
Introduction

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1 Introduction

For all the discussion about the thematic, methodological, and paradigmatic alignment of economics, many economics curricula still insist on detaching the subject of ‘the economy’ from its societal, political, historical, and cultural contexts. While calls for a renewal of economics teaching and research are neither new nor especially original, their reach has been growing steadily.

Pluralist, interdisciplinary, multi-paradigmatic perspectives, and (critical) reflection coalesce under the auspices of socioeconomic, which is acquiring an increasingly sharply-defined profile. In addition to plurality and the multi-paradigmatic perspective, socio-economics insists that university and subject didactic concepts must relate the disciplines of economics, sociology, ethics, and politics. The objective is thus an open, multi- and transdisciplinary economics.

While the contributions collected in this symposium differ in their thematic, methodological, and paradigmatic approaches, they nevertheless share the following elements:

- 1 Economic activity and the economy are understood as cultural and social phenomena that are produced by people and can therefore be changed by them.
- 2 People and organisations – and their economic activity – are embedded in society and culture. Economic thinking and action must therefore always be understood in the context of morals, ethics and politics, as well as time and space. An economic education understood in this way is socio-economic education.
- 3 Because of the embeddedness of economic actors, economic phenomena should be viewed from the vantage of different disciplines. This makes inter- and transdisciplinary perspectives especially useful for critical reflexive consideration of economic matters.

- 4 The academic analysis of economic phenomena can and should involve different methods and methodologies.
- 5 The methodological individualism of neo-classical economic theory is inadequate as the sole starting point, focus, or reference of economic education, because it fails to account for human nature in society, and constrains the understanding of economic matters to an atomistic selfish instrumentality disregarding institutions and structures.

In terms of economic theory these five elements mean, firstly, critical scrutiny of the axioms and methodology of orthodox economic research. Secondly, it requires a critical appreciation of the predominant discourse – which dominates introductory economics courses and textbooks, and thus shapes the thinking of new students – while offering students alternative approaches. In terms of pedagogy, the presentation of economic laws, and for example, the definitive economic rationality is never value-free. Instead, encouraging constructions that transcend a narrow understanding of reason as economic rationality. Economics education concepts that slavishly follow the standard theory and its consequentialism assume selfish instrumentality to be the norm and the nature of economic life. Pedagogically, this must be viewed critically, given that our preponderant objective as teachers is to empower students as fully-capable members of society: self-determined and self-confident, critical and enlightened, supportive, and empathic.

2 Contents of the symposium

Georg Tafner in his article ‘Economic education is socio-economic education: foundations of a reflexive business and economic education’, places the critical and reflexive subject at the heart of economic matters and discusses this from the perspective of reflexive economic pedagogy. In the *wheel of socio-economic education* he summarises his findings for socio-economic education in a basal didactic instrument and shows that – alongside the economic – the didactic/pedagogical, social, political, and ethical dimensions can and should be integrated into subject didactics. In this way economic education becomes socio-economic education.

Tim Engartner, in his article ‘Cornerstones of socio-economic education: on the importance of contextualising economic issues’, discusses the mainstream economic didactics and demonstrates how cultural, historical, political, ethical, and societal influences are neglected – even though their relevance for the analysis of economic phenomena is thematically persuasive, didactically obvious, and convincing in terms of educational psychology. He discusses the epistemological, education policy, and subject didactic deficits of neo-classical theory and outlines the education theory assumptions, subject didactic principles, and education policy implications of a socio-economic education.

Reinhold Hedtke explores the central positions of the social science approach, in his article ‘The social science principle in socio-economic didactics’, and the subject orientation for socio-economic education, where the social science principle possesses a long tradition in economic education. This epistemological reference to social science differentiates socio-economics education from orthodox economic education, justifiable in terms of education theory, subject didactics, and disciplinary considerations.

Silja Graupe examines how everyday economic life can become a location of learning in her article, ‘“To see the world with different eyes”: thoughts on existential orientation in socio-economic education’. A consistent orientation on human economic existence leads her to a socio-economic education based on existential philosophy, which has the potential to form a counterpole to today’s standard economics. The existential orientation is understood not only as an explicit turn to subject and lifeworld but – going deeper still – to the actual human economic existence in the sense of a concrete, never absolutely objectifiable lived reality.

Christian Fridrich investigates the subject of geography and economics at secondary schools in Austria in the article ‘Socio-economic education in the school subject ‘geography and economics education’ in Austria: history, trends, issues and attitudes’, and specifically the social-science-driven integration of geographical and economic education. Economic questions and topics are primarily addressed in combination with human geography and socio-political content, with matters economic perceived as socially embedded and accordingly as (individually and collectively) influenceable. Additionally, the school implementation practice of socio-economic education is empirically analysed.

We hope these five articles contribute to understanding socio-economics, and to solidify its importance in economics education.