

# CARING SOCIETIES

## FEMINIST LESSONS FOR THE FOUNDATIONAL ECONOMY

Dr. Corinna Dengler | Keynote 6th Foundational Economy Conference Vienna | September 15th, 2023

# GUIDING QUESTION

HOW DO CARING SOCIETIES AND A FOUNDATIONAL ECONOMY RESEMBLE EACH OTHER AND WHAT CAN FE SCHOLARSHIP LEARN FROM FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON CARE?

# AGENDA

1. Caring Societies
2. Caring Societies & Foundational Economy: Common Denominators
3. Feminist Lessons for Foundational Economy Scholarship
4. Conclusion





# WHAT ARE CARING SOCIETIES?



# DEFINITIONS OF CARE

## NARROW

- Work that entails an interpersonal caring relationship, mostly defined as a **caring activity provided by a care-giver to a care receiver**.
- Characteristics: limited autonomy, vulnerability, asymmetrical power relations, emotionality.  
→ focus on **dependency**
- Tronto (1993) distinguishes 4 phases of care: caring about, taking care of, care-giving, and care receiving.

## BROAD(ER)

- Care as „individual and common ability to provide the political, social, material, and emotional conditions that allow the vast majority of people and living creatures on this planet to thrive – along with the planet itself“ (The Care Collective 2020: 6).
- Caring societies, caring economy, caring cities, caring commons etc.  
→ focus on **interdependency**
- Tronto (2013) adds a 5th phase, namely the phase of caring with.

# CARING SOCIETIES

- The starting point for thinking about caring societies is the current **care crisis** (Dowling 2021) in its interconnections with other crises (economic, ecological, of democracy etc.).
- **Caring societies** acknowledge that “the foundations of the wealth and well-being of the world rest upon the sphere of social reproduction and the labor of care” (FaDA 2020).
- Caring societies follow broad(er) definitions and **focus on interdependency** and relationality.
- In order to live up to these broad(er) definitions, caring societies need to **embrace actual care dependencies** (i.e. narrow definitions) and collectively take care of them.
- Caring societies have to **venture beyond caring communities** and require a multi-level perspective.
- A focus lies on the question of how to provide **good care for all** within planetary boundaries and without reproducing intersectional inequalities.





# FOUNDATIONAL ECONOMY & CARING SOCIETIES: COMMON DENOMINATORS



# FOUNDATIONAL ECONOMY & CARING SOCIETIES: COMMON DENOMINATORS

- Economics as the study of (social) **provisioning**
- **Collective consumption** and infrastructures, because „we must depend on others to provide for us, as we must, in turn, care for them“ (Sayer 2019: 42)
- Paradoxical relation between societal relevance and **underpayment** of foundational work
- Shift to more localized, contextualized, **embedded and embodied** forms of provisioning
- ... BUT:

“Given the FE’s concern with those parts of the economy that support everyday life (education, healthcare, eldercare, childcare, food etc.) there is an intersection with debates on the work of social reproduction. Yet FE literature currently has a blind spot when it comes to unwaged work, which remains overwhelmingly performed by women. Current framings of the providential FE mostly limit their understanding to public services provided by the welfare state (such as unemployment benefits) or para-state (such as elderly care homes or sports facilities), and indeed to work that is predominantly waged.” (Russel et al., 2022: 1073)



# FEMINIST LESSONS FOR THE FOUNDATIONAL ECONOMY





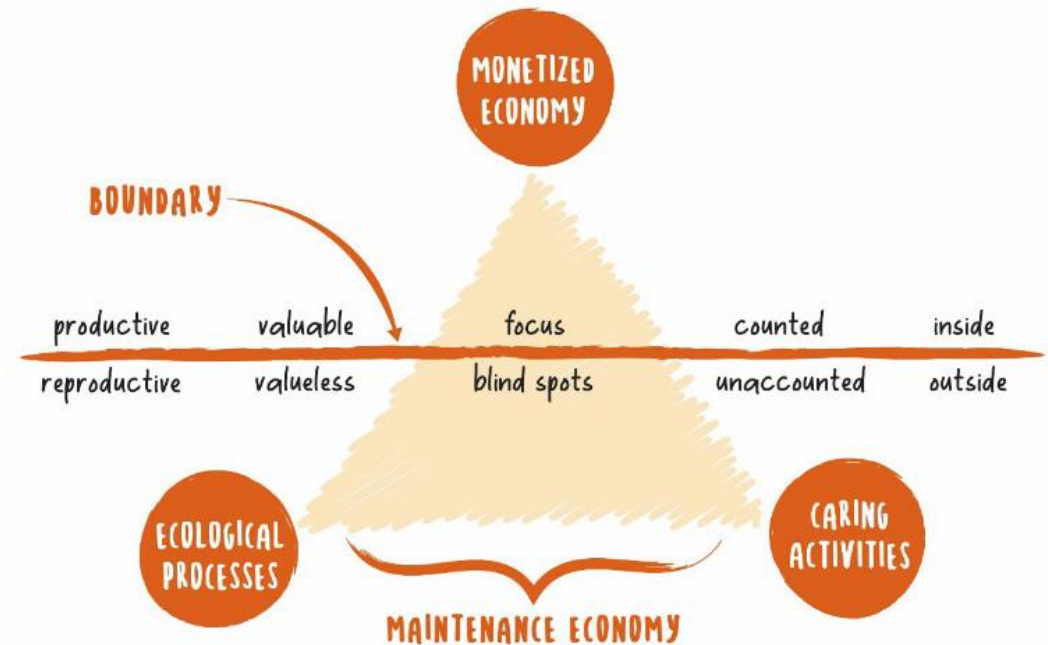
# UNPAID CARE WORK AS „THE CORE ECONOMY“?

|                             | Form of consumption  | Examples  |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Core Economy</b>         | Non-economic because „we must love one another and die“      | Parenting, voluntary action etc.  |
| <b>Foundational Economy</b> | Daily essentials via infrastructure of networks and branches | Material e.g. food, and utilities; Providential, health and care, education, social housing |

Source: Earle/Froud/Johal/Williams: *Foundational Economy and Foundational Politics* (2018: 41)

**Proposition I:** Unpaid care work in the core economy socially reproduces human livelihood and – as cross-cutting rather than separate zone – constitutes the foundation/*infra*-structure of other economic zones

## THE DOMINANT ECONOMIC MODEL



Source: C. Dengler and B. Strunk. (2018). The Monetized Economy Versus Care and the Environment: Degrowth Perspectives On Reconciling an Antagonism. *Feminist Economics* 24(3): 160–83.

Figure derived from: *Radical Pathways Beyond GDP-Report* (Butt et al. 2023: 13)

# WHAT DO WE REGARD AS INFRASTRUCTURE?



**Proposition 2:** From a feminist perspective, infrastructures not only concern physical infrastructure or social infrastructure defined as “social spaces [...] such as community centers, parks and libraries” (Hall 2020: 89). Rather, they should embrace “social infrastructure as social reproduction” (ibid.: 83) and foreground questions of labour, gender, and care.





# WHICH DEBATES DO WE REGARD AS FOUNDATIONAL?

- The Social Provisioning Approach (Power 2004) is foundational for feminist economics – but barely mentioned in literature on provisioning systems (Dengler and Plank, in press).
- The Network Caring Economy (*Netzwerk Vorsorgendes Wirtschaften*) with its principles of care, cooperation, and taking the essentials of a good life as a guideline resembles FE thinking and could create valuable synergies.
- ...

**Proposition 3:** While some feminist ‘buzzwords’ get increasing attention, feminist literature is often structurally excluded from academic and policy debates. When foregrounding care, these early contributions should be re-valued as foundational for FE thinking.



Feminist Economics

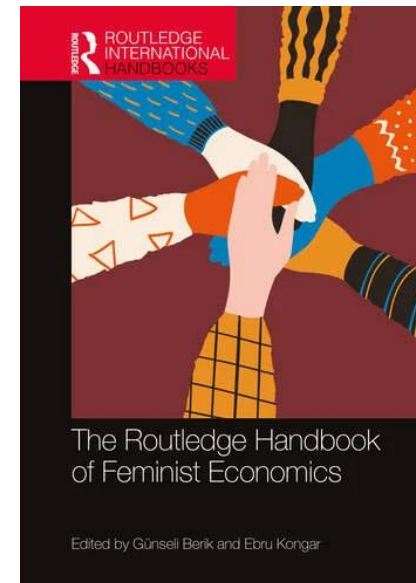
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Social Provisioning as a Starting Point for Feminist Economics

Marilyn Power

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The Routledge Handbook of Feminist Economics

Edited by Güneşli Berik and Ebru Kongar

# CONCLUSION

- Foundational economy scholarship and feminist research on care, a caring economy, and caring societies share a general outlook and the normative vision of the good life (and good care) for all within planetary boundaries.
- But: The synergies between the two streams are not yet fully exploited.
- Some propositions that FE scholars may want to consider are:
  - Rethinking the concept of the “core economy”: Is it a cross-cutting rather than a separate zone?
  - Reframing physical and social infrastructures from the vantage point of social reproduction
  - Critically engaging with and revaluing the (historical) significance of feminist contributions for FE thinking

This conference, which puts care as a central theme throughout the conference, is a great example of how to foster the dialogue between FE and feminist research on care. Let's start from here!



THANK YOU!



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