. The inadequacy of economics has also affected the operation of the economy itself. Arguably, it has always done so. This is, after all, the most important way in which a social science is

different from a natural one. If we fail to understand the workings of the universe, it will function, though some of the machines that we humans invent may not. If we fail to understand the economy, it may not function well at all, because we in our ignorance will damage it.

A good recent example is the global financial crisis, the biggest purely economic shock of the last few decades. As Adair Turner, the influential British economist, has argued, in the early 2000s, economics came to underpin a “*political ideology*”, namely, “*free market capitalism: the intellectual underpinning was the concept of market completion – the idea that the more market contracts could exist and the more freely, fairly and transparently they could be struck, the closer we could get to the most efficient possible outcome, most favourable to human welfare*” (2010, p. 2). This idea was, to put it mildly, a mistake.

We must not exaggerate the failures of either the economy or of economics. In the broad, the economy has done its job almost miraculously well. By co-operating, human beings could indeed support themselves and their families vastly better than they could have done on their own. Even our hunter-gatherer ancestors were able to combine their efforts (by co-operating in hunting, foraging, and bringing up children), insure themselves (by sharing food), diversify their skills (by specialising), exploit differences in knowledge (by exploring different terrain or foodstuffs on their own or in groups), broaden markets (by trading) and communicate with one another (by talking). Humans massively outcompeted other animals that were individually far stronger and faster than they were.

Humans became masters of the planet. The agricultural revolution was a huge jump. But the industrial revolution was a bigger and, above all, far quicker one. The combination of scientific and technological advance with competition and supportive political and social institutions has created a system of staggering complexity and scale. Today, the human economy supports close to 8bn people, almost all of whom live longer and more prosperous lives than those of the great majority of the mere 1bn people alive two hundred years ago. The inventiveness is no less unbelievable: estimates indicate that today the world economy produces some 10bn different goods and services (Beinhocker, 2006). Today, however, human beings and the livestock they rear for food make up 96 per cent of the mass of all the mammals on the planet (Wolf, 2021).

The human economy is, in sum, a success. But it is also a failure and even a danger: extinction rates are thought to be 100 to 1,000 times higher than their background rate over the past tens of millions of years. Thus, externalities have become far more binding, above all those created by the

global environment. Moreover, inequality is pervasive, within and across societies; the financial sector remains a source of instability; corporations are run for the benefit of narrow groups of insiders; monopoly seems to be a pervasive force; new technologies are upending social and political relationships; the media are spreading destructive lies; and the foundations of democracy are corroding.

Economics is itself part of the problem. This is partly because it leaves out so much that matters. It is also because what it assumes about humans is wrong. It does not merely assume “*homo economicus*”, but, some would argue, encourages people to become one: selfish, competitive, and antisocial. This is debated (Girardi et al., 2021). Yet it is at the least clear that if everybody did behave as a rational self-seeker, civilised society, which relies on the unverified or unverifiable trustworthiness of one’s fellows, would almost certainly collapse. *Homo economicus* really could not have created Denmark or any prosperous and highly co-operative society.

Economics is not only part of the problem, because of how it simplifies, but also because of what it leaves out. This is true even though it has developed in significant and helpful directions, to include imperfect competition, analyse asymmetric information, recognise endogenous growth, measure creative destruction, discuss multiple equilibria, distinguish happiness from income and analyse actual human behaviour. The discipline has indeed become more empirical and broader, while maintaining its core virtue of rigour. Yet even this is not enough. This book indicates how economics could become better still. It does so by reclaiming economics as the queen of social sciences, the subject that seeks to analyse *all* aspects of the most important thing humans do together, namely, co-operate, in order to deliver flourishing lives to as many people as possible.

If economics is to do this successfully it must embrace broader perspectives. It must be more aware of what it is trying to do and of the wider context in which the economy and economics operate. It must embrace breadth and complexity. The range of knowledge and abilities needed by economists is at the heart of the necessary transformation.

In a celebrated passage, John Maynard Keynes argued that “*the master economist must possess a rare combination of gifts. He must reach a high standard in several different directions and must combine talents not often found together.*”

He must be mathematician, historian, statesman, philosopher – in some degree.

He must understand symbols and speak in words.

He must contemplate the particular in terms of the general, and touch abstract and concrete in the same flight of thought.

He must study the present in the light of the past for the purposes of the future.

No part of man's nature or his institutions must lie entirely outside his regard.

He must be purposeful and disinterested in a simultaneous mood; as aloof and incorruptible as an artist, yet sometimes as near the earth as a politician.”
(Keynes, 1924, p. 65)

How is such a paragon to be produced? This book offers a good part of the answer. It broadens the foundations of economics, by forcing economists to understand the history of the economy and the subject and so to be aware of what economics tries to do and how it attempts to do it. It proposes a practical route towards a better economic education. It provides a wide range of materials on how different schools approach the challenges and opportunities of studying the economy. It is, in sum, a distinguished effort to educate economists to become the sort of people Keynes thought they ought to be: broad intellectuals, not narrow technicians, but at the same time practical guides, not only abstract thinkers.

For many economists, the approach this book recommends will be painful. That is not just for selfish reasons. Those heroic simplifications had virtues. With them will go the old clarity about what economists are supposed to do and how they are supposed to think. Yet the gains from a richer understanding of what the human economy exists to do and how it does and should work will more than compensate.

Do I agree with everything in the book? Absolutely not. That surely is the point. A good book on the teaching and studying of economics should be challenging.

Read. Enjoy. Learn.

Acknowledgements

Only two names appear on the cover of this book, but don't let that fool you. *Economy Studies*, both the book and the accompanying website, is a cooperative effort built with contributions of some 180 people. Sprawling as it is, we simply could not have written it alone, nor would we have wanted to. In this chapter, we want to tell you a bit about the process of this project, and honour the many people who made remarkable contributions to this effort.

1 Building on a Wider Movement

The story of *Economy Studies* is inseparable from the international student movement *Rethinking Economics*. Over the past decade, Rethinkers have pointed out gaps in the curriculum, argued for different material and conducted thorough curriculum reviews. Many staff members and faculties turned out to be quite interested in our proposals. Still, they generally found it hard to implement such requests, being so used to the familiar curriculum. Hence the idea germinated in *Rethinking Economics* meetings to make an example curriculum.

We did not want to reinvent the wheel, but rather assemble the best work from the generations that came before us. So, we reached out to a wide range of seasoned academics around the world, hoping to tap into their collective knowledge and wisdom. Overwhelmed by the breadth and depth of the responses, we have continued this practice throughout the writing process. These economists freed up some of their precious time to respond to one or more of our requests for feedback. Some of them we already knew through classes or conferences, many others had so far just been revered names in our bookcases. Each time, we were honoured and humbled by the many responses, often going in great detail.

Thank you, for many hundreds of valuable comments and suggestions: Maarten Allers, Viviana Asara, Roger Backhouse, Andrea Bernardi, Dirk Bezemer, Olivier Blanchard, Mark Blyth, Peter Boettke, Frank Bohn, Ivan Boldyrev, Wimar Bolhuis, Marcel Boumans, Björn Brügemann, Govert Buijs, Brian Burgoon, Koen Bytтеbier, Marcel Canoy, Wendy Carlin, Edward Cartwright, Mario Cedrini, Ha-Joon Chang, David Colander, Chris Colvin, Harry Commandeur, Marcella Corsi, Carlo D'Ipolti, Dirk Damsma, Charlie Dannreuther, Thomas Dark, Marc Davidson, John Davis, Samuel Decker, David Dequech, Giovanni Dosi, Sheila Dow, Robert Dur, Wolfram Elsner, Ewald Engelen, Christian Felber, Thomas Ferguson, Alfredo S. Filho, Ben Fine, Svenja Flechtner, Nancy Folbre, James Galbraith, Pieter Gautier,

James Gerber, Reyer Gerlagh, Teresa Ghilarducci, Neva R. Goodwin, William Greene, Roel Grol, Roelf Haan, Marco Haan, Johan Heilbron, Walter Hulsker, Geoffrey Hodgson, Lex Hoogduin, Brigitte Hoogendoorn, Bas Jacobs, William Janeway, Tae-Hee Jo, Steve Keen, Piet Keizer, Stephanie Kelton, Alan Kirman, Arjo Klamer, Alfred Kleinknecht, Theo Kocken, Ingrid H. Kvangraven, Tony Lawson, William Lazonick, Henry Leveson-Gower, Stefano Lucarelli, Jasper Lukkezen, Bengt-Ake Lundvall, Bart Los, Harro Maas, Senna Maatoug, Olga Mikheeva, William Milberg, Irene Monasterolo, Stephanie Mudge, Daniel Mügge, Felix Munoz-Garcia, Richard Nelson, Bart Nooteboom, Erik Olsen, Sander Onderstal, Carlota Perez, Thomas Piketty, Jan Potters, Menno Pradhan, Pratistha J. Rajkarnikar, Kate Raworth, Jack Reardon, Geert Reuten, Maarten P. Schinkel, Philippe C. Schmitter, Geoff Schneider, Dirk Schoenmaker, Henning Schwardt, Molly Scott Cato, Esther-Mirjam Sent, Anwar Shaikh, Robert Skidelsky, Clive Spash, Joseph Stiglitz, Coen Teulings, Tim Thornton, Rob Timans, Bas van Bavel, Harry van Dalen, Eric van Damme, Hendrik van den Berg, Wypkje van der Heide, Frank van der Salm, Joël van der Weele, Ger van Gils, Charan van Krevel, Hans van Ophem, Jan van Ours, Erwin van Sas, Jarig van Sinderen, Irene van Staveren, Rens van Tilburg, Jacco van Uden, Olav van Vliet, Arjen van Witteloostuijn, Olav Velthuis, Jan Verhoeckx, Koen Vermeylen, Jack Vromen, Robert Went, William White, Randall Wray and Kim Zwitserloot.

In the first round, before starting our own writing process, we simply asked this group of seasoned academics a few open questions. How would they define the economy, what should the core principles of a good economics education be, what courses or programmes did they find inspiring, and what it was that made these courses and programmes so worthwhile? These responses, together with many pages of notes from *Rethinking Economics* gatherings, would form the basis of our new curriculum proposal.

2 A Process of Crowdsourcing

We quickly realised that it would be impossible to write ‘the perfect curriculum’. *Rethinking Economics* is at its core a movement for pluralism, and does not intend to replace the current, relatively standardised curriculum with a single alternative. This does not mean that we do not have a coherent view. It just means that it encompasses diversity of theories, methods, values, people, and programmes. We agreed, however, on the major gaps in current programmes, the basic tenets for future programmes, the design principles, and on the general direction we envision for economics education.

This, we decided, would be the form of our curriculum proposals: a modular, open-ended design toolkit built on a clear foundation of guiding principles. The core: teach students to study the economy using a broad and open-ended toolkit, rather than drilling them in a specific manner of thinking about it. Such a modular approach has two advantages. For its writers, it allowed for a collaborative and diverse yet coherent vision to emerge from a broad reform movement. For its users, it offers a menu and a variety of tools, rather than a fully formed ‘take it or leave it’ alternative structure.

Our first rough draft, just 70 pages long, saw the light of day at a long weekend workshop in January 2019, where it was picked apart and put together again lovingly by Daniel Obst, Eric Sargent, Alexandra Sokolenko, and Sally Svenlen. Special thanks here go to Ross Cathcart, Cameron Fay, and J. Christopher Proctor, who have acted as this project’s godfathers from start to finish. We are grateful to the *Independent Social Research Foundation* for funding this workshop. Following this workshop, we took eight months to come to a fuller draft, including much more detailed building blocks, detailed lists of materials and a full version of the *Pragmatic Pluralism* approach.

In September 2019, we went back for more comments. We once again sent out the manuscript, now around 150 pages, to the same group of professors, and again were honoured to receive many pages of valuable feedback. In the year that followed, we processed their comments, additions, critiques and other suggestions to create a new manuscript. We then organised a final round of feedback in the summer of 2020. We went back to the group of seasoned academics mentioned in the list above for a final time, now sending them each one or two relevant chapters to receive more in-depth thematic feedback. At the same time, a group of about twenty rethinkers edited one chapter per week per person for about two months, ensuring that every chapter would pass through many pairs of eyes and hands.

Thank you, to our fellow Rethinkers: Ryan Berelowitz, Elisa Terragno Bogliaccini, Merve Burnazoglu, Charlotte Cator, Michela Ciccotosto, Maeve Cohen, Sebastián Muena Cortés, Eric Decker, Joe Earle, Clara Etchenique, Mads Falkenfleth Jensen, Rita Guimarães, Oliver Hanney, Laurence Jones-Williams, Maarten Kavelaars, Anne Kervers, Liv Anna Lindman, Maria Georgouli Loupi, Cahal Moran, Carles Paré Ogg, Hanna Oosterveen, Ben Pringle, Francis Ostermeijer, Henri Schneider, Vera Veltman, Maarten Vermeir and Tree Watson. Special thanks go to Rethinkers Jamie Barker and Kristin Dilani Nadarajah, for close reading many more of the chapters and sculpting our rough prose into more refined and accurate formulations throughout the book.

3 Constructing the Toolkit: An Iterative Process

Throughout the writing process, we also held some twenty try-out workshops and discussions to broaden and sharpen the work. Many thanks go to the organisers of all these workshops, conferences and gatherings: *the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW)*, *the Dutch Ministry of Finance*, *the Oikos* and *Netzwerk Plurale Ökonomik* student movements, *The Hague University of Applied Sciences (THUAS)*, *the Italian Association for the History of Political Economy (STOREP)*, *the Goldschmeding Foundation* and *the Commission for Education, Culture and Science of the Dutch House of Representatives*. We especially wish to thank the *Rethinking Economics* staff team, who have brought together such an extraordinary worldwide network of young academic freethinkers so many times. This book could not have been written without your tireless organising behind the scenes. In addition, *the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*, *the Radboud University of Nijmegen*, *Utrecht University* and *Leiden University* provided inspiring discussions and use cases of early drafts.

The try-out workshops also helped to sharpen another component of the project: course design workshops at economics faculties, using an abbreviated version of the *Economy Studies* toolkit for the initial brainstorming. In November 2020, *Rethinking Economics International* organised an *Economy Studies Expert Training*, where Rethinkers from five different continents came together online for four weeks to discuss the book and how to conduct such workshops in their own region. The feedback from the participants in this series of sessions sharpened the workshop format in many ways.

It was in these workshops that the book grew to take its final size and shape. Through discussions with fellow Rethinkers and many academics, we came to realise that a curriculum proposal or a set of building blocks with guiding principles alone was not enough: it needed a head and a tail. So, we fleshed out the *Foundations* more clearly, and added several more *Tools* chapters to get closer to the practical realities of everyday teaching work, such as *Adapting Existing Courses* and *Learning Objectives*. All this greatly expanded the book's waistline, to the dismay of our publishers. Still, we believe it is worth it, as the project's range is now much more complete: from basic principles to practical application within a single framework.

Throughout this process, we had a steady and warm home at the independent Dutch thinktank *Our New Economy*. We are very grateful for the unwavering support and wide variety of help given by our great

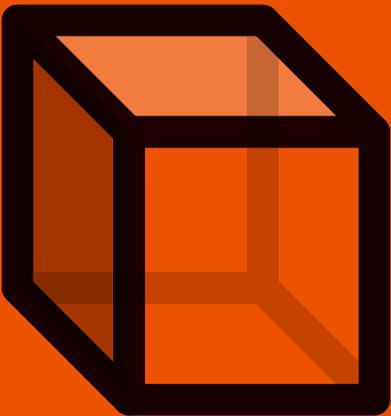
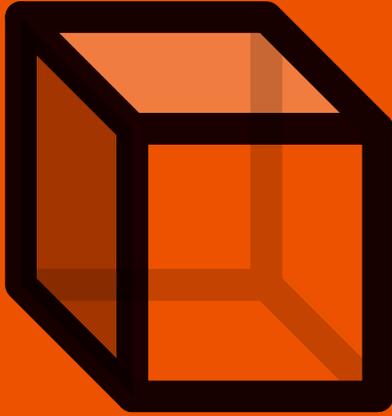
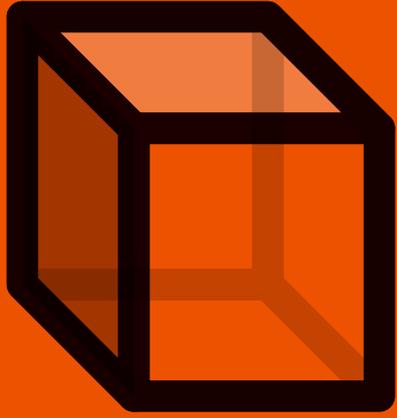
crew of colleagues: Sjaak Beirnaert, Peter Mulder, Maarten Nijman, Esther Somers, Martijn Jeroen van der Linden and Danny Verdonk: from brainstorming sessions and feedback to connecting with faculties to organise workshops, and from dissemination strategy to social media. Special thanks go to Charlotte van Dixhoorn, for a close edit of more than half of the book and to Julika Frome for helping us out with communications and organising the book launch. Anne de Kok helped us to build a beautiful website accompanying the book.

At *Amsterdam University Press*, Inge van der Bijl patiently and constructively guided us through every step of the publication process. At *Matterhorn*, Bob van den Berg crafted the wonderful designs for every page of this book. We are also very grateful that Martin Wolf took the time to write such a powerful and incisive foreword – it feels like the missing puzzle piece of the book.

We also want to thank our friends and families for their support. In particular, we want to thank Tane Nieuweboer, Katrien Eisenloeffel and Marion Molliet for putting up with us during this writing process, which was often in the evenings, weekends and holidays, and all the stresses that came with it.

All remaining errors are, of course, our own. In addition, as the main authors of this book are two young white university educated middle-class men from the Netherlands, the book has an inevitable bias towards our own experiences. We hope that you, the reader, will help us to make the next edition sharper and richer, by pointing out errors and omissions and suggesting better teaching materials and techniques.

We also hope you will take the project further. The book and website are Open Access and Creative Commons, which means they can be freely shared and adapted: you may download digital copies of the book for free. You may also copy and redistribute this material in any medium or format, remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. We very much hope you will do so.



Introduction

“I don’t care who writes a nation’s laws, if I can write its economics textbooks.”

Paul Samuelson (1990, p. ix)

Economies can broadly be described as open systems of resource extraction, production, distribution, consumption and waste disposal through which societies provision themselves to sustain life and enhance its quality. Their functioning is fundamental for and intertwined with many other human endeavours. Whether it is putting food on the table, providing medical care, ensuring a roof over one’s head, fighting a war, running an education system, organising a social outing for a football club or simply getting a coffee, all these actions require interaction with these larger economic systems. Given this importance, good economists are vital for society, at every level. It is their job to investigate the inner workings of the larger systems, help society navigate them, assist in designing parts of them, and monitor their functioning to continuously improve them and avoid unintended consequences or breakdowns.

1 Why Redesign Economics Programmes?

Economists today are in positions of considerable power and influence. Primarily, as key policy experts and advisors in many different policy areas. Under a layer of political supervision, economists are at the head of many of the most powerful public-sector organisations in the world: central banks, ministries of finance, social and economic affairs, and international organisations such as the *International Monetary Foundation (IMF)* and the *World Bank*. Indeed, some argue that we live in an *econocracy*, a society in which improving the economy has become the main purpose of politics (Earle et al., 2016). In the private sector, economists co-direct and influence the behaviour of banks and other large corporations.

Additionally, the economic ideas that are dominant in society exert an influence far beyond the formal advisory of professional economists, guiding decision-making of citizens everywhere. After all, economic dynamics are at the core of many of the aforementioned societal

challenges. Anyone grappling with those problems may look towards economic ideas to understand and help solve them: informally, in day-to-day discussions and literature, but also formally through an economic education. In the United States alone, every year two million undergraduates take at least one economics course (Siegfried & Walstad, 2014).

Indeed, as Nobel laureate Friedrich Hayek (1974) noted, the influence of economists and their ideas can sometimes be intimidatingly large. In his acceptance speech, he remarked that *'the Nobel Prize confers on an individual an authority which in economics no man ought to possess'*, particularly because *'the influence of the economist that mainly matters is an influence over laymen: politicians, journalists, civil servants and the public generally.'* The professional authority of economists, often based upon its image of being both more policy-oriented and more *'scientific'* – in the sense of being more like the natural sciences such as physics – than other social sciences, is crucial in understanding the influence of economists in society (Akerlof, 2020; Fourcade et al., 2015).

Today, a clear and systemic understanding of the economy is more important than ever. The 2007-2008 financial crisis yielded widespread unemployment and bankruptcies, only to be worsened recently by the COVID-19 global pandemic. The world remains one of great inequality, where 1% of the world's population owns more wealth than the other 99% combined (Hardoon et al., 2016). The industrial system is simultaneously causing the world's 6th mass extinction (Ceballos et al., 2017), and destabilising the climate, something that has long received too little attention in economics (Butler-Sloss & Beckmann, 2021; Oswald & Stern, 2019). The uncertainty and insecurity resulting from this rapid and frequently threatening change is driving increasing numbers of citizens into the arms of autocratic populists, who promise strength, stability and simplicity (Mounk, 2018).

To face these and coming challenges, we need a comprehensive understanding of our economic system. The COVID-19 pandemic in particular has shown that if we are to effectively manage our economy, we need an all-round, real-world understanding of how economic sectors work, how they are intertwined with each other, what roles various forms of government play versus the market, how citizens economically depend on each other, and how the economy is embedded in our society at large. A single theoretical framework cannot be enough for this. A range of approaches which prioritise different methodologies, assumptions, units of analysis and outcomes will be necessary to gain a more complete understanding, as well as the critical thinking skills to be able to choose the

most appropriate approaches for the problem at hand. As well as debating alternative policies, we also need to be able to go deeper and debate the values which underpin our judgement of policies, as well as envisioning, designing and debating alternative policies. In short, economists of the future have a lot of work to do. They will need a thorough and diverse training to prepare them for this.

Fortunately, the discipline has many crucial insights to offer its students. Economists have demonstrated how the pursuit of self-interest may lead to benefits for society at large (Adam Smith), how the capitalist system forces not only workers but also employers to compete and fight for 'survival' (Karl Marx), that we pay not only in money but also in opportunity cost (David Green), how the sum of the actions of many sensible, reasonably-acting individuals may be chaotic and generate explosive irrationality (John Maynard Keynes), how developed countries can enrich themselves at the cost of developing countries even without directly plundering them or extracting resources through military power (Raúl Prebisch), how innovation and economic destruction are part of the same process of turbulent economic development (Joseph Schumpeter), how roughly half the work we do, such as care work, is never paid for (Betsy Warrior), that economic development is not (only) about growth but about capabilities and freedom (Amartya Sen), how communities can be able to sustainably manage vital resources without formal rules and property rights (Elinor Ostrom), and how well-intended actions of human provisioning may wreak havoc on the ecological systems that support all life on this planet (Herman Daly).

We, the authors of this book, chose to study economics because we wanted to understand the powerful dynamics within the economy that lie behind the world's challenges, and to learn ideas that might help to solve them. While we learned much of value in our programmes, we also found that they were not sufficiently broad, open-minded and realistic to help us really get a thorough grasp of how the economy actually works.

For one, the majority of the insights listed above were not part of our programmes. If we had not been informed by curious classmates that the field of economics was much wider than what we were being taught, we would never even have known about them. Neither did we learn to discuss the moral foundations of economic discussions. Why, for instance, are we striving for economic growth? Does this goal still make sense and how does it relate to other goals, such as ecological sustainability and social equity? What is a 'well-functioning market', and when and why do we want one? Nor did we learn much about the economy as it actually exists in the real world: few of us could have listed the main sectors in our home countries,

explained how the bargaining processes between workers and employers works in practice, or set out the connection between capitalism and global warming in any more detail than an informed newspaper reader.

Most current programmes are organised around ‘thinking like an economist’ (see Proctor, 2019, for an overview of curriculum analyses in different countries). That is, they focus on training students to think from the neoclassical perspective and to use econometrics, while disregarding other valuable theoretical approaches and research methods. Furthermore, the approaches that are taught are predominantly abstract, rather than based in real-world practice, and claim to be value-free.

2 Giants on Whose Shoulders We Stand

This movement has produced an extensive literature of proposals and discussions about economics curriculum reform, which we will briefly discuss before setting out the contribution of *Economy Studies* itself and the internal structure of this book. To go directly to the overview of this book’s parts and to see reading suggestions for faculty, students and other audiences, skip ahead to the next section of this chapter, *This Book: Structure and Reading Guide*. For more history and detail on the debate about economics education see Butler et al. (2009); Fullbrook (2003); Garnett Jr et al. (2009); Hodgson et al. (1992); Hoyt and McGoldrick (2012); Lee (2009); Reardon (2009); Spiegler and Milberg (2013); Thornton (2016); Tieleman et al. (2017).

For brevity, the literature review starts in 2007, the year the global financial crisis started and as a result the movement for economics curriculum reform received an enormous boost. In this year, *Teaching Pluralism in Economics* (2007) was published; a collection of essays edited by John Groenewegen, which discusses the desirability of pluralism and the different forms it can take, the importance and usefulness of interdisciplinarity, history, and problem-based learning, and differences between an economics education in the United States (US), Germany and the United Kingdom (UK).

Two years later the *Teagle Foundation* report was written by David Colander and KimMarie McGoldrick (2009) about how economics majors in US liberal education could be improved. The report argues programmes should focus more on “big think” questions about highly complex issues as well as the real-world contexts in which economic problems are situated. Colander and McGoldrick also suggest experimenting with new teaching strategies,

encouraging active classroom participation and open conversations, and developing teaching commons with openly shared materials and exercises. They also provide organisational suggestions for improvement, such as increasing attention to teaching skills as well as subjects such as economic history, history of economic thought and institutions in PhD programmes so that the next generation of teachers will be better equipped and prepared.

The Teagle report was also the starting point of *Educating Economists: The Teagle Discussion on Re-evaluating the Undergraduate Economics Major* (2010), a collection of essays from a wide variety of perspectives. Among other questions, it discusses whether to deepen and/or broaden the scope of the programmes, how best to teach students to think critically and independently, and the practicalities of organising economics education such as providing the right incentives to stimulate good teaching.

The year 2009, right after the start of the global financial crisis, saw two other important publications on economics education: Robert Garnett, Erik Olsen, and Martha Starr edited the volume *Economic Pluralism* (2009) of which the third part specifically focused on economics education. The volume gives a good overview of the debate surrounding economic pluralism with essays on, among other things, how to manage intellectual diversity to promote knowledge production, whether to base pluralism on Kuhn's concept of incommensurability or Mill's idea of fallibilism, the institutional heterogeneity in real-world economies, and how pluralist teaching can contribute to relevant skill formation among students desired by companies and governments.

Another book on the need for pluralism in economics is *The Handbook of Pluralist Economics Education*, a collection of essays edited by Jack Reardon (2009). It too contains detailed suggestions for teachers on how to reform principles, core theory and advanced economics courses. In this way, it provides fundamental critiques as well as concrete suggestions for how economics courses, from economics 101 and macroeconomics to labour and international economics, can be improved.

In 2011, INET's UK Curriculum Committee wrote a proposal for undergraduate programmes following these principles: a focus on the economy, rather than on a particular methodology of economics; a pluralist 'one-problem-several-solutions' approach; and a focus on the real world and on preparing students to work outside academia, rather than reproducing the skill-sets needed by academic professors.

2011 also saw one of the most extensive publications on economics education with the 850 pages long *International Handbook on Teaching and Learning Economics* edited by Gail M. Hoyt and KimMarie McGoldrick. The book starts out by describing the history of economics education, different teaching and assessment techniques, and research findings on economics education and student performance. Numerous contributors to the book, furthermore, give reflections and suggestions on existing courses, from health economics and game theory to sport and urban economics. It concludes by discussing institutional and administrative aspects of economics education, such as faculty development, student characteristics, teaching enhancement initiatives, and international differences between educational systems.

Two collections of essays followed. 2012 saw the publication of *What's the Use of Economics? Teaching the Dismal Science After the Crisis* edited by Diane Coyle. The book asks how new insights that have become prominent as a result of the financial crisis of 2008 and its aftermath, such as the importance of the financial sector for macroeconomic developments, could be incorporated in economics education. The various authors, including several employers of economists, argue that the following ingredients are too often missing in current curricula: history and real-world context, practical skills for empirical analysis and the importance of inductive reasoning, attention to the limitations of modelling and deductive reasoning, a pluralist approach with multiple perspectives, and communication skills, especially of technical results to non-economists. The book also discusses how UK undergraduate economics programmes, in particular, can be improved, by innovating teaching and testing, and rewarding good teaching rather than letting career success depend solely on publishing in US mainstream journals.

The second collection of essays, edited by Jack Reardon and Maria Alejandra Madi (2014), arrived at a slightly more radical conclusion. According to the various authors of *The Economics Curriculum: Towards a Radical Reformulation*, reforming economics education is not simply a matter of adding some topics to the curriculum, but fundamentally changing its core elements. The book starts out by analysing what is wrong with current programmes and what they are missing. It then moves towards suggestions for how the curriculum could be improved and what such an improved programme could look like. Core ideas are to centre a pluralist approach to theory, to actively discuss methodological issues, and to make real-world and historical knowledge key ingredients of any curriculum.

In that same year, the French student group *Pour un Enseignement Pluraliste dans le Supérieur en Économie* (PEPS, 2014) analysed existing French economic curricula and proposed an alternative curriculum. Rather than organising the programme around techniques, they put real-world problems and questions at the centre of the programme. Furthermore, the programme is characterised by interdisciplinarity, theoretical and methodological pluralism as well as a focus on independent critical thinking. Their research was followed up by a report by the French Ministry of Education (2014), which concluded that economics programmes were indeed insufficient in preparing students for their future societal roles. The report argued curricula should pay more attention to real-world knowledge and interdisciplinarity.

In 2016, the debate further progressed thanks to two books that each in their own way forcefully argued for fundamentally altering economics education. In *From Economics to Political Economy: The problems, promises and solutions of pluralist economics*, Thornton (2016) argues for disciplinary differentiation and institutional independence. Disciplinary differentiation involves reverting back to the original name of the discipline (political economy) and broadening the field by including economic history, history of economic thought, a diversity of theoretical perspectives, economic development, and comparative economic systems. Institutional independence involves operating outside economics departments (for example, in departments of political science or management). In his words, rather than trying to continue a “dialogue with the deaf” inside economics departments, reform-minded students and academics may benefit from more carefully contemplating the full range of available reform strategies. The analysis includes detailed case studies of successful and unsuccessful attempts at change within and outside economics departments.

The other book, called *Econocracy: The perils of leaving economics to the experts* (Earle et al., 2016), was written by three young economics graduates who had been instrumental in the formation of the international student movement *Rethinking Economics*, which we are a part of, in particular by co-founding the *Post-Crash Economics Society* in Manchester. As noted earlier, they argue that we live in an *econocracy*, a society in which improving the economy has become the main purpose of politics. In such a society, the way economists are educated is of paramount importance. Based on an analysis of 174 UK undergraduate economics courses and their course outlines and exam papers, they argue economics education is currently not fit for purpose. The excessive focus on neoclassical theory amounts to a monopoly of thinking that, they argue, can even be defined as indoctrination, as it discourages independent critical thinking and promotes unquestioningly accepting claims and reproducing earlier

beliefs. They make the case for economics in the form of a pluralist liberal education with attention to multiple theoretical perspectives, real-world issues, inductive approaches and empirical evidence. Furthermore, they argue for the democratisation of economic policy debates, in order to make sure everyone's interests, values and insights are considered rather than only those of a small group of economic experts.

The most recent contributions to the debate consist of two collections of essays edited by three German economists, Samuel Decker, Wolfram Elsner and Svenja Flechtner: *Advancing Pluralism in Teaching Economics* (2018) and *Principles and Pluralist Approaches in Teaching Economics* (2019). These two books further explore why and how to teach economics in a pluralist way. They discuss how this pluralist approach could be applied to different topics and countries, together with discussions of recent development in economics education in Brazil, India, China, Ghana, Germany and France.

While this book is about education, not about research, our suggestions seem to dovetail with a similar shift in the research arena. A recent survey among nearly 10,000 academic economists, weighted to be a representative sample of all 50,000 scholars who recently published, found that most academic economists want the discipline's research work to be more multidisciplinary, less specialized, riskier, more disruptive and focused on the question's importance rather than on causal identification (Andre & Falk, 2021).

The years since the 2007-2008 financial crisis have also produced a growing amount of new teaching material. This wealth of new (online) materials and textbooks is too extensive to do justice in a brief discussion here. Instead, we provide overviews and descriptions of them in the relevant chapters as well as more extensive online overviews of teaching materials and resources on www.economystudies.com.

Besides textbooks, there are websites such as *Exploring Economics*, an open-access and bottom-up e-learning platform for economic theory with introductions into different perspectives and overviews of online courses. *The School of Political Economy* has also been established to provide university-level courses in pluralist economics from outside of the university system. In addition, INET has created several excellent online courses, such as *How & How NOT to Do Economics* by Robert Skidelsky, *Inequality 101* by Branko Milanovic and Arjun Jayadev, *The Economics of Money & Banking* by Perry Mehrling, *What Money Can't Buy* by Michael Sandel, and *Economics for People* by Ha-Joon Chang, which are freely available on its website. Furthermore, the CORE team, coordinated by Wendy Carlin, Samuel Bowles and Margaret Stevens, has developed online

freely available textbooks, such as *The Economy: Economics for a Changing World* and *Economy, Society, and Public Policy*. The *Economics in Context Initiative* has developed a series of textbooks accompanied by online available education materials in which students not only learn about the economy itself but also how it is embedded in social, environmental, historical, institutional and political contexts.

Finally, new economic programmes are being introduced across the world. Over the past years, the initiative *Promoting Economic Pluralism* has developed a platform providing an overview of pluralist economics master programmes around the world. The selection looks, among other things, at whether students are taught a range of theoretical perspectives, taught to reflect on assumptions and values, ecological issues are discussed and real-world knowledge is taught. Since 2005 the online *HED database*, last updated in 2016, also provides a useful overview of (under)graduate programmes with a broader and different theoretical focus (<http://heterodoxnews.com/hed/study-programs.html>).

3 This Book: Structure and Reading Guide

This book, *Economy Studies*, is neither a textbook, a collection of essays, a course manual, nor a critique of existing programmes. Rather, it is an attempt to take the many specific ideas and materials of renewal and reform and bundle them together into a coherent and complete vision of what a contemporary economics degree could look like. It builds on the above calls for more attention to real-world knowledge, history, institutions, pluralist theory, critical thinking and ethical and methodological reflection in economics education. In doing so, it goes beyond principles and general recommendations. The first part of this book outlines the general vision, the second part provides the building blocks of teaching material and the third part offers a practical toolkit to form and adjust concrete courses and curricula.

Apart from being highly detailed and combining an integral vision with a practical how-to guide, our curriculum proposal differs from others in one important respect: it is open-ended. *Rethinking Economics* was founded to crack open the existing homogeneity in economics education, and we do not intend to replace it with another 'single answer'. We believe society would be best served with a diversity of economists, each having slightly different expertise. Hence, we reject the notion that there could be such a thing as the 'optimal' curriculum.

Instead, we build up the proposal in three steps. The first part of the book, *Foundations*, sets out the philosophy of *Economy Studies*: education organised around studying the subject matter of the economy, rather than learning to think in a certain way. Then, three organising principles: a *pluralism* of theoretical and methodological approaches, a foundational knowledge of the *real-world* economy and a clear understanding of the role of *values* in economics. We discuss the importance of *diversifying and decolonising economics* and changing not only what we teach, but also how we teach with the *didactics* of economics education.

In the second part, *Building Blocks*, the domains of knowledge and skills that economics students should learn about are described. Building blocks can be used as templates to create stand-alone courses, or they can be combined or shaped into different forms, to suit the specifics of each programme. Additional online resources are referred to in the larger building blocks, and can be found on our website: links are provided throughout the book.

While most of this book is a blue-sky proposal, the third part *Tools* takes implementing actual change as its point of departure. It proposes more incremental adjustments and provides ready-to-implement tools: a curriculum review tool, examples of curricula and individual courses designed using this method, as well as ready-to-use sets of material to ‘pluralise’ existing core courses, also those for secondary schools and academic minor programmes.

As these example curricula and courses show, *Economy Studies* is certainly not something that needs to be swallowed wholesale. It can also very well function as a menu of different options for broadening existing curricula. Readers are encouraged to skip around in the book whilst reading. To facilitate this, we have written the building blocks as independent units. While they form a coherent whole, each building block is also designed to stand alone.

If you are working with an economics curriculum, whether teaching it, learning it or trying to reform it, this book could be for you. The different sections have been designed to be read independently, as they may be of interest to different readers. We suggest all readers start with part one, *Foundations*. Then, if you are currently teaching a course, and would like to expand it with some fresh material, go to part two, *Building Blocks*, and simply dive into the building block that seems most relevant to your course or see the chapter *Adapting Existing Courses* in part three of the book (p. 329). If you are in a position to influence a programme as a whole, whether as a student, a programme coordinator, or in another role, take a

look at the *Part II: Building Blocks* (p. 141), *Tool 3: Curriculum Review* (p. 363) and *Tool 5: Example Curricula* (p. 387).

Using the structure of this book, we have also designed workshops that help both students and teachers understand and apply the ideas and tools provided in the book. Throughout the international *Rethinking Economics* network, there are people who have been trained to facilitate these workshops. If you are interested, please get in touch at our website: www.economystudies.com.

Online, we also work with the INET Education Program, a platform hosting free educational resources such as video lecture series, syllabi, teaching modules, lecture notes, readings, sample quizzes and exams. In addition to materials, the platform will host an online community of economics professors. The building blocks and other chapters of this book will be part of that platform.

We hope that the ideas and materials offered in this book will be of use to the students and academics of the worldwide economics community. While our subject often seems dry and intangible to outsiders, it is an absolutely critical field of knowledge for any society, as more and more people are coming to realise. We are thankful to the many passionate scholars, activists, sceptics, philosophers and empiricists who have generously taught us what they knew and reviewed our work. You helped make this book what it is. Any remaining mistakes, which a book of these ambitions is bound to contain, are our own.