

How Interdisciplinary is Interdisciplinary Economics?

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Abstract

Interdisciplinarity of economics still proliferates. Interdisciplinary colonization can be substituted for simply interdisciplinarity. Interdisciplinarity of economics can be translated or mapped into the fact that economics is colonizing (or imperialising) and being colonised by non-economics disciplines in the name of interdisciplinary economics. Evidence indicates that colonization of economics by non-economics discipline(s) is more powerful than colonization of non-economics discipline(s) by economics.

Keywords : economics, discipline, interdisciplinarity, colonisation, imperialism

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“All the human sciences interlock and can always be used to interpret one another : their frontiers become blurred, intermediary and composite disciplines multiply endlessly, and in the end, their proper object may even disappear altogether” (Foucault, 1970, p. 357).

Only the title of the *Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics*, which is being published by SAGE since 1985, has induced me to write this article. Further, the title of an article by Mark Blaug (2001), “No History of Ideas, Please, We're Economists” encouraged me to shorten this article. Blaug (2001) clearly warned against too excessive emphasis upon history of ideas and against too little regard for the discussion about the core ideas in the article. Perhaps, John Kenneth Galbraith once said : Economists are most economical with ideas. The shortest article ever published in an economics journal was written by Cook (1972) : A “one line” proof of the Slutsky equation, which had about 350 words including four equations.

This short article has been written to disclose that economics as an academic discipline is colonising (or imperialising) and is being colonised by non-economics academic disciplines in the name of interdisciplinary economics.

By any criterion, economics has acquired the status of interdisciplinarity. Secondly, economics has multitude of interdisciplinarity, which can be classified into two sets: (a) Set of X economics, where the prefix X stands for disciplinary adjective or noun (e.g. geographical economics or family economics) and (b) Set of economic Z, where the suffix Z stands for disciplinary noun (e.g. economic sociology). Thirdly, interdisciplinarity of economics still proliferates.

The relevant examples of the Set of X economics are alphabetically as follows: A : agricultural economics, anthropological economics, architectural economics, astronomical economics, aviation economics ; B : behavioural economics, biological economics, biomass economics, bioenergy economics, biophysical economics, business economics ; C : caring economics, civilian economics, climatological economics, complexity economics, communicative economics, communist economics, computational economics, conflict

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economics, consumer economics, cosmological economics (cosmoeconomics), criminological economics, cultural economics ; D : dairy economics, defence economics, degrowth economics, demographical economics, development economics ; E : ecological economics, econometrics, education economics, energy economics, engineering economics, entrepreneurial economics, entomological economics, environmental economics, ergodicity economics, ergonomic economics, ethical economics, evolutionary economics ; F : family economics, financial economics, feminist economics, forensic economics, forestry economics ; G : genoconomics, geoeconomics, geographical economics, geological economics, growth economics, green economics, gender economics ; H : happiness economics, health economics, hermeneutical economics, humanistic economics, human resource economics ; I : ideological economics, industrial economics, information economics, infrastructural economics, innovation economics, institutional economics ; L : labour economics, land economics, law economics, library economics, local economics ; M : mathematical economics, managerial economics, medical economics, mental health economics, metaphysical economics, military economics, mineral economics, monetary economics, moral economics, mythological economics ; N : neurological economics, neurophysiological economics, neuropsychological economics ; O : oceanographic economics ; P : pathological economics, participatory economics, peace economics, philosophical economics, physical economics (or physioeconomics), physiological economics, poor economics, psychophysiological economics, political economics, psychological economics, public economics ; R : regional economics, regulatory economics, religious economics, resource economics, rural economics ; S : semiotic economics, sexual economics, social economics, social ecological economics, sociological economics, spiritual economics, sports economics, strategic economics, sustainability economics, systems economics ; T : theological economics, thermoeconomics, transport economics, telecommunication economics ; U : underdevelopment economics, urban economics, underclass economics ; W : warfare economics, welfare economics ; and Z : zoological economics.

On the other hand, the relevant examples of the Set of economic Z are as follows : economic agriculture, economic anthropology, economic archaeology, economic architecture, economic astronomy ; economic biology, economic botany ; economic cosmology ; economic development, economic demography ; econophysics, economic environment, economic ergonomics, economic entomology, economic ethics, economic epidemiology, economic ethnography, economic ethnomusicology ; economic feminism ; economic geography, economic geology, economic growth ; economic happiness, economic health, economic hermeneutics ; economic institution, economic infrastructure ; economic management, economic mythology, economic morality ; economic neurology ; economic oceanography, economic ornithology ; economic politics, economic philosophy, economic psychology ; economic resource, economic religion ; economic sociology, economic sustainability ; economic theology, economic thermodynamics ; economic welfare, economic warfare, and economic zoology.

Now, let us differentiate between X economics (where X stands for disciplinary adjective or noun) and economic Z (where Z stands for disciplinary noun). We are aware of the difference between mathematical philosophy and philosophical mathematics : Mathematical philosophy is the result of mathematisation of philosophy and it emerges from philosophy, while philosophical mathematics is the result of philosophisation of mathematics and it arises from mathematics. Let us, for example, assume that X economics is geographical economics and economic Z is economic geography. In truth, geographical economics, which is the result of geographisation of economics, emerges from economics, but economic geography, which is the result of economisation of geography, arises from geography. Analogously, sociological economics, which is the result of sociologisation of economics, arises from economics, but economic sociology, which is the result of economisation of sociology, emerges from sociology. Thus, X economics, which is the result of Xisation of economics, comes from economics, while economic Z, which is the result of economisation of Z, comes from Z. In better words, X economics (e.g. mathematical economics) or Xisation of economics (e.g. mathematisation of

economics) means colonisation of economics by non-economics discipline(s), while economic Z (e.g. economic biology) or economisation of Z (e.g. economisation of biology) implies colonisation of non-economics academic discipline(s) by economics. From the foregoing examples of Set of X economics and Set of economic Z, it is amply clear that colonisation of economics by non-economics discipline(s) is more powerful than colonisation of non-economics discipline(s) by economics.

Hence, following Balkin (1996), it can be emphasized that interdisciplinarity means colonisation of one (or more) academic discipline(s) by another (or other) academic discipline(s). Let us see what Balkin (1996) actually argued about interdisciplinarity :

“Interdisciplinarity results when different disciplines try to colonise each other. If the takeover is successful, work is no longer seen as interdisciplinary ; rather, it is seen as wholly internal to the discipline as newly constituted” (p. 952).

“Interdisciplinarity is an attempt by disciplines to expand their empires, to colonise and to take over other disciplines by extending their sphere of influence over them” (p. 960).

If this colonisation is sufficiently successful, it will not be understood as colonisation. It will simply be seen as part of the general methodology of the colonised discipline. The old discipline continues to exist, but with a new methodology, a new set of questions for study, or new criteria of Kuhnian normal science. Alternatively, the colonised discipline will simply seem to disappear, absorbed into the conquering discipline or reconceptualised as a subspecialty (pp. 960 – 961).

“There is no reason why a discipline could not be colonising while it is being colonised” (p. 963).

“Moreover, economics has itself been successfully colonised by other disciplines, particularly mathematics and statistics” (p. 963).

“Disciplines colonise primarily not through invaders but through turncoats – that is, through persons trained primarily in the host discipline” (pp. 968 – 969).

Economic(s) imperialism was first coined by Kenneth Ewart Boulding (1969). But Gray Stanley Becker was the first economic imperialist in the world of economics. Many literatures reveal that economics is imperialising non - economics disciplines. The examples of such literatures can chronologically be given by : (a) Stillman (1955), (b) Brenner (1980), (c) Stigler (1984), (d) Hirshleifer (1985), (e) Radnitzky and Bernholz (1987), (f) Rothbard (1989), (g) Siegers (1992), (h) Udehn (1992), (i) Buckley and Casson (1993), (j) Zaratiegui (1999), (k) Fine (2000), (l) Lazear (2000), (m) Maki (2002), (n) Rubinstein (2006), (o) Fine (2009), (p) Fine and Milonakis (2009), (q) Maki (2009), (r) Kuorikoski and Lehtinen (2010), (s) Brock (2012), (t) Klonschinski (2014), (u) Bogenhold (2016), (v) Pinto (2016), (w) Marchionatti and Cedrini (2017) and (x) Falgueras - Sorauren (2018).

Further, the imperialism of economics over non - economics disciplines will be evident from the remarks about economics of the following authors :

- (i) Jacob Viner : Economics is what economists do (Boulding, 1941, p.1).
- (ii) Frank Knight : Economists are those who do economics (Bogenhold, 2016, p. 2).
- (iii) H. Geoffrey Brennan : Economics is what economists attempt (Nevile, 1998, p. 132).
- (iv) Robert W. Clower : Economics is a social astronomy (Clower, 1994, p. 807).
- (v) Ariel Rubinstein : Economics is a culture and not a science (Rubinstein, 2008, p. 493).
- (vi) Jack Amariglio, Stephen Resnick, and Richard Wolff : No discipline of economics exists. Or, rather, no unified discipline exists (Amariglio, Resnick, & Wolff, 1990, p. 109).

(vii) Philip Mirowski : Economics is social physics and physics is nature's economics (Mirowski, 1989).

Moreover, the article, “The Superiority of Economists” by Fourcade, Ollion, and Algan (2015) is an ample indication of the imperialism of economics over non-economics disciplines.

However, I am also aware of inverted economic(s) imperialism that is why Duhs (2005) wrote: “Inverting Economic Imperialism...,” while Michie, Oughton, and Wilkinson (2002) wrote: “Against the New Economic Imperialism....”

If we are ardent to know the problem of interdisciplinarity of economics or any other discipline, the following literatures may be relevant : Fish's (1989), “Being Interdisciplinary is so Very Hard to do,” Balkin's (1996), “Interdisciplinarity as Colonisation,” Lynch's (2006) “It's not Easy Being Interdisciplinary,” and Graff's (2016), “The Problem of Interdisciplinarity in Theory, Practice and History.”

It can be concluded that economics as an academic discipline is colonising and being colonised by non-economics academic disciplines in the name of interdisciplinary economics.

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