

Economies of space and the school geography curriculum

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Abstract:

This paper is about the images of economic space that are found in school curricula. It suggests the importance for educators of evaluating these representations in terms of the messages they contain about how social processes operate. The paper uses school geography texts in Britain since the 1970s to illustrate the different ways in which economic space has been represented to students, before exploring some alternative resources that could be used to provide a wider range of representations of economic space. The paper highlights the continued importance of understanding the politics of school knowledge.

Introduction

In 2004, the body responsible for the shape of the school curriculum in England, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) embarked on a programme of consultation about the type of curriculum required for life in the 21st Century. The QCA Futures programme suggested five challenges to which the school curriculum should respond. The first was concerned with ‘Changes in society and the nature of work’:

“Society and work have changed significantly in the last 30 years. The UK has moved from a manufacturing economy to a service and knowledge-

based economy. In an increasingly technological world, jobs migrate between countries. The pattern of employment is moving from a job for life to a job for the life of the project...In an uncertain future, those most likely to flourish are those who are flexible and equipped to learn and adapt...Employees want people who are literate and numerate and have IT skills. They look for people who can build and maintain relationships, work productively in teams and communicate effectively". (QCA 2004)

This statement offers a specific representation of the economy, one that is in line with influential accounts that suggest that we live in a globalised-world, where there is a shift to a 'post-industrial' economy which relies less on material goods than knowledge, and which requires of employees new forms of working that are based less on stable and reliable patterns of employment and more on flexible skills. What is striking about this statement is the way it presents an uncertain economic future as 'already-achieved', how it seems to suggest that there are no alternatives to the global economy, and the distinct lack of human control over the direction of these changes. Thus, it suggests, economies 'move' and 'jobs migrate'. The global forces shaping this economy appear to have no limits. If this is the shape of the world students growing up in the 21st century will encounter, their role, it seems, is to learn and adapt.

The economy represented in the QCA Futures brochure has much in common with that described in Thomas Friedman's (2005) best-selling book, *The World is Flat*. Friedman argues that the world is being tied into a single global marketplace where spatial barriers are being overcome. This is being enabled by technology, which

allows large amounts of work to be conducted ‘at a distance’ (e.g. booking train tickets in the UK is outsourced to India). Friedman explains that while Christopher Columbus returned home from his voyages to report that the world is round, he travelled to the silicon valleys of the global economy, returned home to his wife to whisper his ‘discovery’ – “Honey, I think the world is flat”.

I want to argue that this representation of the economy is based on a specific geographical imagination. The term ‘geographical imagination’ refers to the ways in which space is conceived. It implies that representations of space have an impact on how people see and act in the world. In this instance, the geographical imagination at work is based on the idea the economic and social relations are increasingly stretched across space, and that these are recurring at ever faster rates. In the face of this ‘time-space compression’, older ways of thinking about space based on stable nations or regions are becoming less valid.

It is significant that in rethinking the school curriculum, the QCA makes use of a specific geographical imagination based on ways of conceiving space. My concern is that this particular spatial imaginary is presented as though it was an accurate portrayal of economic geography, when in fact, “there are serious grounds for questioning the extent to which contemporary economies can properly be described as ‘globalised’” (Tonkiss 2006:30). In what follows I want to explore the ways in which economic space has been imagined in the school curriculum.

The article starts from Jenkins’ (1976) view that the essence of curriculum studies is that ‘it takes as problematic what should be planned, taught and learned in our

schools' (vi). In *The Impotent Image*, Gilbert (1984) argues that school subjects such as geography, history, economics and sociology provide students with distinctive messages about the nature of social and spatial relations, and these images need to be critically examined. For instance, in relation to school geography, Gilbert found that the abstract models of location analysis, the market and functionalism prevalent in school geography texts were 'associated with positivism and the "end of ideology" faith in technocratic planning' (p.229). Gilbert advised that educators should inquire into the content of school subjects in order to evaluate their messages.

The focus in this article is on school geography because this is the subject where 'space' has been dealt with most openly. I draw upon work in human geography which posits that space is not merely the physical backdrop to social activity, but is actively involved in the constitution of the social. What is more, space is a social construction, and it is important to enquire into how space acts to hide consequences from us. To give a simple example, it is common to divide the countries of the world into a first world, second world and third world. The first world comprises the 'advanced' economies of the West which have undergone the process of economic development. The effect of this way of thinking is to suggest that other countries in the second and third worlds are in the process of 'catching up', to the extent that the countries of Eastern Europe are often said to be 'transition' economies. This is an example of how a particular way of thinking about space, or geographical imagination', has consequences for how people think about, and maybe act, in the world. My argument is that these commonsense ways of thinking about space underpin curricula, and that there is a need to deconstruct or destabilise these in order

to see them as open to change. In the next part of this article, I analyse the spatial imaginations that have informed teaching about economic space in school geography

Representations of the space-economy

In this section I discuss how economic space has been conceptualised in school geography in Britain. I illustrate these with reference to selected texts which have been influential in the teaching of geography during the past 30 years and which exemplify the approach. I interpret these texts within the wider context of geography teaching, and drawing upon my own experience of geography teaching as a student, teacher, teacher educator and researcher. Throughout, I am interested in the geographical imagination that informs these approaches.

A solid geography

The first approach regards economic space as a container of industrial activity. Places or regions are unique in the particular mix of activities they contain. This approach is exemplified by the 4th edition of Norman Graves and John White's *Geography of the British Isles* which was published in 1976. This was widely considered a ground-breaking text, and Graves is a leading figure in curriculum development in geography.

Although the book's title refers to the 'geography' of the British Isles, its contents are in fact more limited to 'economic geography', and there is little in its coverage that represents other aspects of Britain's geography (for example, social or political geography). This is reflected in the titles of the chapters: "The changing distribution

of industry”, “Power and raw materials for industry”, “Communications between cities and industries”, and “Food supplies for the cities”. The focus is on primary industries such as agriculture and energy extraction which form the basis for secondary industries such as iron and steel, shipbuilding and chemicals. There are a number of features of the economy represented in the text:

- (1) The economy is dominated by the primary and secondary sectors, even though a significant proportion of the labour force at the time worked in services;
- (2) There is an emphasis on modern, large-scale industrial developments – students learn a good deal about the power of ‘man’ to exploit nature;
- (3) There is a focus on how industry has developed over time – patterns of momentum and inertia;
- (4) Explanation is based on assumptions about the organisation and logic of capital and the idea of ‘economies of scale’;
- (5) It is taken as given that the nation-state is and should be involved in the spatial organisation of the economy.

Geography of the British Isles offers a particular representation of Britain’s economy. It purports to provide a reliable *description* of the spatial aspects of the economy. It does not provide an explicit theoretical understanding of the relationship between capital and labour, taking it as read that there are industries, firms and organisations that harness resources to make profits and workers and governments who ensure these firms can operate. *Geography of the British Isles* portrays a planned modern economy and society, expressing an economic landscape designed to further a post-war social democratic consensus of stable and harmonious class relations. What we have is a

‘solid’, modern geography based on power generation, modern mining, improving transport links, ships and steel. The book can therefore be seen as offering and authenticating a particular geography of British modernity (Gilbert et al. 2003), one that is based on a belief in rational and ordered regional development.

It is interesting to reflect on what is missing from this representation, especially the extent to which this particular economic geography was in the process of unravelling. Economic recession followed the rise in the price of crude oil in 1973, and there was a protracted period of industrial action that resulted in the ‘3-day week’. Black (2004) considers that the period 1974-76 was the closest the capitalist economic system has come to collapsing, and in 1976 the British government accepted a loan from the International Monetary Fund. There is no sense, in *Geography of the British Isles*, of the political and class struggles that characterised the 1970s. The economic geography represented too is linked to a specific ‘gender division of labour’ described by McDowell:

“In this period paid work was the prime source of identity for men who, in their role as breadwinners, were expected to support their dependents, usually women and children. This world was one of relative stability..” (2003:98).

Finally there is little sense of the impending environmental crisis in the text. For instance, the modern reader would raise an eyebrow at the following optimistic assessment of the potential for fish farming:

“The high temperatures of water due to the effluent from power stations have been found to cause fish to grow much more rapidly than normal in almost tropical conditions. Pilot schemes are being carried out in Carmarthen Bay and also by the nuclear power station at Hunterston in Scotland” (1976:273-4).

Geography of the British Isles can be read as a simplified representation of what Martin and Sunley (1997) call the ‘space economy under the Keynesian Welfare State’. There are a number of features to this. First, the national economic space is the essential unit of economic organisation. It is assumed that the state is the sovereign actor. Second, the state acted to secure a high degree of spatial centralization of the domestic economy. Third, the state sought to be spatially redistributive and stabilizing. These assumptions underpin the discussion of Britain’s industrial problems in the text.

A scientific space

Geography of the British Isles was typical of geography textbooks based on the idea of subject as the study of regions. The approach tends to be based on description and making visible aspects of the physical space of the nation-state. However, from the mid-1970s this approach to teaching geography was challenged by theories and concepts associated with the so-called ‘new’ geography. This approach offered a very different representation of economic space, concerned with the search for general explanatory statements about the spatial organization of the economy.

An influential example of this approach is Bradford and Kent’s (1977) *Human Geography: Theories and their application*, which was published as part of a series that sought to bridge the gap between university and school geography. The book’s introduction explained the nature of the ‘new geography’:

“Traditionally, geographers have examined the differences between places and regions, rather than their similarities. They have not attempted to establish *generalizations* based on existing similarities. The modern geographer has become concerned with *similarities* as well as *differences* at many scales of study. Like the scientist, he has attempted to discover some *order* in the apparent chaos” (p.1, emphases in original)

The interest in scientific explanation and theorizing in economic geography from the mid-1960s led to the ‘rediscovery’ of economic location theories in the works of

Johann von Thunen, Alfred Weber and August Losch. The focus was on the ‘laws’ that determined the location of economic activity. The ‘new’ economic geography was linked with the continued growth of quantitative and mathematical methodologies and the elaboration of positivist philosophy.

The models of the neoclassical economic geography drew upon an ontology in which the final irreducible units of society were atomised, utility-maximizing, knowledgeable individuals acting in competitive markets. In other words, *homo economicus* or ‘rational economic man’ (the gender is significant since, as feminist geographers pointed out, this was a view of economic life that failed to reflect the experience of women). However, the limits to these models of ‘economic man’ were quickly realised and economic geographers developed more complex conceptions of human motivation and the behavioural environment. Spatial scientists modified their models to take into account the human attributes of human decision-makers. For example, Wolpert’s (1964) study of farming practices in Southern Sweden suggested that the agricultural landscape could not be explained in terms of all-out income-maximizing strategies on the part of the farmers. Instead, he claimed that economic behaviour could be more convincingly analyzed by the idea of satisficing behaviour. This led to the widespread adoption in school geography texts of David Smith’s (1971) model of the ‘spatial margins of profitability’, which suggested that entrepreneurs would often choose a sub-optimal location for their business, as long as such a location was profitable.

The economic space represented in this approach is that of a set of points that reflect the various costs of production (labour, raw material), and a common exercise is to

ask students to decide the ‘least cost location’ or the ‘optimal location’ for a firm. The models used assume the space is an ‘isotropic plane’, where factors such as soil quality or the cost of labour are held constant. In summary, the neoclassical economic models of spatial science rely upon a universal and therefore a-historic approach. This is evident where past industrial location patterns are analysed using the same concepts of ‘least cost’ or ‘profit-maximising’. The idea that people in the past had similar needs or acted in ‘rational’ (i.e. individualistic) ways denies the idea of historical epochs or social formations. The models operate on the assumption of the individual unit (person or firm) acting to secure their own desires.. This view of the space economy has been influential in school geography, and informed curriculum development in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

A radical view of economic space

The neoclassical and behavioural theories discussed in the previous section became the new ‘conventional’ theories of the school geography. However, geographers who adopted more ‘radical’ theories of economic space challenged these approaches.

Radical geography placed the relationship between capital and labour in particular historical formations at the heart of explanation. For example, in his book *The Urban Arena* Short (1984) described the responses of British capital to the end of the post-war economic boom. These included: (1) not investing – since profit levels were falling one response was to not invest in manufacturing; (2) seeking to shift investment overseas; (3) engage in the restructuring of activities. This involved reducing labour costs through cutting employment, increasing productivity by introducing harsher labour practices, and concentrating investment in the cheapest

locations; and (4), capital sought to re-direct the activities of the state, by lobbying for reductions in taxation and public expenditure, encouraging the 'right' climate for industrial relations, and creating more business for private industries. Short's approach is typical of the response to this changed economic and political landscape by many human geographers in the UK. Throughout the 1980s geographers published a series of texts that sought to describe and explain these changes. These included Doreen Massey's (1984) *Spatial Divisions of Labour*, Martin's (1986) edited text *The Geography of De-industrialisation*, and Hudson and Williams' (1985) *Divided Nation*. These texts, though varying in their approach and emphases, represented a shift within geography towards a social science that increasingly looked to ideas from neo-Marxist political economy.

An important feature of these political economy approaches was they offered powerful concepts of 'structure' and served as a challenge to the 'spatial fetishism' of locational analysis and spatial science. Geographers working with this approach were concerned to understand the social relations of production - how space was important in organising the mode of economic production. In this view, explanations of industrial location have to be placed in the context of broader global forces and relations of production in which the key element is the labour process.

Judging by texts produced for school geography in the 1970s and 1980s students were unlikely to encounter these ideas. There were a number of reasons for this. First, they used a theoretical language that was alien to most geography teachers, and the emphasis on Marxist ideas was perhaps unpalatable to the majority of teachers.

Radical or structuralist approaches stress that understanding geographical patterns

requires a knowledge of the role of state power, economic theory and politics, and few geography teachers were trained in these areas. As Huckle noted, ‘much school geography currently fails to meet the needs of older pupils due to its reluctance to deal with the economic and political processes which shape our society’ (Huckle 1984:99). He points out that many teachers would argue that the structural processes shaping the fortunes of the car industry are beyond the understanding of most 14-16 year olds.

A global space

The examples discussed so far point to the different ways in which economic space has been conceived in school geography since the 1970s. To conclude this section I want to discuss how recent texts in school geography have tended to adopt a geographical imagination based on the idea of a global space. Leyshon (1997) remarks that globalization has only relatively recently been taken seriously by economic geographers, but already it is a common topic in school geography. Peter Dicken’s *Global Shift* (currently in its 5th edition) has rapidly become *the* essential reference text for teachers at A Level, and teaching AS and A Level geography in the mid to late 1990s, it was common to find examination questions that reproduced maps from Dicken’s book and asked students to describe and explain the patterns of global economic production. However, Roberts (1995) noted how, in general, although economic geographers have described the way in which capitalist firms and institutions have stretched across, speeded up and transformed the economic world, much of this has been taken up in a relatively uncritical manner. Castree et al (2004) argue that globalization has been used as a ‘tool to make people believe we live in a

hyperintegrated world of ceaseless and irresistible flows’(p.18). They identify a series of ‘myths of globalization’ that circulate in the business press and media and which tend to be reproduced in school geography texts. These ‘myths’ are listed below, along with annotations of statements from two geography textbooks- *People, Production and Environment* and *Geography in Focus*:

Myths of globalization	Examples
That we live in an increasingly ‘borderless world’	<p>“The global economic system affects every facet of human activity” (PPE)</p> <p>“Globalization can be defined as the process in which national economies are becoming more and more integrated into a single global economy” (GF).</p>
Globalization is an irresistible force that stands over and above different places and people	<p>“..global action to provide solutions [to problems] has been only partial.” (PPE)</p>
Globalization signals the demise of the nation-state	<p>“Governments and politicians cannot afford to ignore TNCs..” (PPE)</p> <p>“Globalization is about the challenge to nation-states posed by the activities of TNCs, and by the inability of nation-states to control the activities of the global economy” (GF)</p>
Workers are increasingly vulnerable as firms are able to ‘play off’ workers as part of a divide and rule strategy	<p>GF gives the example of Renault, who in 1997 announced their intention to close its plant in Vilvoorde, Belgium, whilst at the same time planned to build a new plant in Valladolid, Spain: “There was widespread belief that Renault was playing the Belgian government and workforce off against the Spanish government and workforce”</p>
The myth of cheap labour: firms with the capacity to choose between several possible production sites gravitate to places with the lowest	<p>“...cheap labour can reduce the cost of the product so much it is cost-effective to transfer production thousands of miles to a new factory”</p>

labour costs	(PPE)
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These ‘myths’ all contain a grain of truth. However, according to Castree et al., they tend to be greatly exaggerated and as such serve particular social and political agendas. Castree et al argue that concepts such as ‘globalisation’ are never neutral, they have a material effect in that they influence how we see the world and act.

In this section I have attempted to illustrate the spatial imaginaries that have underpinned the teaching of economic geography in schools. Such analysis is important, I argue, because it has the effect of highlighting how space is a social construction, and how different ways of imagining space have consequences for how we act in the world. The analysis also helps us to clarify the spatial imagination that informs the QCA Future’s programme description of changes in society and the nature of work. It is based on a ‘neoliberal’ understanding of economic space which stresses that businesses are the main economic actors who increasingly operate on a global scale, roaming the world to seek out the best place to locate production. This process is characterised by high rates of mobility, so that the idea that individuals could stay in one place and have a job for life is replaced by the idea that employees need to be flexible. This is an influential and powerful view of economic space. However as Harvey (2005) insists in *A brief history of neoliberalism*, there is nothing inevitable about this, but should be seen as part of a concerted attempt on the part of capital to reduce labour’s share of the economic surplus and accumulate wealth. Part of this strategy is to make existing social and spatial arrangements appear natural and

inevitable. An important task in analysing these arrangements is to ask whether another world is possible. In the next section, I discuss some other ways in which contemporary economic space might be conceptualised.

The end of economic geography (as we knew it)

In this section I draw upon recent work in economic geography to explore alternative ways of understanding economic space. Like so many of the human and social sciences, geography has been influenced by debates around postmodernism and the ‘crisis of representation’. An early example is found in Martin’s review of economic geography which, after summarising a series of economic transformations, raised the question of a ‘crisis of representation’ in economic geography, whereby older, established ways of studying the world were increasingly questioned. He notes that within economic geography there has been a growing interest in the metaphorical tropes and discursive practices that permeate different theories of the economic landscape. In addition there is a tendency to favour spatial difference rather than seek to provide general theories of the economy. Although Martin is suspicious of postmodern economic geography, he notes that the postmodern challenge ‘compels us to give much closer critical examination to the meaning of “economic reality”’:

“As a mode of discourse, economic geography, like economics upon which it draws, is inescapably bound up with the structure and content of the language it uses and the world-views or ideologies that underpin different discursive systems” (p.39).

This challenges the 'objective' fact of the space economy. Rather than representing the economic space 'out there', through their theories and concepts economic geographers are actively shaping our understanding of that space. This process is also evident in the discipline of economics. Though economics as a discipline was rather late in responding to the challenge of postmodernism, its ideas have filtered through to their work. As Ruccio and Amariglio (2003), two economists who explore the implications of postmodern ideas for economics, argue:

“...once we relinquish the 'mirror of nature' view of knowledge, then we are lead in the direction of emphasizing the constitutive, as against the representational, view of economic thinking...each of the theories that exists within and comprises the discipline of economics can be said to produce a specific and different discourse of the economy.” (Ruccio and Amariglio 2003:293-294).

Thus, there is a neo-classical economic geography, a feminist one, a Marxist one, a post-structural one, and so on. For Ruccio and Amariglio, the challenge is to live with the complexity and variety of economic explanation and give up on the idea that there exists one 'final' theory or 'single method'. In the same way, economic geographers are in the process of producing their own specific and different discourses of the economy. For instance, Barnes argues:

“The best we can hope for are shards and fragments; there is not one economic geography but many economic geographies, not one complete story but a set of fragmented stories.” (Barnes 1996:250).

Alternative economic geographies

An example of how we might begin to tell some other stories about economic geography comes from the work of J-K. Gibson-Graham (the composite name of two feminist economic geographers, Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham).

Gibson-Graham highlight the ‘performativity’ of concepts in economic geography. By this they mean that the concepts and theories we use in explaining the world do not simply reflect that world, but actively help constitute it. Gibson-Graham (1996) develop this argument in *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it)*. They note how, in representations of economic life, both supporters and critics of capitalism tend to speak of it as a monolithic and all-powerful structure. In this way, capitalism is seen to colonise all aspects of social life. For example, we might speak of life in ‘the capitalist family’ or that we live in a ‘capitalist culture’. For Gibson-Graham, the effect of this way of thinking is to obscure the possibility of thinking about non-capitalist spaces and practices. This leads us to ignore the fact that, for most of the time, most of us live our lives in social relations that are decidedly non-capitalistic (we act out of love, do things for fun, give our time freely and so on). Gibson-Graham aim to use feminist theorising and empirical research in order to make visible and promote non-capitalist forms of economy. Their goal is to develop ‘alternative ways of thinking economy outside of dominant capitalocentric conceptions’.

A similar approach is developed by Leyshon, Lee and Williams (2003) in *Alternative Economic Spaces*. The essays in this collection take up Gibson-Graham's idea that we should 'think and perform 'the economy' otherwise. The political importance of this task is clearly identified. At a time when the rich and powerful routinely announce the hegemony and inevitability of capitalist way of organising economic and social life, the essays seek to show that there are already existing alternatives to the mainstream of global neo-liberalism. The book consists of a series of empirical studies of 'actually existing' alternative economies. These include: credit unions, Local Exchange Trading Systems, 'retro-retailing', informal work, employee-ownership, the social economy, and 'back-to-the-land' migration. Colin Williams, one of the co-editors of the collection, has subsequently published *A Commodified World? Mapping the limits of capitalism* (2005). Williams sets out to survey the data to support the claim of the 'commodification thesis' which is defined as the belief that goods and services are increasingly produced and delivered by capitalist firms for a profit under conditions of market exchange. He suggests that even though there may be disagreement about the desirability of this development and debate about the speed at which this is occurring, there is widespread acceptance of the thesis among business leaders, politicians, journalists and academic commentators. Williams presents data to suggest that significant and increasing amounts of time are spent in subsistence work, non-monetary and not-for-profit activities. In addition, the geography of commodification is uneven, and varies for different socio-economic groups. Once we move beyond the idea that economic space is dominated by commodity exchange, Williams argues, we are able to imagine

different ways of organising economic space. For example, economic policies might be designed to build upon people's existing networks of provision, and there could be attempts to foster plural economies. Though both books recognise the challenge involved realising sustainable alternatives, their contribution is to alert readers to the possibility that 'another world is possible'.

Curriculum implications

I argue that it is productive to place the vision of economic space presented by QCA alongside the alternative economic geographies discussed in the previous section. The effect is to remind us that there may be ways of organising economic and social life differently, and that the story about a global economic space where employment is precarious and the ideal worker is endlessly flexible and adaptable is not the only one to be told. With this in mind, teachers can construct educational experiences that highlight the openness and possibility of doing things differently. For example, geography teachers who use Dicken's *Global Shift* to teach about the processes of globalisation might stress how the text is almost wholly concerned with the actions and decisions of powerful Transnational Corporations (TNCs) rather than the lives of their workers. In *Global Shift*, workers are reduced to 'costs'. They might use Castree et al (2004) *Spaces of Work* to develop activities that stress the importance of the geographies of work in understanding global capitalism, pointing out that 'labourers do not live and work on a global isotropic plain nor on the head of a pin'. What is important to note about their perspective is that it is difficult to reach conclusions about what is 'good' and 'bad' for workers, and much of this

complication is due to geography – things are context specific which means that they are conditional on ‘how place and space (which is to say, geographical scales) articulate in particular cases’. They are arguing for the importance of the geographical imagination – a way of thinking space and place.

Conclusion

If the problematic of curriculum studies is what should be planned, taught and learned in schools, then this paper has attempted to ask about the geographical imaginations that underpin the curriculum. In analysing the representations of economic space found in school geography, the intention was to suggest that such representations are never neutral, but are based on certain ideas about spatial and social relations. Thus texts which suggest that we live in a global economy dominated by powerful multinational corporations provide a specific view of how the world works. The analysis of texts opened the way for a consideration of recent work in economic geography that highlights the existence of the ‘proliferative economy’ which stresses that economic space is made up of a rich diversity of capitalist and non-capitalist activities. This is not simply a theoretical nicety. Once economic space is recognised as characterised by a diversity of activities, ‘political action and the promise of alternatives become imaginable in way inconceivable before’ (Barnes 2005:75). At the same time, there is a need to avoid the idealist view that change is effectively a matter of changing our geographical imaginations. Hudson (2001) argues for the importance of understanding the forces of political economy:

“Thus, it is of utmost importance to stress that we live in a world in which capitalist social relations are dominant, the rationale for production is profit, class and class inequalities do remain, and that wealth distribution does matter”(p.5).

Barnes has recently argued that the ‘central pedagogical task is to find the means to teach our students an economic geography intellectually appropriate to the twenty-first century and not that of a previous age’ (2006:409). QCAs vision of the economic future is one such attempt; my aim in this article is to suggest that there are others and that the school curriculum is an appropriate place to start explore alternatives.

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