Imagining and building more equitable and democratic systems: lessons from Bay Area organizations

By

Tara Mohtadi

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Authored by: Tara Mohtadi
Department of Urban Studies and Planning, May 16, 2023

Certified by: Lawrence Vale
Ford Professor of Urban Design and Planning, Department of Urban Studies and Planning; Associate Dean, School of Architecture and Planning; Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by: Ceasar McDowell
Professor of Practice of Civic Design, Department of Urban Studies and Planning; MCP Committee Chair

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ABSTRACT
America's democratic system has been built atop politics of exclusion and oppression. While strides have been made in enfranchisement and inclusion, communities continue to be systematically marginalized, dispossessed and disempowered. Processes illuminate the often invisible purpose and values that underlie systems, but as this research discusses, an overemphasis on process as the problem and solution has limited the potential to create substantive change.

To build a true democracy requires both imagining and building alternative political and economic systems that rest on the premise of equity and collective power. Social movements are at the forefront of transforming oppressive systems, and marginalized communities in particular are often on the frontlines of the struggle for justice. Collective and cooperative organizations have emerged within and alongside movements as explicit infrastructures that both embody and support social change. They form to respond to unjust material conditions in their communities related to land, labor, wealth and housing, while simultaneously being embedded in sustained movements, coalition building and policy advocacy efforts to address the root cause of these injustices.

Through numerous conversations with organizations located in the San Francisco Bay Area, this research highlights how systems that foster shared power are not only imaginable, but are being built. In sharing learnings from these organizations, this research tells the story of their challenges and visions, their various approaches to enacting change, and how they are linked to broader networks of mobilization. As microcosms of a truer democracy, collectives and cooperatives have implications for reshaping the relationship between people and power, at the individual, organizational, and societal level. Ultimately, this thesis presents these models as a pathway for transitioning from an extractive to a regenerative economy, and from concentrated to collective power.

Thesis supervisor: Lawrence Vale
Ford Professor of Urban Design and Planning, Department of Urban Studies and Planning, MIT

Thesis reader: Ceasar McDowell
Professor of the Practice of Civic Design, Department of Urban Studies and Planning, MIT

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"I don't believe democracy exists; indeed, it never has. Instead, the ideal of self-rule is exactly that, an ideal, a principle that always occupies a distant and retreating horizon, something we must continue to reach toward yet fail to grasp. The promise of democracy is not the one made and betrayed by the powerful; it is a promise that can be kept only by regular people through vigilance, invention, and struggle."[1]

1 Astra Taylor, *Democracy May Not Exist, but We'll Miss It When It's Gone* (Metropolitan Books, 2019).

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Who is best suited to deliberate upon and solve for the problems facing a community? This question has far-reaching implications for the way our political processes are set up, and who they are set up for. Our modern-day political system rests on the premise that the responsibility should fall upon elected officials to represent our demands. But whether those in power actually represent the demographics, values, and needs of their constituency is a questionable assumption at best. We have undoubtedly strayed from the original notion of democracy and its Ancient Greek roots of the people (demos) holding power (kratos). The fractured version of democracy we are left with reveals deep-seated inequities over questions of who counts as people, and how and where they hold power.

Local decision making, especially as it relates to planning and the built environment, has direct and tangible impacts on people's lives; at the municipal, community, and neighborhood level scales, social structures are manifested in the physical environment.[2] At these local scales, there are a variety of mechanisms set up for people to participate in decision making, from town halls to public comments, but these processes often fail to represent the actual population–especially the voices of the most marginalized–let alone extend authority to those voices. It is in this power void that social movements often take shape.

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework is an approach to research, education, and action that is oriented around collaboration, and towards social transformation.[3] It advocates for those who are most impacted by an issue to be at the center of problem-solving and decision making. In the context of academic research, power structures traditionally assume the researcher as the expert and authority and participants as the subject. PAR reframes this dynamic, and positions participants as researchers themselves, acknowledging that their proximity to the issue in question and their lived experience is a critical source of information. Shifting power through reimagining relationships opens a realm of possibilities into realizing alternative futures. As Eve Tuck notes, "PAR forces a collective to ask and answer, 'How do we believe that change happens?'... 'Does change happen incrementally, over time?' Or, 'does change happen like the turn of a new page?' Each requires a different, even opposite, strategy of action."[4] Translating the reflective principles of PAR into the realm of decision making raises questions such as, how does the relationship we have with each other, and with our institutions, reflect the world we want to live in? What empowers or dispossesses us from agency as individuals, and power as a collective?

Our political and economic systems are largely built on hierarchies that empower a few at the expense of the many. The resulting inequities manifest as exclusion and dispossession from decision making, land, labor, wealth, and housing. To address injustice requires both addressing people's material conditions, and transforming the systems that form the basis for unequal conditions. Social movements are often at the forefront of calling attention to and resisting injustice. But resistance necessitates imagination and transformation to be turned into action. Organizations that accompany social movements play a vital role in imagining and institutionalizing alternatives that prioritize collective power. They offer different ways of knowing, being, and doing through reimagining how we relate to one another, to our employers, to our community, and to our government, in order to build a more equitable society. By resisting, imagining, and building, movements and organizations offer a pathway to collective transformation.

2 Andrew Binet et al., "Ownership of Change: Participatory Development of a Novel Latent Construct for Neighborhoods and Health Equity Research," *Social Science & Medicine* 309 (September 2022): 115234, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2022.115234.
3 Sara Louise Kindon, Rachel Pain, and Mike Kesby, eds., *Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods: Connecting People, Participation and Place,* Routledge Studies in Human Geography 22 (London; New York: Routledge, 2007), 9–18.
4 Eve Tuck. "Re-Visioning Action: Participatory Action Research and Indigenous Theories of Change." *The Urban Review* 41, no. 1 (March 2009): 47–65. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-008-0094-x.

CHAPTER 2. WHAT IS WRONG WITH OUR DEMOCRACY?

2.1 The flaws

Over the last half century, Americans have lost trust and confidence in political institutions, feel less represented by the political system, and political participation has trailed in comparison to other countries.[5] This shift is symptomatic of increasing economic inequality, coupled with segregation–both dynamics that contribute to polarization, and as a result, to less social trust amongst people, and trust towards institutions.[6]

Contemporary democracy has become an arm of capitalism, viewing the citizen as a consumer whose votes and money are in high demand. Our political systems no longer represent the true public when that public is simultaneously manipulated and suppressed. Democracy's challenges are further exacerbated by barriers to equitable representation, such as voter suppression, misinformation, and increasing polarization. The lack of participation and representation is rooted in deep-seated flaws in our political systems, and to mechanisms that have failed to adapt to an increasingly diverse constituency.

The origin behind who is allowed access to power is tied to the country's foundation on capitalism. The Founding Fathers saw property as tied to personal independence, because it would allow for the autonomous control of one's resources. The idea was that this independence would then pave the way for people to participate in democracy willingly and act in the interest of the public good, because their rights were not tied to someone else's provision of resources.[7] Of course, which people were granted property rights and by extension voting rights, was confined to a narrow definition of white males. Furthermore, the commodification of Black people as property via slavery not only excluded, but actively oppressed any access to agency and power. The original American republicans saw property as power not only because of the material value of property in and of itself, but because the few they allowed to access wealth and agency could only do so at the expense of others. In this light, our democracy is not in crisis, but perhaps operating precisely as intended.

Inclusion in America's political system is defined through exclusion, and power is granted not innate. As a result, while strides have been made in enfranchising marginalized groups, struggles for power are not yet over. Power is tied to choice, and to influence. Power is equated with the right to vote, yet citizens don't vote on every issue, and economic players have disproportionate influence over decision making mechanisms. Power also takes the form of who has the right to run for office, and as a result, who represents and who is represented in the political system.[8] Elections are our primary mechanism for authorizing decisions by these figures to be made, but successful elections necessitate representation and informed decision making, neither of which we adequately achieve. For one, the lack of deliberative procedures incentivizes an uninformed constituency. That is, many citizens don't vote, and those who do, may unknowingly vote in "ignorance", because the costs associated with educating themselves–such as time, energy, or access to information and resources–

5 Pew Research Center, June 2022, "Americans' Views of Government: Decades of Distrust, Enduring Support for Its Role." https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2022/06/PP_2022.06.06_views-of-government_REPORT.pdf; Drew DeSilver, "Turnout in U.S. Has Soared in Recent Elections but by Some Measures Still Trails That of Many Other Countries," Pew Research Center, December 15, 2022, https://pewrsr.ch/3WpFhHd.
6 Henry E. Brady and Thomas B. Kent. "Fifty Years of Declining Confidence & Increasing Polarization in Trust in American Institutions." *Daedalus* 151, no. 4 (November 15, 2022): 43–66. https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_a_01943.
7 Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Published for the Omohundro In, 1996).
8 Danielle Allen, *Justice by Means of Democracy* (University of Chicago Press, 2023).

are too high.[9] Traditional polling and elections, therefore, offer a limited (and even inaccurate) snapshot of public opinion.

Furthermore, our democracy has been warped by majority rule and winner-takes-all mechanisms, in which obtaining 50% + 1 of votes has become the goal, rather than bare minimum. Campaign strategies lean on the bare minimum and focus more on casting a negative light on their opponents, than making efforts to capture a wider set of interests, let alone strive towards consensus. This leaves the remaining 49% of the population with their second choice, in the best-case scenario, or what is more likely, a completely conflicting set of interests. While our elections and political processes are certainly worth improving, process is often overemphasized, both as the problem and solution. Whether process improvements are sufficient to address deeper issues of unequal power and warped representation depend on how it is used.

2.2 Participating in a flawed democracy

Elections characterize our democracy, but elections are infrequent and imperfect. Participatory processes have been developed as both a form of accountability that can check the power of elected officials, a mechanism for transparency, and a way to solicit public input. But all too often, participatory processes are decoupled from the goal they serve, and therefore tend to uphold power in the places it already exists or be misused to justify an end.

Public comments

Public comments often consist of an authority presenting information, and the public providing feedback. The public comment process is usually preceded by a public notice period, in which the public is invited to share their opinion. In San Francisco, the City's Planning Department, for example, posts public notices for certain types of land use and development projects. These notices are distributed in the form of physical and digital fliers to nearby residents, and often include information about a project, along with contact information for the project developer and/or staff from the Planning Department, and if a public hearing is held for the project, information about attending the hearing. Public hearings are meetings open to the public, held by the Planning Commission–a group of appointed and elected officials–on a monthly basis, to discuss projects, and solicit public comments on any scheduled agenda item. Increasingly, efforts are being made to make the various features of the public comment process more accessible and inclusive, such as translating the notices into multilingual materials and ensuring they are "jargon-free," posting notices both physically and digitally, and providing resources to better equip project developers in engagement and to convey information more clearly to the public.

Because public comments are designed as an opt-in system, they generally attract people who either are already invested in politics generally or a topic specifically, or if they do draw a wider audience, tend to do so because the issue at hand provokes widespread contention.[10] Who participates also reflects inequities around who has time and capacity to participate, who has access to information, and who is willing to speak in a formal public forum: the incentives to not participate are high. In a study on public meetings related to zoning in the Boston area, researchers found that the dominant voices were older, male, longtime residents, voters in local elections, and homeowners.[11] This pattern is exacerbated by campaigning, organizing, or outreach efforts that use funding and existing power to garner support from certain factions, and create the illusion of representation.

9 "Deliberative Polling," Participedia, https://participedia.net/method/147

10 "Notice and Request for Public Comment," Participedia, https://participedia.net/method/5306.

11 Katherine Einstein Levine, Maxwell Palmer, and David M. Glick. "Who Participates in Local Government? Evidence from Meeting Minutes." OpenBU, 2018. https://open.bu.edu/handle/2144/34276

More diversified approaches can help to include a larger cross-section of the community; cities are undertaking efforts to conduct more robust and intentional outreach to marginalized communities and creating various modes of input outside of the traditional town hall setting. Even if these improvements created a process in which everyone had an equal opportunity to provide input, decision makers are not obligated to incorporate public input into policies or projects. More often, it seems that public comments are used to legitimate decisions that have already been made.[12]

But the procedural limitations of public comments are not the primary bottlenecks to creating a more representative decision making process. Trying to solve the substantive issue of inclusion through a regulatory tool like public comments is insufficient in addressing the deeper seated values of power and justice. Where public comments become especially harmful is when the process lacks transparency and clarity around the intent. If decision makers perceive public comments as representative, rather than a distorted representation of the public, then their influence will be skewed. And if the public expects their participation to influence an outcome, when that was never the goal, then the process is likely to perpetuate distrust and frustration. Shared decision making requires dialogue, and dialogue necessitates shared power: two components that are often missing from public comment procedures.

Ballot initiatives

In the US, 21 states have direct initiative processes–a form of direct democracy wherein citizens propose initiatives, and those that garner enough support to end up on the ballot are decided upon via a referendum or public vote.[13] A handful of additional states allow for indirect initiatives, in which the initiative is submitted to elected officials who make the final decision, as more of an adversarial process. Ballot initiatives can be a pathway for voters to demand policies that may otherwise be impossible in a landscape of increasingly gridlocked or one-party legislatures.

Proponents of ballot initiatives often tout them as a form of direct democracy that can mobilize voters, but evidence suggests that direct legislation does not actually significantly impact voter turnout; voter turnout seems to be more strongly influenced by election cycles that draw attention and receive high amounts of spending.[14] Ballot initiatives originated as a way to protect political processes from the stronghold of corruption and corporate rule. In California's case, ballot initiatives became part of the State Constitution in 1911 to limit the increasing stronghold of the Southern Pacific Railroad over political decisions, by giving people access to more direct power.[15] Yet, ballot initiatives have now become a tool for corporations to wield power. For example, Uber, Lyft, DoorDash and Instacart spent around $200 million to get Proposition 22 on the California ballot in 2020, to exclude app-based workers from employee benefits and rights.[16]

San Francisco is embedded in a notorious history of ballots that are loaded with numerous measures. In November 2022, the local election ballot featured 14 initiatives. Beyond just the overwhelming voter experience this creates, the 2022 election represented a deeper systemic dysfunction. In particular, two initiatives, Proposition D and Proposition E, were in direct opposition to one another – the former proposed by the mayor, and the latter by the city's Board of Supervisors. Both measures shared the goal of streamlining approval of affordable housing and

12 Graham Smith. *Beyond the Ballot: 57 Democratic Innovations from around the World; a Report for the Power Inquiry.* London: The Power Inquiry, 2005. https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/34527/1/Beyond_the_Ballot.pdf
13 "Initiated state statute," Ballotpedia, Accessed January 21, 2023, https://ballotpedia.org/Initiated_state_statute
14 Joshua J. Dyck and Nicholas R. Seabrook, "Mobilized by Direct Democracy: Short-Term Versus Long-Term Effects and the Geography of Turnout in Ballot Measure Elections," *Social Science Quarterly* 91, no. 1 (March 2010): 188–208, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6237.2010.00688.x
15 Jon Brooks, "On the 100th Anniversary of the Initiative, Taking Stock of Direct Democracy in California | KQED," KQED, October 12, 2011, https://www.kqed.org/news/42633/on-the-100th-anniversary-of-the-initiative-taking-stock-of-direct-democracy-in-california.
16 Caroline Hansen, "The Democratic Paradox of Ballot Measures: In Order to Form a More Perfect Uber?," Equal Democracy Project, November 1, 2020, https://orgs.law.harvard.edu/equaldemocracy/2020/11/01/the-democratic-paradox-of-ballot-measures-in-order-to-form-a-more-perfect-uber/

used similar language to do so but established different thresholds of affordability. This competition ultimately led to neither measure receiving enough votes to win, yet across both voters and legislators, the majority (when adding up those in favor on both measures) approved expanding affordable housing. Over $3.5 million was spent funding the campaigns that pit one side against the other.[17] Some point to a potential factor in the stalemate being that both measures required a "yes" vote to pass, and studies have shown that voters are more likely to be mobilized to vote "no" than "yes".[18] But underlying this and other similar cases, there is clearly a deeper tension that results from having little incentive and opportunity to establish shared goals, which further perpetuates polarization.

Participatory budgeting

Participatory budgeting (PB) has gained traction globally, since it was first introduced in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 1989. It is a form of engagement in which city governments (or other bodies) allocate public funds to projects proposed and voted on by residents.[19] In the original model, deliberative assemblies and representative bodies were integral to the process, to allow for residents to brainstorm and then refine ideas that would then be voted on. Participatory budgeting in some ways embodies an ideal form of engagement within existing systems; the process encourages and incentivizes people to be informed, is clear about the role people play in the process through votes being tied to a final decision and can create greater community cohesion by giving people a say in their neighborhood.

Now having spread to several thousand cities, PB processes have been adapted and iterated upon. Many major metropolitan cities in the US have implemented some form of PB, including New York City, San Francisco, and Boston. Among these cities, PB funding is generally earmarked for capital projects, which refers to the improvement or development of physical infrastructure (rather than programs or services). Some processes feature various stages, wherein deliberation and consultation are optional for participants leading up to the final vote, while others forego deliberation all together, and just entail a final vote, resembling a more traditional election. Processes with deliberative forums foster sustained engagement and opportunities for learning between project sponsors, voters, and local officials. In creating a dialogue between stakeholders, they allow residents to have the chance to learn more about budgeting and decision making, and officials learn more about neighborhood-level issues and priorities. This can foster relationship building, civic engagement, and empowerment–benefits that go beyond just an enriched final decision. But deliberative features are also more resource intensive in terms of time and capacity, for both voters and the organizing body. In its most simple form, of a singular, final vote, PB still carries benefits: a low barrier voting effort, grounded in explicit goals of community benefit, is a low-cost and high impact way for voters to participate in how money is spent in their community.[20]

A particularly unique feature of PB is its experimentation with extending enfranchisement: PB processes often extend voting to youth and undocumented people; in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the city's PB process allows all residents ages 12 and older to vote on projects, regardless of citizenship status. In Boston, the city initiated a youth-led participatory budgeting process in 2014, in which residents specifically between the ages of 12-25 participate. While expanding upon the traditional election process in some ways, PB processes are also fairly constrained: many PB processes take the results of voting as a binding decision, but some use the votes more as a

17 Leila Darwiche and Sriharsha Devulapalli, "These 16 Charts Show the Money behind San Francisco Propositions and Candidate Races," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 9, 2022, https://www.sfchronicle.com/election/article/campaign-funds-san-francisco-17542721.php
18 Joshua J. Dyck and Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz, "Ballot Initiatives and Status Quo Bias," *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (June 1, 2019): 180–207, https://doi.org/10.1177/1532440018815067
19 Christina Stacy, Martha Fedorowicz, and Rebecca Dedert, "Best Practices for Inclusive Participatory Budgeting," *Urban Institute*, August 2022, https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/Best%20Practices%20for%20Inclusive%20Participatory%20Budgeting.pdf
20 Carolina Johnson, H. Jacob Carlson, and Sonya Reynolds, "Testing the Participation Hypothesis: Evidence from Participatory Budgeting," *Political Behavior*, February 25, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-021-09679-w.

consultative process. PB processes are also usually limited to capital investments rather than programming or services, or critical needs like public health and housing, and the scale of PB rarely exceeds 2-3% of the municipal budget. Some argue that these constraints impede the potential for true participation, in holding the public at arm's length while claiming direct democracy. Others see participatory budgeting, even with these constraints, as extending excessive discretion to the public, when it should be elected officials making these decisions.

Participatory budgeting in its most comprehensive form has the potential to serve as an antidote to the general electoral system, creating a forum for deliberation, a process for education, and an incentive for engagement. Like public comment processes, participatory budgeting is susceptible to manipulation, if it is used to validate the preferences of decisions that have already been made by those in power. But the anonymization of voting in PB helps to at least mitigate the effects of loudest voices having the most influence. Even for participants who don't engage in the more intensive deliberative components of PB, and only engage in the vote itself, the role of PB can have broad benefits. In a study by Johnson et al. (2021) on New York City's participatory budgeting process, findings point to an overall increase in participants' probability of voting in regular elections, by an average of 8.4 percentage points, and additionally, effects are greater for those who often have lower probabilities of voting—young people, lower educated and lower income voters, black voters, and people who are the minority race of their neighborhood.[21]

The role of PB in extending enfranchisement to a wider population, and to influence outcomes that directly impact their community, have benefits for broader democratic participation. But even with these benefits, PB is not immune to being co-opted to serve existing power structures: PB processes tend to see low voter turnout and certain groups tend to be disproportionately represented, or unrepresented.[22] While the increasing popularity of PB processes may signal a willingness to engage with new ways to think about decision making, it is also susceptible to being used to claim participatory democracy without actually shifting power to the public. When the PB process is used to validate a decision that was already made, for example, it risks not only upholding the status quo, but perpetuating voters' disillusionment and distrust.

Deliberative democracy

Deliberative democracy is based on the premise that free and equal citizens debating ideas in a public forum creates high quality and legitimate democratic outcomes. Deliberative processes often feature face-to-face deliberation, within which participants receive balanced information, are able to hear a variety of perspectives, and can weigh the pros and cons before a final judgment is made.[23] Deliberative processes emphasize the collective, operating from the assumption that a group of people can come to a better informed decision than an individual. As a process, it not only offers a mechanism for collective values to be represented in decision making, but it also provides the additional (and perhaps more critical) indirect value of overcoming polarization, and promoting recognition, understanding, and learning of different perspectives through direct confrontation with alternate viewpoints.[24]

According to deliberative democracy scholar Jane Mansbridge, the primary functions of a deliberative democracy are to 1) produce decisions that are the result of substantive and meaningful consideration, and based on facts and logic; 2) promote mutual respect, and to orient citizens not as passive subjects to be ruled, but as autonomous agents; and 3) include multiple and plural voices,

21 Ibid.
22 Zachary Roth, "Making Participatory Budgeting Work: Experiences on the Front Lines," Brennan Center for Justice, August 23, 2022, https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/making-participatory-budgeting-work-experiences-front-lines.
23 Cristina Lafont, "Can Democracy Be Deliberative & Participatory? The Democratic Case for Political Uses of Mini-Publics," *Daedalus* 146, no. 3 (July 1, 2017): 85–105, https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00449
24 John S. Dryzek et al., "The Crisis of Democracy and the Science of Deliberation," *Science* 363, no. 6432 (March 15, 2019): 1144–46, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aaw2694

interests, concerns, and claims.[25] A deliberative process can be a strong tool against the influence of elite-dominated power, or unitary power (exhibited by the majority rule problem), by expanding the circle of actors who can reflect on and discuss ideas.[26] It can therefore be a means for marginalized groups and minority voices to access and exercise civic agency.[27]

Deliberative democracy is practiced across the world, often in small scale iterations such as neighborhood groups, citizens advisory boards/councils, or citizens' assemblies. While seen as novel interventions today, in 17th century New England, deliberative forums were standard protocol for decision making. "Town Meetings", as they were called, were public forums in which residents could deliberate and legislate on everything from public affairs to local budgets, and were the primary mechanism for decision making, consensus and unity. Town meetings have become synonymous with experiments in early American democracy and touted by scholars as the purest form of democracy. But Town Meetings also reflect a particular social and cultural agenda. The Puritans' arrival in America was an act of self-determination and self-preservation, and control and protection were vital to the formation of their communities. Collective life was managed not only by controlling moral behavior, but also in decisions around the formation of the town such as land use, the siting of houses, and the allocation of common resources. Furthermore, communal control was a way to ensure certainty and unanimity.

As the population of towns grew in both numbers and diversity, unity was replaced with pluralism and polarization, and town meetings lost their stronghold. The assembly format never successfully spread beyond the region, and in the various New England towns where it still persists, participation has significantly declined. Practices of deliberative democracy tend to be limited in scale, constrained to small and or highly local processes, because they generally require a physical convening of people. They also pose a challenge in terms of capacity, both for organizers and participants. The decision making process within a deliberative process is also not necessarily straightforward; majority rule voting can leave a large portion of the population unsatisfied, while consensus extends a single vote the power to block a decision, which is a power that can be manipulated and/or lead to an impasse and exacerbate conflict.[28] Furthermore, deliberative democracy can be used as a mechanism for people to justify their decisions to act on individual interest, or where those with less power conform to the loudest voices at the table, ultimately perpetuating power imbalances.

Perhaps the purest form of deliberative democracy is the deliberative poll, a technique first developed by James Fishkin of Stanford University. Traditional polling and elections take a snapshot of public opinion on an issue at a given time, but don't account for lack of interest, awareness, or education about the issue. Deliberative polling, on the other hand, creates the ideal conditions under which citizens can access equal and unbiased information, account for the different opinions of fellow citizens, and can interact with expert panels of policymakers to understand the tradeoffs of different policy positions.[29] In these models, participants may be recruited via random sampling, to eliminate selection biases. Fishkin's studies have shown that throughout the course of a deliberative polling process, about two-thirds of opinions change.[30] The

25 Jane Mansbridge et al., "A Systemic Approach to Deliberative Democracy," in *Deliberative Systems*, ed. John Parkinson and Jane Mansbridge, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1–26, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139178914.002.
26 James N. Druckman and Kjersten R. Nelson, "Framing and Deliberation: How Citizens' Conversations Limit Elite Influence," *American Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 4 (October 2003): 729–45, https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-5907.00051.
27 Vijayendra Rao and Paromita Sanyal, "Dignity Through Discourse: Poverty and the Culture of Deliberation in Indian Village Democracies," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 629 (1) (2010): 146–172
28 Jane J. Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy*, University of Chicago Press ed., with a rev. pref (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).
29 James Fishkin and Cynthia Farrar, "Deliberative Polling: From Experiment to Community Resource," in The Deliberative Democracy Handbook: Strategies for Effective Civic Engagement in the 21st Century eds. John Gatsil and Peter Levine (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).
30 Ibid.

ideal conditions, it turns out, may actually result in a different outcome. While these outcomes may be a more genuine reflection of people's preferences, their superiority also poses a dilemma: the potential to alter people's opinions means that the results may be "counterfactual" opinions that diverge from the popular majority opinion. For the wider population to see this decision as legitimate then, would require buy-in to the process at large.

Deliberative processes are a testament to the fact that a process is only as strong as its purpose. In their original form, the Town Meeting model may have had all the right ingredients to foster dialogue, education and understanding. But its success at the time was dependent on a shared commitment to social control and to maintaining a homogeneous populace. According to author Michael Zuckerman's analysis of the history of Town Meetings, "The meeting gave institutional expression to the imperative of peace. In the meeting, men reached consensus and placed both individual consent and public opinion in the service of social conformity."[31] Consensus was a tool to enforce conformity, and ensure homogeneity. Applying the same mechanism today is unlikely to yield the same results: unanimity is neither feasible, nor necessarily desirable, in an increasingly diverse and complex population.

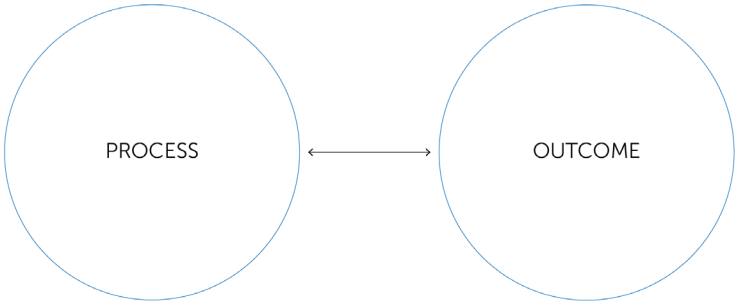
The deliberative process creates an opportunity for people to be informed and engaged with decisions, and to therefore reshape their relationship with politics, but it is not a one-size-fits-all solution. The extent to which deliberative processes hold explicit power, for example, varies. While processes like participatory budgeting may be binding in their decision making power, most deliberations tend to be advisory. In an advisory role, deliberative processes can be a useful tool to validate public opinion, or to assess and adapt policies between election periods. Whether more direct power is more valuable, or preferable, is a question that various processes need to contend with. Additionally, deliberative processes may deepen the quality of decisions, but require capacity and time to be carried out–a luxury that most decision making processes don't have. The how and behind a deliberative process is deployed requires intention and iteration.

The role of participation

Process requires attention to culture and context. The weakening of the Town Meeting model points to the how processes are not guaranteed to be sustained over time. Rather than replicate the procedural components of a Town Meeting, it is worth considering how to capture and revive the sense of communal accountability and collective responsibility that they fostered. Processes are tied to values and a desired outcome–whether those values and the outcome are made explicit or not–and therefore require evolving values to better reflect evolving contexts.

Participatory processes are not inherently problematic. But participatory processes are prone to being misused: they tout the inclusion of a diversity of voices yet they end up serving the loudest voices, or they claim community power yet are used to validate decisions that were already made. The problems arise when process is decoupled from outcome. When process is overemphasized as a solution, it is easy to become distracted by questions of mechanism and format, losing sight of the role that process plays in serving a broader goal. On the other hand, when outcome is prioritized as a means to make decisions more efficiently, the values of transparency and accountability that participation offer are lost. Process in and of itself is a valuable mechanism that can extend agency to community members, foster dialogue, and encourage understanding across stakeholders. But process is not an isolated mechanism–it should be an articulation of broader values and desired outcomes.

31 Michael Zuckerman, "Mirage of Democracy: The Town Meeting in America," *Journal of Deliberative Democracy* 15, no. 2 (May 1, 2020), https://doi.org/10.16997/jdd.331



The decoupling of process and outcome hes resulted in process being overemphasized at the expense of outcome, or vice versa. Relinking the two can foster better processes that serve better outcomes.

Improving our democratic system requires us to think more critically about the relationships that people have with power, and how the goals of democracy inform those relationships. As democratic theory scholar Mark Warren describes, "Rather than modeling democracy after a mechanism, practice, or norm, we should build democratic theory as a set of responses to the question: What kinds of problems does a political system need to solve to function democratically?"[32] To foster a more engaged citizenry requires not just more, but deeper forms of engagement, and to promote not just the process of participation, but participation as a means towards collective power.

32 Mark E. Warren, "A Problem-Based Approach to Democratic Theory," *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 1 (February 1, 2017): 39–53, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055416000605.

CHAPTER 3. WHAT IS THE ALTERNATIVE?

The features of our democracy are not just features of government, as the state-run authority, but should more broadly be defined by the idea of governance, as the way collective life is managed beyond the formal instruments of government.[33] Governance encapsulates how decisions are made around our collective future, which is a process rooted in relationships. The values underlying our democracy are both reflected in, and determined by, the relationships we have with one another, with place, and with power. Participatory processes often assume that the problems, and solutions, lie only in government, and therefore conceive of ways for more people to interact with government more often. But by foregoing the deeper questions around how power is built outside of government, and how relationships are tied to power, they miss the opportunity to not only broaden, but deepen participation. As a result, these processes tend to perpetuate the unidirectional relationship between people and government and maintain people's relationship to government as ancillary. Government and governance are often conflated, but unlike government, governance offers a more expansive framework for capturing how collective life is managed by an ecosystem of actors, which may include the state, but extends more broadly to the network of relationships in society.

3.1 Defining the "who"

Community is a term that is used to generalize and otherize groups, to claim and reclaim identities, to create boundaries and to tear them down. Community has become such a commonplace term in the field of planning, and beyond, that it is ambiguous at best, and runs the risk of being haphazard and careless in its more harmful applications. To instead ground community in intentional and specific ways, can create a more meaningful framework for how it is conceived. As Penn Loh explains, "Conceiving of government as a singular entity or community as a singular entity is an oversimplification. Communities are always happening, are always becoming."[34]

At the individual level, how individuals are recognized by people and institutions informs who is deemed worthy of power and participation, and ultimately, who our democracy serves. Scholars like Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey examine this power differential through the force of capitalism shaping spatial and social relations, asking "who has rights to the city?" At an individual level, who has rights to the city, similar to who has rights to citizenship or to economic power, is not an unalienable right, but one that is decided upon. With the premise that rights and power are granted, inclusion is not intrinsic to a person, and becomes defined via exclusion. People have used this discretion to argue for expanding rights, such as the rights that have been extended to corporations in the US, or the rights of nature–which Ecuador included in their 2008 constitution–and ongoing debates around recognizing the rights of future generations, or digital identities.[35] The antidote to our exclusionary, border-protected democracy is one that exists outside of the confines of those definitions all together. Broadly speaking, community is that antidote, as an entity distinct from the legal confines of a city or state, that is neither defined by formal boundaries, nor by enfranchisement or rights.

According to John Dewey, "~~Men~~ [humans] live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. What they must have in common to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge."[36] From this framing, community forms through shared values. Shared value might

33 Xavier De Souza Briggs, *Democracy as Problem Solving: Civic Capacity in Communities Across the Globe* (MIT Press (MA), 2008).
34 Penn Loh (Senior Lecturer and Director of the Master of Public Policy Program and Community Practice at Tufts University's Department of Urban and Environmental Policy), in discussion with the author, January 10, 2023.
35 Astra Taylor. *Democracy May Not Exist, but We'll Miss It When It's Gone* (New York, Metropolitan Books, 2019).
36 John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (LaVergne, TN: Simon & Brown, 2011).

consist of place, most tangibly, but that is a less and less dominant feature of community with the digital age fostering entirely placeless communities, and globalization forming communities across geographies. Community can also be thought of as what forms despite differences, as the relationship that people build across divides, in order to work towards a shared future. Whether from the starting point of a shared value, or working backwards from a shared future, community rests upon a commitment to a collective vision.

One way to distinguish between a community and being *in* community is that while community can be defined as a group of people, to be *in* community is an action rooted in mutual dependence and recognition.[37] Mutual aid, then, as Peter Kropotkin professed, is not just a temporary reaction, but is the very act that sustains community. Cooperative organizations embody the notion of being in community, as entities created with the intent of not only fulfilling a material need, but in convening people around a shared value that replaces hierarchical relationships with egalitarian ones.[38] Community is a self-defined network that exists outside of the state or the economy and is sustained through an active and mutual relationship.

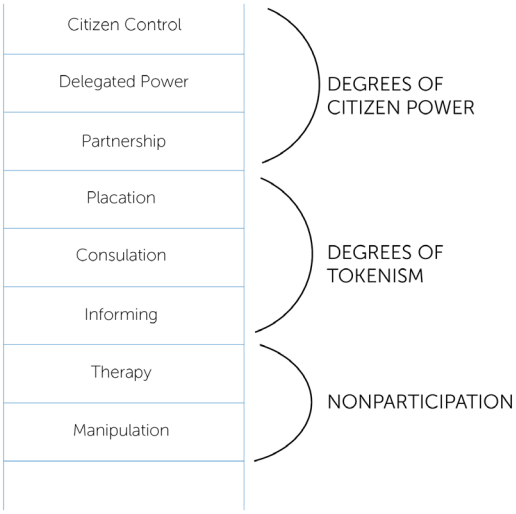
A community working together to carry out a specific objective can become a collective. Collective governance, then, rests upon a set of practices and values that are rooted in deep relationship building, between individuals, across organizations, and throughout networks. As Michael Menser describes, "For collective determination to be democratic, members of the polity (however defined) must be recognized as equal, and there must be mechanisms that aim to render this equality operational."[39] A collective is an umbrella term for groups who make decisions democratically, while a cooperative more specifically refers to a formal member-benefit organization with economic participation and democratic governance by members.[40]

3.2 Principles of power

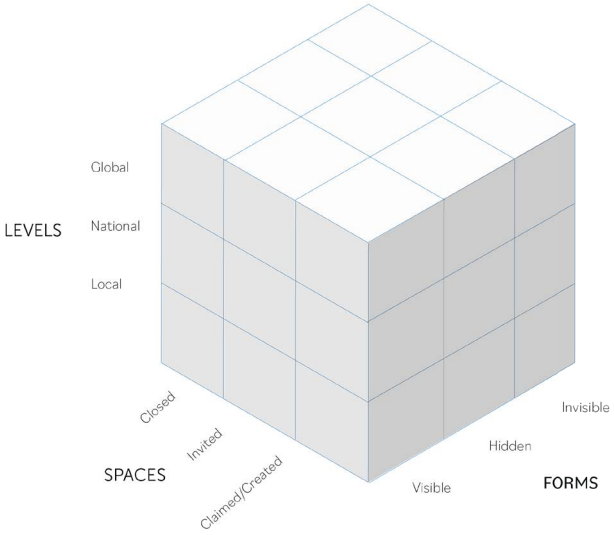
Movements often form as a response to a failure (or perceived failure of the) of the state, and therefore often seek to build power in opposition to the state. But political power is also often the very tool that can enable, or disable, movements from broadening their impact. This tension leaves questions like, what is the relationship between forces of institutional power and counterforces of movement-based power? Are the two mutually exclusive sources of power, or co-dependent? What does it mean for oppositional forces to be recognized, and even embraced, by the state?

One way to explore the tensions behind power is through the framework of shared spaces. As Margaret Kahn notes in *Radical Space,* "Whether the goal is to create a unified demos or to empower the disenfranchised, shared places help forge communities by enabling and constraining the way in which people come together."[41] The physical features, cultural norms, and social cues of a public space both reflect and perpetuate power relations and social hierarchies. In Garrett Hardin and Elinor Ostrom's opposing views on the "tragedy of the commons," Hardin argues that given the power to control a common pool resource, a collective will inevitably deplete or destroy the resource (hence the "tragedy"), whereas Ostrom argues that tragedy is not inevitable and through the development of principles of cooperation, a collective can successfully manage the commons.[42] Applying theories of the commons to the contemporary urban context, Sheila Foster's more contemporary discourse notes that public space, like common pool resources, are

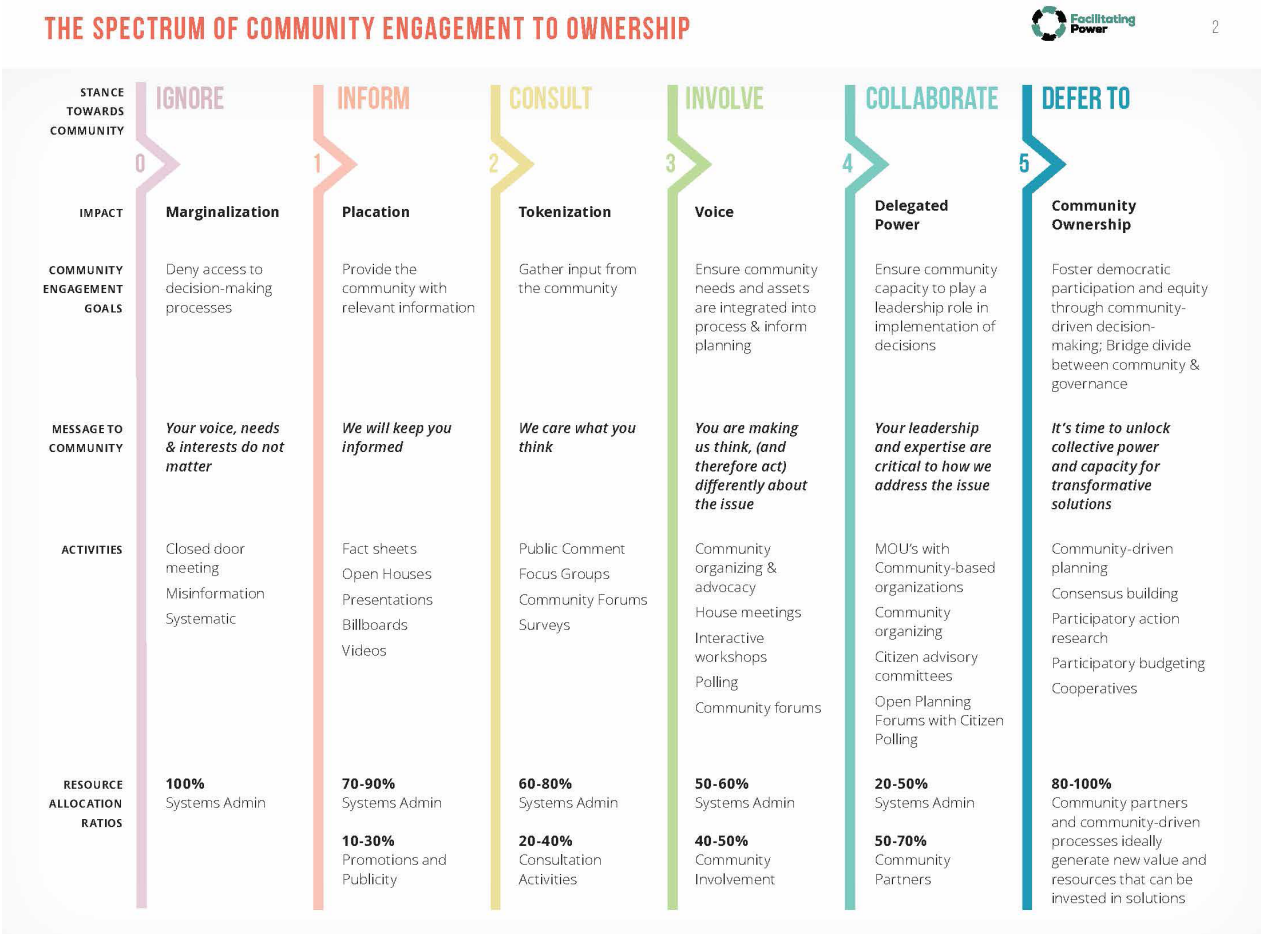
37 Art Workers' Inquiry, *Art Work During a Pandemic* (Red Bloom Communist Collective and Common Notions, 2021).
38 Margaret Kahn. *Radical Space.* (Cornell University Press, 2003)
39 Michael Menser. *We Decide!* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2018).
40 "Worker Cooperative FAQ," Democracy at Work Institute, https://institute.coop/worker-cooperative-faq
41 Ibid.
42 Garrett Hardin, *The Tragedy of the Commons*, 162 SCI (1968); Elinor Ostrom. *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions, 1990).



Arnstein's ladder simplifies citizen participation into rungs of increasing citizen participation (Adapted from Arnstein, 1969)



John Gaventa's Power Cube visualization features three dimensions of power: levels, spaces, and form (Adapted from Gaventa, 2009)



The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership six levels of engagement to strengthen and transform communities (González, 2019)

both rivalrous and non-excludable; there is a high cost to a public space being exclusionary, but rivalrous conditions may take place when there is congestion or conflict over types of use, for example.[43] Whereas Hardin would emphasize centralized state control or privatization as a solution, Ostrom's perspective paves the way for an alternative, in the form of self-organized, cooperative natural resource management. Foster adds nuance to Ostrom's theory, by arguing that for collective management to take hold in an urban community, there must be variables in place for "collective efficacy" to be established, which she describes as existing where there is a combination of social cohesion, working trust, and a shared willingness intervene on behalf of the common good.[44]

The question these theories raise is whether collective action should engage with the state or be autonomous. According to Foster, collective management may take place in the shadows of or even in opposition to the state, but it is also very much dependent on the state. From this viewpoint, the state can offer stabilization, power, and permanent presence to movements that arise from civil society. According to political scientist John Dryzek, on the other hand, when an oppositional group leaves the sphere of civil society to enter the state, the state is who benefits, by easing their fears of protest and opposition.[45] There may be some democratic gain from the civil society side, but Dryzek notes that there is also democratic loss, unless certain conditions are met. These conditions are based on whether or not the oppositional group's interests are aligned with the state's. If so, then being included in the state can be a way of enacting the desired change through formal public policy. But if not, then Dryzek sees inclusion as a political tactic to co-opt groups, which ultimately limits democracy.

To Dryzek, civil society's value is that it is unconstrained, and therefore fosters a greater freedom to pursue goals outside of interests tied to electability. Movements don't necessarily need the power and permanence of the state to legitimize them. He proclaims that, "A movement's concerns can persist even when its action is less visible, for civil society can be sustained in social and political networks and reproduced through cultural transformation."[46] Therefore, rather than center the state as the locus of how democracy unfolds, there can be more emphasis on non-state spheres like the workplace and civil society, as sites of democratization. Views like Dryzek's are tempting to endorse as ensuring a robust democracy, but they also call into question who has access to the social capital and the resources necessary to mobilize, and therefore which movements are able to mobilize transformation outside of the state.

How and to what extent power is exercised is not fixed. When a social movement takes shape amongst civil society, it may seek to operate autonomously from the state, alongside the state, or may depend on the state for resources, control, or legitimacy. Each type of relationship holds benefits and risks. Frameworks like Sherry Arnstein's "Ladder of Citizen Participation," which was created specifically to illustrate the ways in which citizens participate in planning processes, are useful for understanding the different forms that power can take.[47] In the ladder, Arnstein outlines degrees of power, from manipulation to citizen control. The ladder is an oversimplification, suggesting a linear process of accessing power, and a hierarchy that assumes the lower rungs are less desirable (in reality, a lower rung like informing may be more appropriate in certain contexts). Arnstein herself acknowledges these shortcomings: But she also emphasizes that though simplistic, the distinction between the "powerholders" and the "have-nots" (or those without power) in the ladder, is a realistic reflection of the way in which the have-nots view those with power as a

43 Sheila Foster. "Collective Action and the Urban Commons." *Notre Dame Law Review* 87 (January 2012).
44 Ibid.
45 John S. Dryzek. "Political Inclusion and the Dynamics of Democratization." *The American Political Science Review* 90, no. 3 (1996): 475–87. https://doi.org/10.2307/2082603.
46 Ibid.
47 Sherry R. Arnstein, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35, no. 4 (July 1, 1969): 216–24, https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225.

monolith, and the powerholders see those without as a "sea of 'those people.'"[48]

Several other models have developed as adaptations to Arnstein's principles. John Gaventa, for example, conceives of power as the spaces, levels, and forms of power, and how they are interrelated.[49] Using the form of a cube, Gaventa emphasizes the role of relationships in the expression of power, and range of power relations from invisible power differentials to highly visible power struggles. The model of the cube draws attention to the interconnectedness of space, levels, and forms of power, and is a call to action to think about how strategies can enable multiple dimensions of power simultaneously. More recently in 2019, Rosa González of the Movement Strategy Center and Facilitating Power, developed the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership.[50] The spectrum acts as more of a toolbox, highlighting the range of stances taken towards communities, and the resulting impact, along with examples of accompanying goals, messages, and activities, across six different levels of engagement.

These models make the often invisible forms of power visible, and therefore help to identify how a process may be causing harm, upholding the status quo, or effectively supporting change. They reveal when participation or engagement are claimed, without the accompanying shift in power, which as Sherry Arnstein professes, "allows the powerholders to claim that all sides were considered but makes it possible for only some of those sides to benefit. It maintains the status quo."[51] The notion that any engagement is better than none assumes that because participation is a vital principle of democracy, it is universally positive. But participation in public processes is just a single entry point into democracy, not a comprehensive solution to democracy's inequities. Participation carries a risk of being manipulated as a force for good, without actually fostering any change, and can reinforce the unidirectional relationship between people and government, as one of power over, rather than power with.

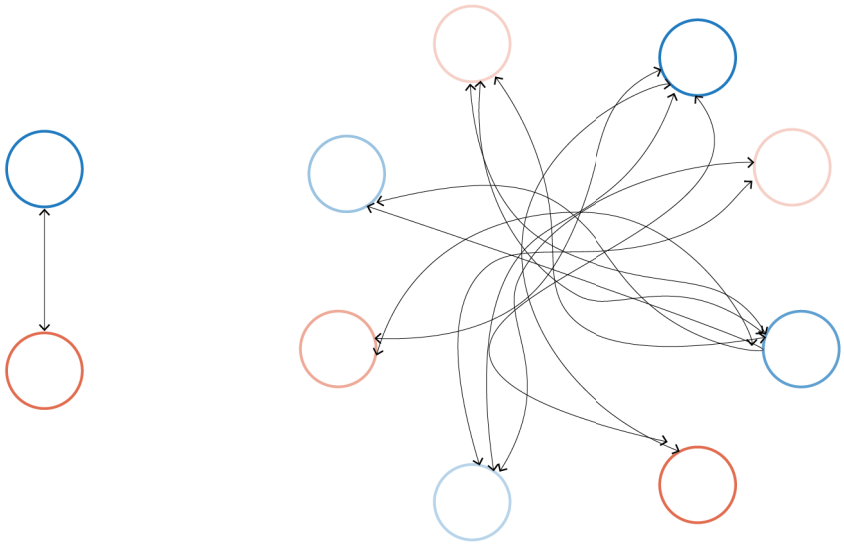
3.3 Frameworks for collective governance

Proposals to improve the democratic process tend to take the perspective that to access power, people need to be brought into government processes, invited into bureaucratic procedures, and trained in formal convenings. But the inverse–inviting the government into community, enabling elected officials to navigate local social and cultural norms, training representatives in building relationships–is rarely considered. Simon Mont, an organizational consultant, and community organizer who has spent a decade in grassroots movement building, articulates this shortcoming: "The moment we begin the conversation at 'how do we make government more participatory?', we've already placed the center of gravity inside of the government. But instead we can say, as an ecosystem of various institutions from all sectors that all play a role in creating and making decisions about the world we live in, how do we redefine our roles vis-a-vis one another, to get to where we want to go?"[52] If instead of focusing on government as a singular decision making body, we consider the entire ecosystem of actors that underlie governance, we can reconceive the points of entry to accessing power. Doing so allows a shift away from a unidirectional relationship and finite amount of power, and instead towards the value that each individual actor can offer towards generating collective power.

Collective governance rests on the premise that all stakeholders are conceived as equal: each

48 Ibid, 17.
49 John Gaventa. "Finding the Spaces for Change: A Power Analysis." *IDS Bulletin* 37 (February 2009): 23–33. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2006.tb00320.x.
50 Rosa González, Movement Strategy Center, and Facilitating Power, "Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership," 2019, https://movementstrategy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/The-Spectrum-of-Community-Engagement-to-Ownership.pdf
51 Arnstein, A Ladder of Citizen Participation, 216.
52 Simon Mont (Founding Worker-Owner at Harmonize LCA), in discussion with the author, January 13, 2023.

stakeholder is individually autonomous and has the same opportunity to be informed and represented. Together, stakeholders are invested in long-term relationship building, establishing, and operationalizing shared goals, and mobilizing towards collective change. Various models of governance have organized themselves around principles of shared power, a handful of which are introduced in the following section.



Collective governance calls for shifting from a unidirectional relationship of "power over," to a multidirectional relationship of "power with."

Anarchism

A useful starting point to understanding how different forms of governance relate to authority, is to begin with an ideology that is based on the absence of institutional authority: anarchism. Contrary to popular belief, anarchism is not just an ideology based on opposition, but rather, is a set of ideologies that promote individual autonomy, cooperative community, and non-hierarchical societal and institutional management. However, since the majority of our structures, systems, and relationships are antithetical to this premise, anarchists' call for liberation becomes an opposition to society as we know it.

Anarchism is widely discussed in political theory but cannot be discussed in purely theoretical terms: it necessitates practice. A testament to this is that many academics who self-identify as anarchists, also identify as activists. One such figure, the late David Graeber, emphasized the innate human nature to self-organize and to question authority, arguing that many people practice everyday acts of anarchism unknowingly.[53] Robert Paul Wolff explains anarchism by describing the conflict between authority and autonomy, wherein the state is characterized by authority, and people by autonomy.[54] To Wolff and others, anarchism is the only political doctrine that aligns with autonomy. But anarchism is not necessarily mutually exclusive with the state either. Rather, many anarchists argue that if rule is by the people, rather than for the people, then in ruling themselves, autonomy and authority can exist simultaneously.

A critical component in working towards anarchist values is to build upon existing, alternative

53 David Graeber, "Are You An Anarchist? The Answer May Surprise You!," The Anarchist Library, https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/david-]graeber-are-you-an-anarchist-the-answer-may-surprise-you.
54 Robert Paul Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism* (Univ of California Press, 1998).

social infrastructures, or "infrastructures of resistance."[55] Infrastructures of resistance are the set of physical, educational, and organizational resources that set the groundwork for people to establish long term relationships and practices that can support movements. This allows for spontaneous and direct action to be exercised in an anticipatory, rather than responsive, fashion–a strategy that mutual aid networks exemplify.

The concept of "mutual aid" was first conceptualized by 19th century scientist Peter Kropotkin, as a response to Social Darwinism. Kropotkin didn't reject the notion that competition played in evolution but saw it as overemphasized. Instead, he argued that cooperation is a natural phenomenon in evolutionary biology and cooperative behavior and systems of mutual aid play as large, if not a larger part, in evolution.[56] Mutual aid presumes equity between those involved; it is the process of collectively organizing and sharing skills and resources autonomously from the state and looks to local contexts and needs to determine the type of support needed. Mutual aid organizations and networks are distinct from charity, which is intimately tied to capitalism and exists within a hierarchical structure in which wealth accumulated at the top is distributed down. Additionally, while mutual aid is often most recognized during crises–such as the programs that cropped up during the Covid-19 pandemic–it is often the result of deeper-rooted movement building efforts that have been invisibilized. Within the anarchist conception of mutual aid, networks not only respond to crises through improving immediate conditions (through the provision of food, housing, healthcare, for example), they anticipate and can help mitigate them: a commitment not just to survival, but to helping communities thrive, and achieve liberation and autonomy.[57] In Arnstein's ladder of participation, anarchism would strongly sit within citizen control.

In the last several years, anarchist and anarchist-inspired practices have shifted from the radical margins to more mainstream movements. Groups like Food Not Bombs and Reclaim the Streets, and global movements from the Zapatistas to Occupy Wall Street, are mobilizing more than just those on the fringes. Within anarchism, there are divisive views on what does and does not constitute the right path towards liberation, and the value of sectarianism versus intersectionality. But as Graeber professed, the embodiment of values through practice is a radical anarchist exercise in itself. Prefigurative politics, the idea that modes of organization should resemble the world you want to create, asks how solidarity can be built within existing structures, while still conceiving of new structures.[58] In this way, anarchism provides a framework for fulfilling a need now (i.e., improving material conditions), while working towards longer term, transformative change.

Collaborative governance

Collaborative governance, as defined by Ansell and Gash (2015), is "a governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets."[59] Through diversifying the stakeholders involved in a decision, and extending decision making power to those stakeholders, collaborative governance can be used to mitigate the problems that arise from top-down decision making. These include instances where conflicts of interest or differences in the priorities arise when one entity is

55 Jeffrey Shantz, "Learning to Win: Anarchist Infrastructures of Resistance," in *Anarchist Pedagogies: Collective Actions, Theories, and Critical Reflections on Education*, ed. Robert H. Haworth (Oakland, CA: PM Press 2012). https://we.riseup.net/assets/219988/anarchistpedagogies.pdf

56 Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (London: Heinemann, 1914).

57 Regan de Loggans, "Let's Talk Mutual Aid," April 25, 2020. https://mutualaiddisasterrelief.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/LOGGANS-mutual-aid-zine.pdf

58 Andrej Grubacic and David Graeber, "Anarchism, Or The Revolutionary Movement Of The Twenty-First Century," *The Anarchist Library*, January 6, 2004. https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/andrej-grubacic-david-graeber-anarchism-or-the-revolutionary-movement-of-the-twenty-first-centu

59 Chris Ansell and Alison Gash, "Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 18, no. 4 (October 1, 2008): 543–71, https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mum032.

tasked with making decisions on behalf of another (known as the principal-agent problem), or when a decision making body lacks the relevant knowledge to make an informed decision (referred to as the local knowledge problem).[60]

City planning in the US context often takes the form of collaborative governance. As a governing body that determines development but does not command the resources to make development happen, planning agencies regularly interface with multi-sector stakeholders, in both civil society, and the public and private sectors. While collaborative governance is defined by integrating government and non-government actors, most definitions specify role of public agencies in initiating the participation of stakeholders outside of government: who is invited to the table (a topic further explored in chapter 3.2), therefore, is largely determined by the public agency. In this light, the very definition of collaborative governance becomes somewhat paradoxical–by centering the state as the authority that decides when and who to convene, and can bias the agenda and outcome, the structure begins from a premise of unequal power amongst stakeholders. Critics of collaborative governance view it as a way to simply legitimate public decisions under the guise of participation, rather than offer true public participation.[61] Within Arnstein's ladder, such forms of collaborative governance would be a form of consultation or placation. Additionally, given that the collaborative process rests on face-to-face deliberation, those who have less capacity, resources, or information may be at a disadvantage at the negotiation table: a power imbalance that is exacerbated when groups that are less formally organized–or perhaps not organized at all–are excluded from the table altogether.

Collaborative governance holds both powerful potential and risk in making choices around who is at the table and how power is exercised. By casting a wider net that invites diverse stakeholders, collaborative governance holds the potential to develop more robust, creative, and thoughtful decisions than traditional decision making–similar to the value that mini-publics in deliberative democracy strive to create. But the discretion behind which stakeholders are included is prone to biases and exclusion. Consensus-building and mediation practitioners in particular have developed extensive strategies around how to equitably represent stakeholders amidst power imbalances, but even with professionally trained mediators, power imbalances in how people participate and are represented are difficult to perfectly mitigate. While collaborative governance can offer a pathway towards centering relationship-building in the decision making process, without explicit efforts to mitigate representation and participation asymmetries, it can fall short of being truly collaborative.

Solidarity economies

The problems with our democracy are not just a feature of government, but of relationships more broadly: how relationships are built and how people relate to one another are all intertwined with the values that build our systems. The solidarity economy framework bridges the value of relationships with a theory of change that centers transformative politics. It is a framework that spans theory, practice, and movements. It can be thought of as an umbrella of visions, all of which coexist to promote post-capitalist economic theory, through a set of social, economic, and political practices, that align with a broader global movement. The core practices and aligned values of the solidarity economy are solidarity, participatory democracy, equity (in all dimensions), sustainability, and pluralism.[62] According to Penn Loh & Boone W. Shear (2022), "Solidarity economy (SE) is most plainly associated with ethical and cooperative economic practices, like local currencies, land trusts, community gardens, fair trade, and cooperatives of all sorts. These SE practices and their associated values—cooperation, sustainability, justice, interdependence, autonomy—open the possibility of a

60 "Collaborative Governance," Participedia, https://participedia.net/method/150

61 Marc Parés et al., "Challenging Collaborative Urban Governance under Austerity: How Local Governments and Social Organizations Deal with Housing Policy in Catalonia (Spain)," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 39, no. 8 (November 17, 2017): 1066–84, https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2017.1310531.

62 Emily Kawano and Julie Matthaei, "System Change: A Basic Primer to the Solidarity Economy," *Nonprofit Quarterly*, July 8, 2022, https://nonprofitquarterly.org/system-change-a-basic-primer-to-the-solidarity-economy/

more transformative vision."[63]

In conceiving of a post-capitalist framework, the roots of the solidarity economy are often traced to Latin America and Europe, where communities have responded to the neoliberal concentration of capital and power with practices that have served to build collective power.[64] It recognizes the deeply rooted and interwoven stronghold that capitalism has had on promoting economic inequality, colonialism, environmental degradation, gender disparities, and racial inequity. But beyond just an alternative to capitalism, it seeks to build a different world altogether. As Arturo Escobar professes, what is needed is not only an alternative development, but an alternative to development.[65]

The solidarity economy centers transformative politics because anything less is a perpetuation of the status quo. Given the ways in which capitalism exploits forms of oppression, solidarity economy values are explicitly anti-oppressive. While the solidarity economy framework has received criticisms for being utopic and unfeasible, it is already in practice at various scales, including cooperatives (worker-owned, consumer, producer), public banks, participatory budgeting, and community land trusts. Where some of these practices become co-opted for capitalist temptations highlights the risk involved in building alternatives within dominant systems. For example, the desire to scale these institutions can result in co-optation when scale is pursued at the expense of values, or when form is prioritized over function. Solidarity economy practitioner and scholar Emily Kawano advocates that for the solidarity economy vision to be realized, we need to resist and build, simultaneously.[66] That is, all forms of oppression need to be actively resisted, while the values, culture, practices, and institutions of solidarity are built.

63 Penn Loh and Boone W. Shear, "Fight and Build: Solidarity Economy as Ontological Politics," *Sustainability Science* 17, no. 4 (June 25, 2022): 1207–21, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-022-01165-4.
64 Ibid.
65 Arturo Escobar, "Farewell to Development," interview by Allen White, *Great Transition Initiative* (February 2018), http://greattransition.org/publication/farewell-to-development.
66 Emily Kawano and Julie Matthaei, "System Change: A Basic Primer to the Solidarity Economy," *Nonprofit Quarterly*, July 8, 2020, https://nonprofitquarterly.org/system-change-a-basic-primer-to-the-solidarity-economy/

CHAPTER 4. LEARNING FROM COLLECTIVE & COOPERATIVE ORGANIZATIONS IN THE BAY AREA

Our political and economic systems are not just related to our values, they are our values. While capitalism is a dominating force, the proliferation of alternatives–especially in response to disasters like the worsening climate crisis, COVID-19, and rampant inequality–speak to a changing set of social values. These changing values set the groundwork for changing systems. As Manuel Castells asserts, "Cultural change precedes political change...This is why deeper social transformations depend on the emergence of new ways of perceiving, evaluating, and conceiving the human experience."[67] Castells calls attention to the fact that economic practices are human practices, that they are not abstract or inevitable practices, but very directly informed by human interests and values.[68] When disasters reveal fractures in our systems, and alternatives form to fill in the gaps, they serve a dual purpose of not only making visible the failures in our dominant ways of being, but also the possibilities of a different way forward.

Our democracy is so entrenched in the dominant forces of power–of religion and capitalism, of wealth accumulation and oppression–that to envision anything different requires both imagination and deep commitment. We have been incentivized to pursue growth and competition, to accumulate wealth and power without regard for the land and people who are exploited as a result–all practices which are contradictory to our ability to thrive as a collective and an ecosystem. Social movements have taken on the role of imagining and building alternatives through a more generative approach. The collective and cooperative organizations that form alongside movements build alternative systems through establishing different ways of producing, consuming, relating, and living.

A note on terminology: Characterizing the work of movements as building an "alternative" references their relationship as an "alternative to" dominant political and economic forces. But the language of "alternatives", "countermovements", or "oppositional forces," risks othering the power of the communities leading the work of transformative change. It perpetuates the center of gravity lying within existing forces. Given Castells' argument that cultural change precedes political change and acknowledging that a critical component of culture is language, the framing of movements as "alternatives" should be done so carefully, recognizing that while they may be alternatives now, whether or not they remain as such is in our collective control.

4.1 Methodology

The question of how a community's needs should be recognized and responded has varying responses across academic and professional settings, different sectors, and geographies. A snapshot of these perspectives became apparent during my time working with the City of San Francisco's Planning Department in 2022. Tasked with developing community engagement guidelines, I embarked on a process of assessing existing engagement practices primarily through interviews with three groups of stakeholders: department staff, community organizations, and project developers. Through conversations with individuals from each group, I sought to understand how people perceived the relationship between community and the city, in order to inform how engagement could be improved. While each of these groups represented different goals–often that were at odds with one another–they also each expressed shared sentiments around feeling

67 Manuel Castells, *Another Economy Is Possible: Culture and Economy in a Time of Crisis* (John Wiley & Sons, 2017). 196.
68 Ibid 14.

frustrated, lacking trust, lacking capacity, a sense of being overburdened and having little capacity, and a disillusionment by unfulfilled promises. All of these sentiments signaled fraught relationships, but a shared motivation to restore trust and support.

Parallel to this experience, I began learning about the Bay Area's history and culture of social movements, and the ways movements have been intertwined with organizations rooted in solidarity. These organizations–which often take the form of collectives or cooperatives based on their democratic governance structure–are often characterized as being part of counterculture or countervailing movements, because they embody values that run counter to dominant systems. But although they are categorized as alternatives, their nontraditional nature more closely approximates the true traditions of democracy; they emphasize accountability and transparency, operate on the values of mutual aid and solidarity, and are governed via shared power.

My inquiry into these organizations began from a birds' eye view, learning from resources like Participedia and Grassroots Economic Organizing (GEO), and local networks like Network of Bay Area Worker Cooperatives (NOBAWC). Early conversations with Ricardo Nuñez (Director of Economic Democracy at the Sustainable Economies Law Center) and Penn Loh (Senior Lecturer and Director of the Master of Public Policy Program and Community Practice at Tufts University's Department of Urban and Environmental Policy) were particularly helpful in providing a broad introduction to the landscape of organizations and movements. From there, an organic snowballing process took shape wherein one interview would lead to mention of or connection to another organization. This process quickly revealed how interconnected the Bay Area's network of organizations: the organizations consistently referenced one another's work as both sources of inspiration, and as partners. The interviews took place both in person and virtually, between January and March 2023. With permission, interviews were recorded, and transcripts were automatically generated. Participants were given the opportunity to amend and verify direct quotes.

The interviews served as primary sources of information, with each conversation providing a richer understanding of the challenges that these movement-oriented organizations seek to address, the social and political barriers they face, and their broader implications for democratic systems. Inspired by the teachings on reflective practice from scholars like John Dewey and Donald Schon, as well as the principles of Participatory Action Research, this research process was rooted in reflexivity.[69] Rather than serve to prove or disprove a predetermined hypothesis, each interview became an inflection point, orienting me to explore certain questions more deeply, and to think about new questions entirely. Overall, 16 interviews are featured directly in the following section, but numerous additional conversations were invaluable in guiding this work. The purpose of these vignettes is to neither illuminate best practices, nor serve as an exposé into the inner workings of various organizations, but rather to (re)tell distinct, yet linked, stories of changemaking. Each vignette speaks to the ways in which these groups came to establish and operationalize their values, and the role they play in building a broader network of mobilizing change.

69 John Dewey, *How We Think*, (D C Heath, 1910), https://doi.org/10.1037/10903-000.

4.2 Case Context

In referencing the Bay Area, this research particularly focuses on the 3 cities of San Francisco, Berkeley, and Oakland, while recognizing that the Bay Area is a much larger megaregion of 10 counties, and 101 cities.

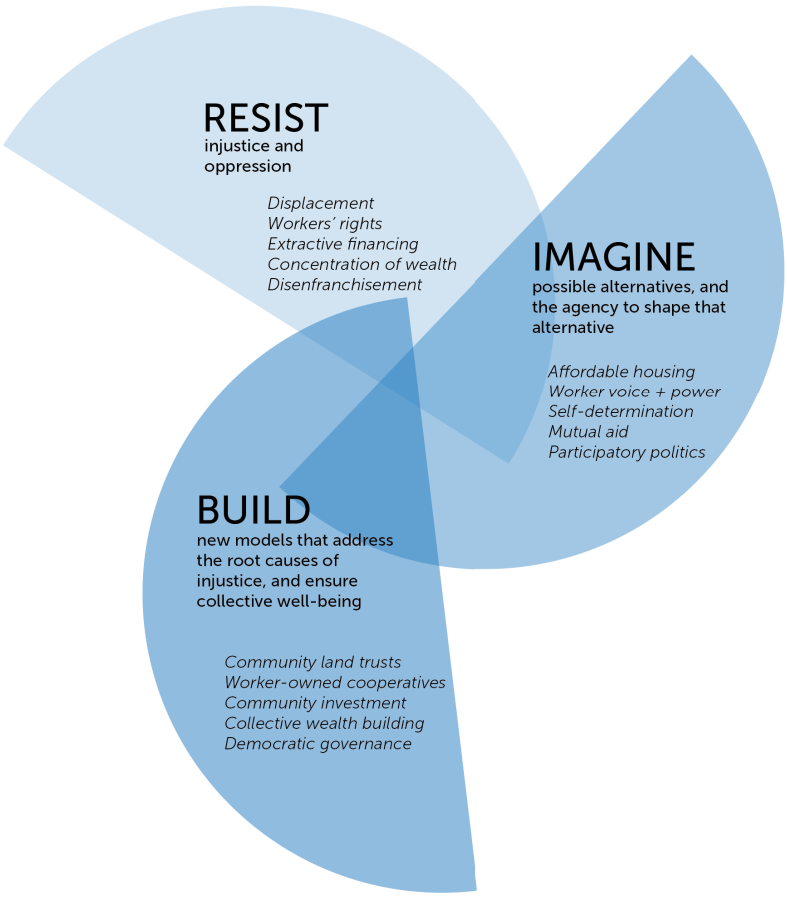
The Bay Area has historically been a hub of countercultural, radical, alternative ideologies, from the Free Speech movement in Berkeley, to the founding of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, and gay rights liberation in San Francisco. This rich culture of social, racial, political, and environmental movements has left an indelible mark both locally and globally. The momentum of these movements is often conflated with a culture of progressive politics, but in decoupling movements from local politics, it becomes clear that these movements have in fact originated in response to policy failures and social injustices.

In highlighting the particularities of collective struggle across class and race, and place-based, and ideological divides in the Bay Area, geographers Rachel Brahinsky and Alexander Tarr (2020) argue that the perception of liberalism in the region has invisibilized the decades-long fight that countless people and communities have had to endure to claim their space.[70] Locating these movements within a broader context of race and class tensions is not a means to diminish their impact, but rather a way to paint a more complex picture of the region's extremes and identify the roots of their fight in order to acknowledge the context for their successes. As Brahinsky and Tarr observe, "With each force comes a counterforce."[71]

Although San Francisco has had Democratic mayors since the 1960s, from 1911-1963, it was led by Republicans, and therefore lacked the robust investment in social democratic programs like government-supported middle-class housing, public education, or public transportation, that its counterparts like New York City experienced in the early 20th century.[72] The Bay Area also spawned many of the nation's original exclusionary housing policies that set precedents for redlining. Namely, with the passage of Berkeley's 1916 comprehensive zoning ordinance, Berkeley became the first city to enact single-family residential zones, which spurred exclusionary zoning across the country. Additionally, a coalition that originated in Oakland in 1950 initiated a statewide ballot initiative, Article 34, whose passage required any federal or state-finance housing projects to be approved via referendum. To this day, Article 34 continues to be a major barrier to affordable housing initiatives.[73] The Bay Area's history of oppression and dispossession, and parallel stories of resistance, form the groundwork for today's movements around anti-gentrification, environmental justice, Black Lives Matter, and worker rights.

Movements make injustice visible, and justice actionable. The organizations that align with or stem directly from movements help to operationalize their demands, embodying self-determination, community ownership, collective power, and liberation. The following section highlights how various Bay Area organizations seek to build collective power through enabling more equitable access to wealth, housing, land, and decision making. These cases not only imagine but build the alternative futures they set out to create. While the majority are formally considered cooperatively-run organizations (both owned and democratically governed by employees), those that are not more broadly fall under the category of collectives, who enable and/or embody principles of shared decision making.

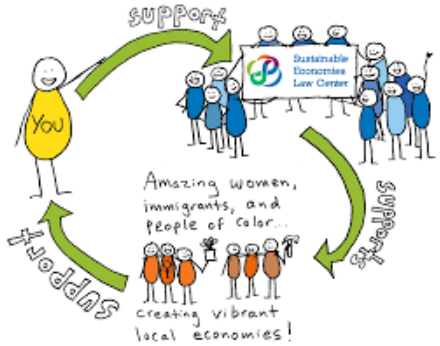
70 Rachel Brahinsky, Alexander Tarr, and Bruce Rinehart. *A People's Guide to the San Francisco Bay Area*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2020.
71 Ibid., 20.
72 Lincoln Mitchell, "Actually, San Francisco Isn't That Liberal and Never Was," *Washington Monthly*, December 15, 2022, https://washingtonmonthly.com/2022/12/15/actually-san-francisco-isnt-that-liberal-and-never-was/
73 Eli Moore, Nicole Montojo, and Nicole Mauri, *Roots, Race, & Place: A History of Racially Exclusionary Housing in the San Francisco Bay Area*, 2019.https://belonging.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/haasinstitute_rootsraceplace_oct2019_publish.pdf



The Resist, Imagine, Build framework borrows from Solidarity Economy principles and others, to outline the links between resistance against injustice, imagining alternatives, and building new systems.

4.3 Case Studies

SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIES LAW CENTER



Capacity and coalition building, technical/ legal assistance, and policy advocacy to support community resilience and grassroots economic empowerment

theselc.org

PROJECT EQUITY

Supporting businesses in developing as, or transitioning to, worker ownership

project-equity.org

MUJERES UNIDAS Y ACTIVAS

Provides Latina immigrant women with support through advocacy, case management, support groups, and workshops

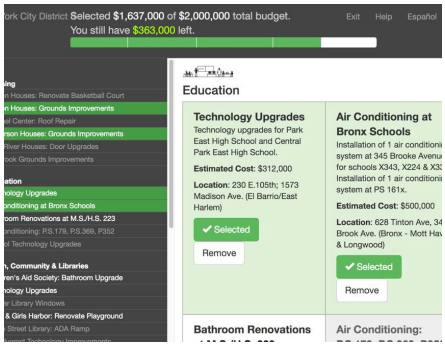
mujeresunidas.net

TENDERLOIN PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

Participatory Budgeting process led by San Francisco Department of Planning, for the Tenderloin neighborhood

sfplanning.org

STANFORD CROWDSOURCED DEMOCRACY



Open-sourced platform development to support participatory budgeting and deliberative democracy processes

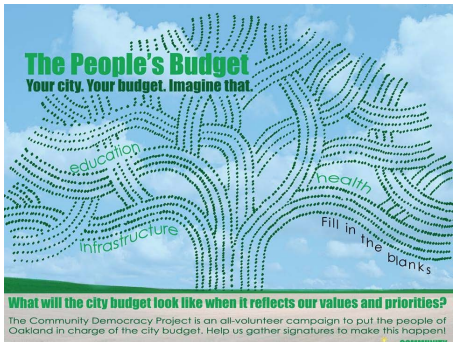
pbstanford.org

PARKLETS

Movement to reclaim parking spaces as temporary public parks

myparkingday.org

COMMUNITY DEMOCRACY PROJECT



Proposal for the public to determine the budget for the City of Oakland

communitydemocracyproject.org

PUBLIC BANK EAST BAY

Proposal for a Bank owned and governed by the community for the community

publicbankeastbay.org

RAINBOW GROCERY COOPERATIVE

Worker-owned grocery

rainbow.coop

THE CHEESE BOARD COLLECTIVE

Worker-owned bakery

cheeseboardcollective.coop

PEOPLE POWER SOLAR COLLECTIVE

Community-owned energy cooperative

peoplepowersolar.org

SOGOREA TE' LAND TRUST

Urban land trust focused on rematriation and indigenous stewardship of public land

sogoreate-landtrust.org

OCCIDENTAL ARTS AND ECOLOGY CENTER

Research and education center, ecological preserve, and capacity building

oaec.org

OAKLAND COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

Perpetual affordability and stewardship of land and housing for, and with, low-income Oakland residents

oakclt.org

EAST BAY PERMANENT REAL ESTATE COOPERATIVE

Community control of land and housing by structurally excluded communities

ebprec.org

Network-based Organizations

Sustainable Economies Law Center (SELC)

For movements to be able to grow from a call to action, to forming roots as organizations, institutions, and legislation, they have to overcome myriad barriers: legal and political obstacles, financial hurdles, and knowledge gaps, to name a few. The Sustainable Economies Law Center (SELC) was founded in Oakland in 2009 to "bridge the gap in legal expertise needed to transition from destructive economic systems to innovative and cooperative alternatives."[74] Staffed by a mix of lawyers, policy advocates/analysts, and community engagement specialists, SELC seeks to support grassroots economic development and community resilience, by addressing the legal and technical barriers that often stand in their way. Their work prioritizes cooperative ventures, because they see community control of enterprises and assets as a way to ensure community well-being and economic transformation. Cooperatives are defined as jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprises based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity.[75] Having guided over 1,500 grassroots groups over the years, their support takes the form of offering legal education, research and advice, and policy advocacy. Nearly every organization covered in these interviews mentioned SELC as a resource they have directly benefited from through the resources they offer, or as an indirect source of support in the legislation they have spearheaded and coalitions they have formed.

Ricardo Nuñez, SELC's Director of Economic Democracy, and a Staff Attorney, describes SELC as being guided by a vision for an economy that is regenerative, deeply democratic, and reparative.[76] These values are embodied both by the organizations SELC supports, and by SELC's own governance structure. Their website includes a public document detailing their internal policies, which they call an "Internal Policy Wiki," and an overview of their decentralized governance structure, including an explanation for why they don't have an Executive Director. Publishing these internal documents is not only a testament to their transparency, but also to their commitment to supporting organizations, who can refer to these resources in developing their own organizational structures. In this vein, SELC has additionally developed a toolkit to help organizations write their bylaws; rather than legalese that is intended to protect a board's power and profits, SELC helps an organization think about their politics by first establishing values of trust and equitable distribution of wealth, and then developing custom bylaws that operationalize those values.[77] SELC also targets local government leaders, creating informational packets that describe the benefits of worker cooperatives for local economic development, for example, and sample legislation that cities can use to endorse cooperatives, both of which have been used across the country to garner municipal support.[78]

They have been critical in amending or developing policies and spearheading legislative campaigns that enable economic justice and have paved the way for many of the organizations interviewed here to gain legitimacy. For example, they have been part of coalitions that have developed and advocated for the California Employee Ownership Act (Senate Bill 1407, 2022), which enables small business owners in California to transition to worker-ownership more easily, and the Cooperative Housing Bill (AB 569, 2014), removing significant barriers to the creation of Limited Equity Housing Cooperatives. A coalition led by SELC also successfully passed the California Worker Cooperative

74 "Our Mission, Theory of Change, Governance, and Financial Transparency," Sustainable Economies Law Center, Accessed January 30, 2023, https://www.theselc.org/mission

75 "Cooperative Identity, Values & Principles," International Cooperative Alliance, https://www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity.

76 Ricardo Nuñez (Director of Economic Democracy & Staff Attorney, Sustainable Economies Law Center), in discussion with the author, January 10, 2023.

77 Ibid.

78 Jason S. Spicer "Worker and Community Ownership as an Economic Development Strategy: Innovative Rebirth or Tired Retread of a Failed Idea?" *Economic Development Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (2020): 325–42. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891242420941597.

Act (AB 816), which recognizes worker cooperatives within existing cooperative corporations' law, and allows California cooperatives to raise capital by selling shares of up to $1,000.

Project Equity

Worker-owned cooperatives, or co-ops, are characterized by being both owned and democratically governed by workers. Co-ops have been shown to increase wages as compared to similar jobs in non-cooperative companies, and contribute to longer term employee wealth and local economic development.[79] They can provide a significant wealth accumulation effect for all, and especially for low-income individuals and families.[80] Yet cooperatives have been slow to proliferate widely in the US, largely due to cultural barriers, political and financial barriers, and lack of expertise or resources to support education around cooperative management. With the saturation of small businesses in the US, and the simultaneous risk to jobs and economic losses that result when business owners retire and are unable to sell, Project Equity–a nonprofit organization based in Berkeley–found an intersection of needs they could address. Project Equity found that as business owners near retirement and are already thinking about the sale of a business, there is a "readiness factor" that creates a fertile opportunity for education around the benefits of employee ownership.

The organization supports newly formed employee-owned businesses, but primarily supports existing businesses in transitioning to employee ownership, as well as provides educational and awareness-raising tools around employee ownership. For business owners, employee ownership can be a succession strategy–especially for businesses with an explicit mission, and/or have owners who have concern for the well-being of their business and employees after they retire.[81] As part of their efforts to increase worker-ownership in the Bay Area and nationally, Project Equity spearheaded an initiative to develop a "Blueprint" for worker cooperatives in 2014.[82] The Blueprint was a one-year long strategy that engaged stakeholders, created feasibility studies and implemented pilot projects, in order to develop a model that could be used for creating and scaling worker cooperatives. Project Equity's commitment to worker cooperatives is rooted in the multi-faceted benefits they provide, from improved job quality for workers, to enhanced growth and longevity for businesses, and the broader direct and indirect social impacts.

The Blueprint outlines the benefits of worker co-ops for low-wage workers in particular and develops a local action plan for a multi-sectoral strategy, while also calling attention to the many challenges that co-ops face in a broader ecosystem that incentivizes businesses to concentrate wealth and power. Scale, in terms of the birth of new co-ops, and for existing co-ops to grow in size, is a limiting factor. Given the dominant values around business culture, there are few resources that provide education, few pathways to secure financing, and various local and federal legislative hurdles. To surmount these barriers, Project Equity emphasizes the importance of collective impact, which they distill down to three critical components: "an influential champion, adequate financial resources, and a sense of urgency for change."[83] They consider these components as preconditions to both bring people together to form a collective, and to then sustain the collective until momentum around an initiative is built.

In 2018, Project Equity partnered with the City of Berkeley, to support the City's Office of Economic Development in retaining local small businesses that were likely to close due to pending baby

79 "Investing In Worker Ownership," *Democracy at Work Institute*, accessed April 24, 2023, https://institute.coop/sites/default/files/resources/DAWI%20-%20Investing%20in%20Worker%20Ownership.pdf.
80 School of Management and Labor Relations, Rutgers University, "Building the Assets of Low and Moderate Income Workers and Their Families The Role of Employee Ownership," March 2019, https://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/Documents/Centers/Institute_Employee_Ownership/rutgerskelloggreport_april2019.pdf
81 Alison Lingane, "Bay Area Blueprint: Worker Cooperatives as a Community Economic Development Strategy," *Carolina Planning* 40 (2016), https://project-equity.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Bay-Area-Blueprint_Worker-Coops-as-a-Community-Economic-Development-Strategy_CPJ2015_Lingane.pdf
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.

boomer retirements.[84] Project Equity analyzed how closures would affect the city's economy, and simultaneously conducted outreach to the businesses at risk to provide them with the knowledge of employee ownership as an option. Their findings revealed that 1,200 businesses, which make up 60% of the City's small business revenue, would be in need of succession planning services over the next 15 years.[85] In response to the findings, in the following year, the City earmarked $100,000 towards a pilot program that would support businesses to transition to worker ownership.[86] This partnership was the result of collective impact: a confluence of funding, cultural interest, established infrastructure, and a progressive-leaning legislative body. The model of transitioning businesses to employee ownership not only contributes to the City's goals of business retention and economic development, it also as a means of advancing worker cooperatives as a model for economic justice and equity. Ultimately, Project Equity aligns their goals with scaling the cooperative movement, with the goals of employees and employers and, the City of Berkeley (and the host of other cities they now work with), allowed them to build broader support.

***Mujeres Unidas y Activas* (*MUA*)**

Immigrant workers are faced with multiple forms of political, economic, and cultural oppression that exclude them from basic rights. Immigrant women are disproportionately vulnerable to low wages and unsafe conditions, and Latina immigrants–many of whom are domestic workers–face their own set of challenges, since the nature of domestic work is dispersed and secluded, and lacks regulation.[87] Mujeres Unidas y Activas (MUA), which translates to United and Active Women, is a non-profit organization that opened in 1989 by two immigrant Latina community leaders. After helping San Francisco State University researchers interview immigrant women for a study, Clara Luz Navarro and Maria Olea started MUA alongside some of the study participants, with the intention of addressing the injustices they experienced. The group started by creating a leadership training program that graduated 14 women in its first year and has since grown into a local and national leader in immigrant rights campaigns.

MUA sets out to improve the social, economic, and political conditions of Latino immigrant families in the Bay Area, through transforming the lives of Latina immigrant women.[88] Their work both responds to the urgent needs of the community they serve and establishes pathways for transformative change. Through relief services, including a Spanish-language crisis line, language access and translation services, support to obtain business licenses, peer-led counseling, and various cash relief and food distribution services during COVID-19, the organization responds to urgent needs. Simultaneously, they play a significant role in leading policy advocacy and political campaigns around issues like asylum, citizenship, gender-based violence, and labor rights. Leadership development training has also continued to be a pillar of their work since the organization first started.

People often first connect with the organization through one of their services offerings, in response to outreach, or through hearing about the work in their community. After attending an orientation, the organization offers a variety of ways for the women to be able to engage as members more actively, from workshops on immigrant rights or nontoxic cleaning products, to participating in a direct action. Once people attend various events, meetings, or workshops regularly, they have the opportunity to take on leadership trainings. From there, women can then become "member

84 Alison Lingane, "Employee Ownership as a Strategy for Business Retention," *Employee Ownership News*, October 21, 2019, https://www.fiftybyfifty.org/2019/10/employee-ownership-as-a-business-retention-strategy/.
85 "Retain Businesses in Berkeley, CA," Project Equity, 2019, https://project-equity.org/communities/small-business-closure-crisis/berkeley-california/
86 "City of Berkeley Commits $100,000 to Worker Cooperative Development," Sustainable Economies Law Center, June 2019, https://www.theselc.org/berkeley_commits_two_years_of_funds_to_worker_coops
87 Linda Burnham and Nik Theodore, "Home Economics: The Invisible and Unregulated World of Domestic Work," *National Domestic Workers Alliance*, January 2012, https://www.domesticworkers.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/HomeEconomicsReport.pdf
88 "Mujeres Unidas y Activas Strategic Vision 2010 - 2015," *Mujeres Unidas y Activas*, February 2012, https://mujeresunidas.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/MUA-strategic-plan-2010.pdf

leaders," and participate as spokespeople, peer counselors, facilitators, educators, or have the opportunity to be elected to the board. Throughout various inflection points, such as when the organization develops its periodic strategic plans, or when it decides which campaign efforts to prioritize, member leaders are part of the decision making process. Members and member leaders are not only participants, but stakeholders and decision makers in the organization. The leadership development program allows women to access individual healing, counseling, and education, and offers them agency and power through direct opportunities to support the organization and their community and become part of a broader collective movement. The leadership program also strengthens the organization's own workforce–by employing a base of people who represent their communities in decision making–which in turn strengthens their mission. The organization is predominantly run by women who started as members, and recently, a longtime member became the Executive Director.

Though the initial draw may be to receive immediate support, as MUA's Leadership Development Director Malena Mayorga explains, there is so much more that happens: "As one heals, integrates into the community, and becomes active in our movements, one is transformed. We want this to be a transformational relationship not a service relationship. We see that through transformation, we become leaders, and together, organizing, we build our collective power to make the changes we want to see towards social, economic, and racial justice."[89] To MUA, the services they provide and the trainings they offer are intimately linked with transformational change, because individual growth is intertwined with collective power. "It is when women find their power that their voices can be at the center and lead towards systemic changes."

Networks as Critical Infrastructure

When organizations form in response to systemic injustices, their work by nature runs against the status quo. As a result, political, financial, and cultural barriers often limit their ability to exist, let alone scale. Therefore, these organizations often rely on coordinated and sophisticated organizing efforts that include targeting government bodies at multiple scales, and incubating networks of organizations both regionally and nationally.[90] To overcome political and cultural barriers, a proof of concept can be a mechanism to both inspire others within the movement and build wider support. Pioneers in the movement space are therefore critical in paving the way for others to follow suit. Networks also serve a vital role, in convening and aligning organizations to build coalitions, facilitating knowledge sharing, and pooling resources. Organizations like SELC and Project Equity have become trusted local partners in offering direct educational resources and technical assistance, and building a network of local, regional, and national partners. Networks that form across issues and sectors can also form the basis for collective impact, by broadening the base of support and building the momentum necessary to overcome barriers. MUA, for example, in representing and organizing Latina immigrant women, has also come to advocate for domestic workers, undocumented workers, and workers' rights more broadly.

City-led Public Processes

Participatory Budgeting in the Tenderloin

San Francisco's Tenderloin neighborhood is often characterized by homelessness, poverty, substance abuse and crime, but it also has historically been a hub for social movements, activism, and resiliency. It is the district with the highest density of children in the city, and high concentrations of communities of color, seniors, people living with disabilities, artists, and community-based organizations and merchants. The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated many of the Tenderloin's challenges, prompting the city to initiate a State of Emergency response to allow

89 Malena Mayorga (Director of Leadership Development, Mujeres Unidas y Activas), in discussion with the author, March 10, 2023.
90 Jason S. Spicer "Worker and Community Ownership as an Economic Development Strategy: Innovative Rebirth or Tired Retread of a Failed Idea?" *Economic Development Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (2020): 325–42. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891242420941597.

residents to access resources more quickly. The emergency response was managed by the city's Department of Emergency Management from January to June of 2022, after which the efforts transitioned to long term management by the San Francisco Planning Department's Community Equity team. To mark the culmination of the preceding phase of crisis operations efforts and transition to sustained management, the city developed the Tenderloin Community Action Plan–a strategic visioning document that outlines priorities for the neighborhood.[91] At the end of 2022, San Francisco Mayor London Breed allocated $3.5 million to a participatory budgeting process for the Tenderloin, to begin identifying projects that could be implemented within the Action Plan. Due to city budget timelines, the Planning Department ("the Department") took on the role of carrying out the process under a tight, 6-week period. During November and December, the team conducted outreach and promotion, collected project submissions, and carried out voting.[92]

The process began with a call for submission for projects, which was open to either residents or businesses in the Tenderloin, or community organizations serving the Tenderloin. Projects were required to be within the neighborhood boundaries (as defined by the city). For projects to be accepted for the final ballot, various criteria were established. Projects had to serve the goals of the Action Plan and had to be deemed "ready-to-go" (which meant that they were either pre-existing projects or could be new project proposals as long as the new project included a proposed budget, scope, deliverables, project manager and fiscal sponsor). The Department offered support for new project proposal submissions if requested, but support was limited due to capacity constraints, and the requirements for a new project limited the ability for individuals or organizations who had less resources to participate, or who did not have prior experience with navigating a process like this. A list of additional criteria was compiled by the Department for further evaluation considerations. These criteria were presented to community members during two workshops (one in person, one virtual), during which participants discussed and prioritized criteria. The finalized criteria were then used as an additional filter through which projects were selected for the final ballot. Ultimately, 32 projects out of 53 submissions were eligible for voting.

While submissions were being collected and evaluated, the Department was also conducting outreach around the upcoming vote. With a tight timeline, outreach strategies were limited in scale, but included distributing flyers to the community, and engaging with community based organizations. The Department also decided to create in-person voting opportunities at various community events, as both a way to reduce barriers to voting, and to serve as an additional form of outreach about the vote. In terms of the vote itself, the Department grappled with wanting to foster as accessible and open a process as possible, while also mitigating the risk of what they referred to as a "popularity contest" (referring to a scenario in which votes may be skewed by more well-resourced residents or organizations better equipped to mobilize supporters). Decisions behind the process and mechanism for how people vote have technical implications for the voter experience, as well as broader implications around who can participate and how. After comparing various options, the team decided to use the Stanford Participatory Budgeting Platform developed by the Stanford

91 "Tenderloin Community Action Plan." San Francisco Planning. https://sfplanning.org/project/tenderloin-community-action-plan.

92 I worked as an intern with the San Francisco Planning Department's Community Equity team during the Summer of 2022. I began my research for this thesis shortly after, which is also when the team embarked upon the participatory budgeting process. The timing meant that I had already begun to collect information into participatory processes, and they had already begun their outreach process. In reconnecting, we developed a collaboration in which I could learn from their approach to participatory budgeting, while also supporting their decision making process by contributing learnings from researching how other cities have carried out participatory budgeting. Specifically, these insights were used to inform their decisions around voting eligibility criteria, conducting effective outreach prior to and during voting, and ballot design (including factors like digital or paper ballots, language, and visuals). My prior and ongoing relationship with the department informed this research. But having a prior relationship also meant having a more intimate view into understanding the challenges that the Department, and any organization, might face in carrying out a participatory process.

Crowdsourced Democracy Team to host the voting process.[93] After an initial conversation with the Stanford team to understand the platform's capabilities, as well as internal discussions to determine desired qualities, the Department ultimately decided upon the following ballot features:

- **Voting eligibility:** Tenderloin residents 12 years of age and older, Tenderloin small business staff, and Tenderloin Community-based organizations staff
- **Voting method:** The platform distinguishes between various methods that vary in complexity, from approval voting, which asks voters to choose between two options, to "knapsack" voting, which gives voters the agency to allocate either pre-determined or self-determined amounts to various projects, distributing the funding until a maximum amount is reached. The Department decided on Approval voting, in which voters selected projects (all of which were listed alongside their proposed budgets) until the maximum of $3.5 million was reached.
- **Language:** The platform can translate the user interface into a set of pre-programmed languages (or additional languages, upon request, though that requires more time), but the ballot items themselves must be translated ahead of time by the organization. Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Vietnamese, and Tagalog are the languages predominantly spoken in the Tenderloin. All of these languages, except Vietnamese, were available pre-programmed on the website. While programming the interface in Vietnamese was possible, it would have taken longer than the timeline allotted, so the Department had to forego offering a Vietnamese option.
- **Verification:** Verification steps are intended to mitigate the risk of people voting multiple times. The platform's default is to ask a registration question that prompts people to provide user-specific information, such as an address or phone number. Asking all voters for such information would have created significant access issues for the population of unhoused and undocumented residents. As a work-around, the Department established a Google Voice number that those without personal devices could enter.
- **Voting procedures:** It was decided that all voting would happen digitally, because the Department did not have the timeline nor capacity to collect and count paper ballots. To accommodate those with limited or no digital access, voting kiosks and voting events were set up. These stations featured iPads with the ballot and were managed by Department staff and community members. This option both accommodates voters who may need additional support, and also asks as an additional outreach tool, as curious passersby could learn more about the process and cast their vote on the spot.

Ultimately, 1,368 Tenderloin residents and workers voted. The most popular projects predominantly supported improving neighborhood safety and livability with public space improvements, direct safety investments, cleaning, and shelter and food security. Community-based services for youth and immigrant seniors also received support. The results notably reveal that many of the winning projects are from existing, rather than new, programs. The reasons for this may be related to various reasons: 1) the additional information required to submit a new project proposal created a bias towards the submission of existing projects; 2) While some voters may have been hearing about all 31 projects for the first time, and therefore have more of an objective perspective, it is likely that most had some familiarity with existing projects in the community. The bias in familiarity was likely exacerbated by the fact that the list of projects during the voting process was extensive, which may have incentivized people to choose projects they already knew of as a shortcut; and 3) The Department did not regulate how individuals or organizations who submitted projects conducted their own outreach to garner support. The winning organizations or individuals may have had better resources to conduct outreach to more voters.

93 The Stanford Crowdsourced Democracy Team (SCDT) is a group of researchers at Stanford University that partners with cities and organizations to deploy digital tools to support the implementation of participatory and deliberative processes. # These tools include an Online Deliberation Platform, which fosters digital deliberative processes, and the Participatory Budgeting Platform, an open-source software that supports digital voting for participatory budgeting elections. The team has supported election processes for cities including Boston, New York City, Chicago, and most recently, San Francisco.

While features of a "popularity contest" may have been realized during the process, at the same time, votes of any quantity still provide an important indication of community preferences and priorities that otherwise may have gone unknown. Lodewijk Gelauff a Stanford PhD student and member of the Stanford Crowdsourced Democracy Team who was the Department's point person in using the platform, notes that while the platform only supports the voting process itself, it does not support any preceding outreach, or evaluation after the vote: it is up to the city to carry out such steps.[94] Along with attention to the voting process itself, developing robust measures to ensure more equitable project submission and project evaluation processes, can help to maximize equitable representation and participation–steps that may have been unlikely in this given the team's limited time and capacity, but that could be considered for future iterations.

With voting over, the Department then undertook an internal evaluation process, incorporating additional criteria around refining proposed costs, feasibility, and timing. The evaluation also consisted of assessing cross-agency collaboration opportunities and barriers, since many projects may not be within the sole jurisdiction of the Planning Department. With various stages of additional evaluation that would potentially override votes, residents' raw votes are not binding, and instead, are more consultative. The final list of projects will then have to undergo an RFP process, under the city's procurement policies.

This was the first Participatory Budgeting process that had taken place in the Tenderloin neighborhood, which is not insignificant. Aseel Fara is a longtime Tenderloin resident, community organizer, and now Planning Department employee who was a core member of the Participatory Budgeting team. As one of the people on the ground at the voting stations, he heard a lot of residents express skepticism towards the vote. In a community that has historically been overlooked and under-resourced, many lack the time or capacity for voluntary engagements, and if they do participate, rarely get to see the impact of their input. Aseel challenged residents' assumptions, emphasizing that through this process, their vote will inform funding allocations. Despite its various challenges, he feels proud of what the process means "the Tenderloin has never had this type of opportunity, and a process like this means giving sovereignty to people, through funding."[95]

Parklets

During the Covid-19 pandemic, our primary social infrastructures, like schools, churches, and restaurants, closed, making it more evident than ever before how critical public spaces are. Cities around the world quickly found ways to adapt, closing streets to vehicles and creating outdoor dining space. But the efficiency with which many cities were able to implement these new uses so quickly, is in part due to a preexisting framework developed years prior. In 2005, a collective of artists and urbanists known as Rebar, set out to call attention to the way cities had become places that were highly scripted, programmed from the top down, and furthermore, that prioritized vehicles over nearly every other use.[96] Inspired by other public artists, their tactic was to exploit a loophole in the City's code–which doesn't specify that activities other than parking are not allowed in parking spaces–for public benefit. They commandeered an 8-foot-wide by 20-foot-long metered parking space in downtown San Francisco and proceeded to subvert its usual use by parked cars to a miniature public space. People around the world quickly took note, and what started as a local prototype of user generated public spaces became a phenomenon known as Park(ing) day. Since then, many of these original spaces, and a plethora of new ones, have become permanent, and are known as parklets. Through the proof of concept and ensuing popularity, the public benefit was acknowledged, and the solution embraced.

94 Lodewijk Gelauff (PhD student in Management Science and Engineering at Stanford University, Stanford Crowdsourced Democracy Team), in discussion with the author, January 12, 2023.
95 Aseel Fara (Community Development Assistant, San Francisco Planning Department), in discussion with the author, January 19, 2023.
96 John Bela, "Hacking Public Space With the Designers Who Invented Park(Ing) Day," *Next City*, September 18, 2015, https://nextcity.org/urbanist-news/hacking-public-space-designers-parking-day

Only a few years after the original intervention, the Rebar team began working in partnership with the City of San Francisco to formalize parklets. Under the City's model, parklets could be sponsored by businesses, who would submit permits and then be responsible for designing, developing, and maintaining the parklets. The parklets had to remain open for public seating, so the public-private partnership had to ensure that seats would be for both patrons of the businesses and for the public. Through formalizing parklets, the City offered a greater capacity to be able to emphasize equity, providing technical assistance and expanding the definition of who could sponsor the parklets, and prioritizing certain neighborhoods for the location of parklets. At the same time, the transition from a community-based intervention to a city-led process, and the onus on businesses to apply for the permits to create parklets, leaves questions around whose responsibility it is to fulfill the need for public space, and who they are serving.

When the pandemic began in 2020, outdoor spaces became not only desirable, but essential. Until recently, there were no formal guidelines for the design of parklets. The pandemic necessitated urgency, so the city further loosened restrictions, and approved parklets that prioritized commercial seating over public space in order to serve the high demand for outdoor dining. The conversion of parklets to primarily serve patrons rather than the public has persisted post-pandemic. John Bela, one of the founders of Rebar and originators of the Park(ing) Day movement, describes what he sees now as the privatization of public space, and takes issue with the placement of responsibility for creating and stewarding public space on someone like a restaurateur, who is focused on running a business.[97] He identifies the problems that have emerged, such as accessibility issues when seating spills over into sidewalks, or confusion around who the spaces are actually for when the design of the space itself doesn't make it clear who is welcome and who is not. These problems scale quickly when you consider the proliferation of parklets. As John describes, "The parklet is a tiny little space. So it almost seems insignificant. But then when you think about there being 12,000 of them in New York. What is 12,000 times 200 square feet? It ends up becoming a lot of space. All these sorts of dimensions of environmental signals are kind of magnified in this tiny little space."

Parklets in other cities, like Vancouver, have taken a different approach. When Vancouver rolled out its parklet program, the city took on the responsibility of funding and development, which resulted in a far slower roll-out of spaces. But while less efficient, this process turned out to offer an important lesson: as the demand for public space persisted, the city concluded that parklets were not the optimal solution for offering both public space and commercial space. In response, they created two pathways: one in which businesses could apply for commercial parklet permits and pay for the development and maintenance of the spaces (but only be obligated to provide them to patrons, not for the public), and a second in which the city would redirect the resources for parklets to instead build out fewer, but larger, public spaces in the form of plazas.

By embracing parklets, both San Francisco and Vancouver, amongst other cities, responded to a demand for public space. While San Francisco replicated the original intervention to apply to evolving demands, the outcome ultimately strayed from the original need. Vancouver's approach, on the other hand, was iterative from the start, and was able to use that iteration to respond to community needs more directly.

Adopting (or Co-Opting) Movements

When government bodies adopt the demands of a movement, that is often perceived as a win. But there is a fine line between embracing and co-opting, between empowering and disempowering. PB first originated as a tool that could deepen democracy through a deliberative process that is linked to a binding decision. But many contemporary PB processes, like that in the Tenderloin, have

97 John Bela (Co-founder, Principal Rebar Art and Design Studio; Founder, Principal Bela Urbanism + Design), in discussion with the author, February 2, 2023.

iterated on this, either foregoing the deliberative element and/or limiting voters' preferences to be consultative rather than directly linked to a decision.

PB is a way for people to engage with investments that are made directly in their communities, and for that engagement to extend to a broader constituency than a traditional election, given the openness with which most PB processes set eligibility criteria. While not true to the original intent of PB, limiting the process to just entail a vote rather than linking it to a broader deliberative dialogue, also has its benefits, in offering a low-cost opportunity for people to engage in a high impact decision on how money is spent in their community.[98]

Like a deliberative polling process, participatory budgeting can be a useful tool to enrich decision makers' understanding of a community, cuing questions like, what do these results tell us about the need here? Are these needs in line with what we assumed? If not, why not? What is it that the community wants that isn't being provided, and why? While the amount of people's influence in a participatory budgeting process can range from a consultative process to direct decision making authority, and from minimal participation via a vote, to higher participation via deliberation, where along that spectrum a process falls is not just coincidental, but the result of various decisions. The values and intentions behind these decisions should therefore be made transparent. If not, PB can run the risk of perpetuating patterns of extractive community engagement, wherein what is intended, what is promised, and what is achieved are different.

The Tenderloin PB process also raises questions around the time and capacity required to carry out participatory processes. With the Department's constraints and given that it was the first PB process they had carried out, there were certainly various gaps in both knowledge and thoroughness that resulted in a process that had room for improvement. Whether that means the entire process was futile then, or perhaps even harmful, or if it is still worthwhile even with its limitations, is a question that engagement processes at large have to reckon with: is any engagement always better than no engagement?

In the context of the parklet movement, the City embraced a form of resistance against car-dominated culture and policies. But it was the intervention (converting parking spaces to seating) that was embraced, not the underlying demand (creating public spaces that reflected the particularities of a neighborhood). As a result, the intervention became repurposed during Covid-19 to respond to businesses who needed outdoor space in order to re-open. Being able to adapt a successful program to meet changing needs is valuable, but the demands of Covid-19 were temporary, and the longer term need for public space has yet to be met. The distinction between San Francisco and Vancouver's approaches highlights the ways in which–when a countermovement becomes adopted by a governing body–its impact can either be scaled and expanded or reoriented all together.

A process is only as strong as the values that it is rooted in, and the transparency and communication of those values. An overreliance on process, and the mechanics of process, can distract from the importance of not only establishing, but upholding values.

Community-led Public Processes

Community Democracy Project

The Community Democracy Project (CDP) is a campaign that began in Oakland in 2011 on the coattails of the global Occupy Wallstreet movement. An entirely volunteer-run effort, CDP's mission is to promote direct democracy by empowering residents to control the city budgeting

98 Carolina Johnson, H. Jacob Carlson, and Sonya Reynolds, "Testing the Participation Hypothesis: Evidence from Participatory Budgeting," *Political Behavior*, February 25, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-021-09679-w.

process. Using frameworks from participatory budgeting and deliberative democracy, CDP developed a ballot initiative intended to first appear on the city's ballot in the 2014 election. The initiative, if approved, would amend the city charter of Oakland to allow residents to decide on the city's entire budget, through participation in neighborhood assemblies and an annual vote.

In Oakland, for a ballot initiative to appear on the ballot, signatures from 10% of the registered voting population must be collected. But a charter amendment, which something like participatory budgeting would trigger, would need 15%. The CDP team has made various attempts at collecting adequate signatures leading up to the past several election cycles, but has yet to acquire the requisite 15%, which would be equivalent to nearly 30,000 validated signatures. What distinguishes CDP's initiative from participatory budgeting is the relationship it envisions between people and power. In a traditional process, like that in the Tenderloin, elected officials usually earmark or allocate a small percentage of the budget to be decided upon by residents, but the number of constraints limit how much power people actually have. Conversely, CDP not only outlines a process rooted in participation, but it also sets out to have the entire $2 billion city budget decided by the people. Voters would be given a list of all city departments and their current percentage of funding, and then allocate percentages to each. The average of the choices would determine a department's budget in the following fiscal year.

Through their signature collection canvassing efforts, CDP has been in dialogue with residents of Oakland for more than a decade. An important component to CDP's work is mobilizing the people who are apathetic, who may be disillusioned by the political system and see no value in the effort. Shawn McDougal, one of the founders and the co-director of CDP, describes how many of the conversations he has had with voters begins with people expressing a lack of hope and interest, and not seeing how anything could change.[99] Part of Shawn's personal mission is to change their mind, to instill in them that people not only have the right, but the power to change the law. The outcome of changing policy to democratize the budget is just one component of CDP's mission. The process to getting there is equally, if not more, important. According to Shawn, "Anyone who lives in a community has access to the same amount of community knowledge as anyone else, so we should all have the same say about what affects us. It's not even just about better policy outcomes through the budget–which is already powerful in itself–it's also about people feeling dignity. So they're not like, 'Oh, I'm in the servant class, because I don't make 'x' amount of money. And my say doesn't matter'. It's like, no, we all have the same say."[100]

Along with the vote, the ballot initiative emphasizes participation and deliberation as integral to the process, which CDP envisions via their Neighborhood Assemblies model. The model subdivides the city into assemblies of three to five thousand people. The assemblies hold monthly meetings in which community based organizations, elected officials, and others can have a platform to present various ongoing projects and proposals, and the group can discuss neighborhood issues in an open forum.[101] The assemblies also become a way to discuss the budget vote in a collective context, borrowing from deliberative democracy models as a framework. The Community Democracy Project envisions a world in which people develop a sense of dignity and empowerment through the prospect of enacting change, and in interacting with others in their community, develop a more powerful collective wisdom.

Public Bank East Bay

Deciding how a city's budget is used is one mechanism of direct democracy, but if and when public interest is established for a community benefits projects, how that project is actually funded and implemented is not guaranteed. Private banks and lending institutions often deem community

99 Shawn McDougal (Co-director, Community Democracy Project), in discussion with the author, January 16, 2023.
100 Ibid.
101 "FAQs," Community Democracy Project, Accessed January 27, 2023, https://communitydemocracyproject.org/faqs/

benefits to be too risky, or not profitable enough. But these dominant financial institutions have such a stronghold on economic activity, that envisioning an alternative feels more like a thought experiment than feasible objective. In the East Bay, a group has set out to realize that vision. Public Bank East Bay (PBEB) is a proposal for a public bank, which would be owned jointly by the jurisdictions of Alameda County, Oakland, Berkeley, and Richmond. Traditionally, municipalities invest tax revenue in a private bank, but a public bank cuts out the middleman and saves cities on the otherwise high costs that result from banking fees and interest.[102] Unlike private banks, which ultimately serve to create profits for shareholders, public banks are primarily concerned with long-term economic growth over profit. This allows them to be a local lending institution that can more robustly serve the public benefit: revenues are reinvested towards public resources (such as infrastructure projects) and by being able to offer lower interest rates, they can support underbanked individuals, and finance community benefits projects.

In the US, the only operating model of a public bank is the Bank of North Dakota. The bank's experience in the rollout of the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) amidst the Covid-19 pandemic has become a testament to the value of public banks; while communities across the country struggled to access and distribute the funds, North Dakota was able to secure more PPP funds relative to their workforce than any other state, giving local small businesses a significant advantage.[103] This was due both to the public bank not charging exorbitant fees like most other banks, and their longstanding community relationships, which allowed money to be distributed efficiently. What sets public banks apart is the combination of scale of their lending capacity via taxpayer funds, an emphasis on economic development over profit, and the commercial credit allowances that let the public bank fund community benefits that might not generate short-term profit otherwise, like worker cooperatives or community land trusts.

PBEB's governance structure is also an antidote to that of traditional private banks: not only are all board meetings open to the public, but their governance structure also centers community, with 10 seats for community members, and 5 for government representatives. One challenge that PBEB has had to grapple with is needing to forefront banking expertise in their decision making, while also being cognizant that doing so could create a barrier to adequately engaging and representing community in decision making. Ultimately, they decided that they wouldn't sacrifice technical expertise, in order to ensure the longevity of the financial institution, but that those roles will receive training in working with community, so that the bank can exist as an entity for the public.[104]

An additional component of public banks is their mission around intentional investments. Private banks are often the leading funders of fossil fuels, private prisons, and the arms industry. Even when a jurisdiction votes to divest from these industries, there often is not an easy pathway to do so; PBEB provides a viable pathway to divesting from these industries, and reinvesting funds back into the local economy. Debbie Notkin is a member of the Friends of the Public Bank East Bay board, a nonprofit created to provide oversight in the formation and functioning of the bank. To her, the bank's mission is uniquely positioned to serve a public need: "Nobody other than the public banking movement is looking at the huge pot of tax and fee money, and saying, how can it work for us instead of working for rich people, fossil fuel corporations, private prisons? The public banking movement is the only space where people are asking those questions."

A report from the University of California, Berkeley, recommended public banks as one of the solutions that could help mitigate the vulnerabilities facing POC-owned businesses in the Bay

102 "Public Banks," Democracy Policy Network, Accessed January 27, 2023, https://democracypolicy.network/the-agenda/policy_kit/public-banks
103 Andrew Van Dam, "North Dakota Businesses Dominated the PPP. Their Secret Weapon? A Century-Old Bank Founded by Radical Progressives.," *Washington Post*, May 15, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/05/15/north-dakota-small-business-ppp-coronavirus/
104 Debbie Notkin & Didacus Ramos (Board Members, Friends of Public Bank East Bay), in discussion with the author, January 26, 2023.

Area, by providing access to capital and financial support that is otherwise lacking.[105] PBEB's pillars of community control and community interests extend to supporting the entire ecosystem of a community. For example, in supporting small businesses, the bank will offer flexible lines of credit and loan guarantees to POC businesses. Filling that need then alleviates the pressure on over-extended non-profit lenders who historically have taken on lending to these businesses. Broadly across the community, greater access to funding at a local scale creates economic development that more closely reflects people's needs.

Public Funding by the People, for the People

Both CDP and PBEB have received pushback from community members who are resistant to what decentralizing authority would mean. CDP's proposal to put budget decisions in the hands of residents is particularly contentious and raises questions around whose expertise is valued in our society, which becomes codified in decisions like who is allowed to vote and whose opinion is deemed worthy to represent others'. Skepticism towards the average citizen having decision making power is not an unreasonable response. Given how our existing system has incentivized ignorance, voters have little incentive to gain knowledge about political decisions because their vote generally neither requires knowledge, nor has a significant influence on outcome. Therefore, the cost is high for people to obtain knowledge, and the benefit is limited.[106] Conversely, while experts and elected officials may be better informed about the procedural and technical aspects of an issue like budgeting, they are less equipped to understand the nuances of local needs, which entails assessing the costs and benefits of a decision on individuals.[107] Rather than a binary, our political processes would benefit from considering how and when both the expertise of elected officials and of residents can be best leveraged.

Participation in our political systems often takes the form of the people being invited into the government. That is, the assumption of power rests in the state, and processes are set up to grant people agency to provide input. But the premise of being invited into a process implies that the underlying rules are set up by those in power, and therefore, to participate requires citizens to navigate technical procedures and bureaucratic rules, and to have a high threshold for overcoming the disincentives to being informed. If the government is intended to represent the public, then it should be elected officials and legislative bodies who are tasked with learning the nuances of a locality, to navigate a community's local history and context, and build relationships with individuals and organizations. Participatory budgeting and public banking help to bridge this gap, by bringing decision making to the community, and using participation as a mode of education for both citizens and government officials. These mechanisms simplify otherwise technical processes, and as a result, benefit from capturing a wider set of interests from an expanded circle of stakeholders.

Worker-owned Cooperatives

Rainbow Grocery Cooperative

Rainbow Grocery Cooperative is an independent grocery store and worker-owned cooperative in San Francisco's Mission District, that opened in 1975 as part of a wave of community stores that were borne out of the era's counterculture movement. The store was initially run as a nonprofit operated by a handful of volunteers but soon began to pay workers as they generated a profit. Eventually, they restructured into a cooperative corporation, which is how they continue to operate. At nearly 200 workers, Rainbow has not only grown immensely, but it is also one of the few alternative enterprises from that era still standing. The cooperative is non-hierarchically structured,

105 Laura Schmahmann, et al., "Mapping POC-Owned Business Vulnerability in the Wake of COVID-19" (Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, Berkeley, December 2021), https://www.urbandisplacement.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/UDP-Business-Vulnerability-Report-Final.pdf

106 Ilya Somin, *Democracy and Political Ignorance: Why Smaller Government Is Smarter, Second Edition* (Stanford Law Books, 2016).

107 Ilya Somin, "How Political Ignorance Strengthens the Case for Libertarianism," *Washington Post*, September 20, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2017/09/20/how-political-ignorance-strengthens-the-case-for-libertarianism/

and operates under democratic, majority-rule processes. New hires transition from workers to members who have voting rights once they have completed a trial period (which consists of either working 1000 hours, or for 9 months, whichever comes first) and are voted in. Cody Frost, who has been at the Rainbow Grocery Cooperative for 16 years, sees this onboarding period as a critical time during which people are introduced to the structure and processes of the organization.[108] Whether they have previous cooperative experience, or even come in with a set of aligned values, is not a prerequisite: the education around being part of a cooperatively owned enterprise is part of the training process, just as an orientation to the store and products are.

One of the challenges Rainbow faces is that with 200 workers, there are 200 different sets of values. Consensus-based decision making would be unfeasible at this scale, and also may not be appropriate, given that not every decision impacts the group at-large, like it might in a smaller organization. Rainbow's solution to decision making at this scale was to divide the store into 14 departments, each of which are run relatively autonomously. These subsets operate via a democratic process wherein members vote on decisions internal to their department. Meeting minutes and information from all departments and processes are accessible, so members can still engage with other departments, and can choose to be actively engaged with store-wide decisions or can choose to limit their participation to just their department.

As a cooperative with a customer base, balancing the interests of customers, with those of the internal membership, and the store's bottom line, is a challenging balance. The store, for example, does not carry any meat or human consumption (they do sell pet food), which was a decision based on organizational values, despite the many requests of non-vegetarian customers. On the other hand, the expansion of their bulk foods section–a pillar of the store that draws in many customers–while labor intensive to maintain, was a response to customer demands.[109]

Beyond building and sustaining their values across the membership, being a leader in the broader worker-cooperative movement, and disseminating their practices and processes is central to Rainbow's identity. But being a business in an increasingly competitive market and expensive city–let alone a business where profit is not the sole motive–has natural constraints. Cody describes how the business historically has dedicated more time and resources to external engagement, but that there is increasingly limited capacity for those opportunities, both individually and organizationally. As a result, there is a shared agreement to temporarily deprioritize external efforts while they focus on economic sustainability and longevity. This is just one example that challenges the assumption that cooperatives are constrained by rigid values. Rather, Rainbow is a testament to the values and structure behind a cooperative actually enabling adaptation and evolution, so long as there is shared agreement. And while making decisions collectively certainly slows down processes, as Cody explains, having unilateral support behind decisions means that there is more buy-in and understanding: "Ultimately, we can come up with better compromises and have the support that if there's something we're unsure about, we can have more confidence to test it out, because we all agree."

The Cheese Board Collective

When it first opened in 1967, the Cheese Board Collective was a small cheese shop in Berkeley, with a bulletin board posted out front that was used to post information about political activity related to the Anti-war movement and Free Speech Movement.[110] As it expanded, the owners sold the business to its employees, forming a worker-owned collective. The store is a relished local

108 Cody Frost (Marketing & Creative Strategist, Rainbow Grocery), in discussion with the author, San Francisco, California, January 17, 2023.
109 Ibid.
110 "Cheese Board." In *Bay Area Directory of Collectives*, 1980. Collective Directory Group, Berkeley, CA. Archived at *Wayback Machine*, citing a capture dated July 18, 2011. https://web.archive.org/web/20110718162114/http://american.coop/sites/default/files/Bay%20Area%20Directory%200f%20Collectives.pdf

institution that has come to be associated with consistent lines of customers.

Many of the Cheese Board's structures and processes echo those found at Rainbow. For one, there is no prerequisite for new hires to have prior experience in cooperative contexts, or to necessarily come in with those values. Instead, employees are trained in cooperative processes through various workshops and trainings. With a lateral, non-hierarchical structure, all workers are trained in all aspects of the business (with the exception of a few specialized administrative roles).[111] Additionally, as they have grown, they no longer make every decision collectively across the organization. Instead, they developed a committee structure that employees are either elected into or can volunteer to join. The committees represent specific functions and make decisions on behalf of the collective.

Within the cooperative governance structure, people make decisions that influence both their own and their co-workers' well-being. This agency, and responsibility, carries both direct and indirect benefits. Radcliffe Eccleston, who has been at the Cheese Board for three years and serves as the Community Liaison, notes that, "As a cooperative, we can enact change amongst ourselves, without having to go through other people. Having that capacity in some facet of your life is gratifying and exciting...Something I value is how seriously we take the concept of empowerment. Where you are empowered, you have to be engaged. We're empowered in a way that isn't really paralleled in any other facet of life."[112] The relationship between individual agency and broader empowerment has broad implications for how workers in a cooperative can contribute to the greater community.

In terms of balancing the interests of the collective versus those of the customers, when requests are made, they are usually first raised informally in internal convenings, before being presented formally via a proposal that goes to a vote. Decisions like expanding their hours or providing additional services can mean that employees work longer and harder, but when these decisions are made, they are made collectively, and therefore are sacrifices that the employee base deems worthwhile to prioritize financial stability and retain customer loyalty. Where they aren't willing to meet customers, is around expanding the business. Expansion is often seen as antithetical to cooperative values, because even though cooperatives may still strive to maximize profits to better sustain their employee base, there's less incentive to grow when profits and power are distributed rather than concentrated. Instead, expansion is emphasized as a mode to scale the cooperative model and its impacts, rather than for a particular business's benefit. In line with this principle, years ago, when one of the founding Cheese Board members had an interest in opening another bakery, rather than expand, they replicated the model as a separate enterprise. Eventually, they formed an association of cooperatives known as the Arizmendi Association. The original Cheese Board team used the experience they had acquired over the years to guide the Arizmendi cooperatives through the process of forming. Arizmendi, by way of Cheese Board, has now become an incubator of sorts, acting as a network and resource for new cooperatives.

People Power Solar Collective

In the U.S., residents are largely detached from the way our energy systems work, interacting very little with it aside from monthly bills. People Power Solar Cooperative was formed with the intent of getting people to ask, "where does my energy come from?" and "who controls access to it?"[113] Electric utilities and renewable energy companies operate at enormous scales, which makes them critical players in the Just Transition. But their scale is also part of the challenge: as investor-run and profit-generating entities, the environment is not their only motive, and in some cases, the production of solar and wind farms at such a large scale can detrimentally affect ecosystems.

111 Radcliffe Eccleston (Community Liaison, Cheeseboard Collective), in discussion with the author, January 20, 2023.
112 Ibid.
113 hannah bouscher-gage (Co-Director, People Power Solar Cooperative), in discussion with the author, February 23, 2023.

While individuals are able to install their own solar panels, installation is costly and requires home ownership. Community energy organizations, like People Power Solar, seek to decentralize energy ownership, and distribute the benefits and profits to the community. They are able to operate at a larger and more cost-efficient scale than individuals, while being small enough to limit the exorbitant investment costs that large-scale companies bear for new facilities. In describing their energy ownership model, People Power Solar Cooperative is intentional about the language they use to describe it. As the organization's Co-Director hannah bouscher-gage, explains "We do not mean ownership in the sense of power over, but rather within, as in a sense of ownership of oneself, one's role in the movement and ability to participate." And in terms of energy, "We frame energy as a verb, as something that cannot be commodified. We are working toward this reframe of energy and the energy system in order to ultimately move toward decommodification."[114]

People Power Solar's first project was a pilot site in Oakland which was entirely financed by community members. The project is the first residential energy project in California to be owned by community members, rather than by a municipality. Through the California Worker Cooperative Act, the cooperative raises capital from investors (or "members," as they are referred to). Once there is enough funding for a solar installation, the organization takes care of installation, which so far has been on the property of community members who opt in to being subscribers. People Power Solar then sells the energy to the subscriber at affordable rates. Through the state's Net Energy Metering Law, any revenues made back are distributed across the members. The entire premise of this process rests on the Metering Law, which encourages private investment in renewable energy through solar credits. However, in December 2022, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) unanimously voted to approve a change to the policy, which cuts payments for excess solar production sent to the grid by 75% – significantly reducing solar credits and incentives for localized energy transitions.[115] As a result, People Power Solar is having to reckon with adapting, or even rebuilding, their entire model.

Rooftop solar not only diminishes the reliance on power plants, but it also localizes energy sources, which reduces the risk of long-distance power lines which have been known to be the source of some of the state's wildfires. But without incentives for residential solar power, the resulting decline in rooftop solar may drastically hinder California's climate goals, because utilities would not be able to produce or buy enough renewable energy to replace what would be lost.[116] As a cooperative, People Power Solar sells solar energy at or below the rate that utility companies would charge and distributes dividends collectively across its member base. Their model broadens the impact of rooftop solar to not just those who have the means, property, and luxury of a south facing roof but to the broader community. This effort also fosters energy literacy–the organization's original intent–by getting more people interested in asking where their energy comes from, and to realize there are alternatives.

Worker Power is People Power

In an archived directory of Bay Area Collectives from 1980, the Cheese Board's changing relationship to politics is described: the cooperative started out with an explicit mission to support social and political activity, but as it grew, reeled in its political emphasis, while still focusing on the humanitarian values of equal pay, non-hierarchical governance, anti-profit as a motive, fair and responsible service to its customers, and feedback and support from the community.[117] Even if a cooperative is not driven by an explicit social mission, the principles of a worker-owned cooperative

114 Ibid.
115 Iris Crawford, "What's Going on with California's Rooftop Solar Battle?," Nonprofit Quarterly, February 23, 2023, https://nonprofitquarterly.org/whats-going-on-with-californias-rooftop-solar-battle/
116 Ivan Penn, "A Fight Over Rooftop Solar Threatens California's Climate Goals," The New York Times, January 24, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/24/business/energy-environment/california-rooftop-solar-utilities.html
117 "Cheese Board." In *Bay Area Directory of Collectives*, 1980. Collective Directory Group, Berkeley, CA. Archived at *Wayback Machine*, citing a capture dated July 18, 2011. https://web.archive.org/web/20110718162114/http://american.coop/sites/default/files/Bay%20Area%20Directory%200f%20Collectives.pdf

are innately linked to a broader agenda of worker power and economic justice. While both unions and cooperatives seek to provide adequate worker conditions, wages, and benefits, unions still operate within the context of traditional employee-employer relationships, while cooperatives directly counter this power dynamic, and as a result, embody an alternative model for how people relate to work, to power, and to the economy.

When worker-owned cooperatives are driven by a social movement, like People Power Solar, their democratic structure has the added power of bolstering their mission in day-to-day practices. People Power Solar's mission to reclaim power from dominant structures translates both to their organizational model and to their broader economic and environmental goals of "decentralizing, democratizing, distributing, and diversifying the energy system," as the organization's co-director describes. Social movements are not immune from being exclusionary and perpetuating inequities. Cooperatives structures in the context of a collective movement can be a means to democratize participation in the movement and allow people to engage in conversations and solutions more easily.

A healthy democracy is not just a matter of politics, but also economics. Our democracy is built on racial and gender discrimination, and on the idea that for certain groups to excel, they must profit off of others. Employment practices both reflect these societal dynamics, and further perpetuate them. Because work is tied to not only wages but also benefits, and determines so much of how we live, work holds immense power to influence our well-being as individuals, and as a collective. Ensuring workplace equity and democracy is not just a matter of improving job quality, but also of ensuring people have agency and voice. Having the agency to advocate for and secure our well-being as individuals and as a collective is a vital, yet radical, principle. Worker-owned cooperatives are a model for this principle to be realized, at the scale of an organization, and more broadly across society.

Reclaiming Land

Sogorea Te'

The environmental conservation movement has had a strong foothold in California, where places like Yosemite have become symbols of pristine wilderness. But the premise of this narrative rests on a perception of "wilderness" that implies nature that is untouched, and not yet explored. The global conservation and environmental protection movement has created a dichotomy between land and people, insisting that land must be protected from the destruction of people.[118] What this philosophy fails to recognize is the millennia of Indigenous people who were on the land prior to European settlers, and the reciprocal nature of how they traditionally stewarded the land.

In the Bay Area, of today's more than 1.4 million protected acres, only a handful belong to the contemporary Indigenous groups whose ancestors once lived there.[119] Present day East Bay is home to traditional Ohlone land. The Ohlone people consist of around 50 Indigenous tribes speaking related languages in coastal California. Like other Indigenous groups, they have been victims of multiple waves of colonization and genocide, each of which was marked by violence and a seizure of land. Generally, tribes that are federally recognized have been granted rights to acquire land, as well as access funding and protections. But the Ohlone are unrecognized, which means they are excluded from these resources, and lack protections of cultural, burial, and sacred sites. To complicate matters further, the process to become recognized requires documentation, which colonization has made obsolete for most tribes. California has the highest number of unrecognized tribes, as a result of 18 treaties that Congress never ratified, and the termination of recognition for

118 Mark Dowie. *Conservation Refugees: The Hundred-Year Conflict between Global Conservation and Native Peoples*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2009.
119 Eric Simons, "Land Back," Bay Nature, January 3, 2021, https://baynature.org/article/bay-area-land-repatriation/

41 tribes in the 1950s.[120] Displacement is embedded into the history of colonization and has come to characterize contemporary Indigenous' people's relationship to land. The Ohlone's struggle for justice speaks to how that history has persisted to this day through codification of oppression.

In the late 1990's, hundreds of ancestral remains from the Lisjan–one of the Ohlone groups–were unearthed in the East Bay city of Emeryville. After the site was deemed a contaminated brownfield, the burial ground was paved over and converted into the Bay Street Mall.[121] Both the symbolism and explicit harm done through this process prompted two Ohlone women, Corrina Gould, and Johnella LaRose, to begin organizing "Shellmound Peace Walks" to guide people in walking tours to various sacred sites in the Bay Area. The tours turned into an annual pilgrimage which became both an act of collective healing, and an educational tool for the broader community.

In 2011, another sacred and historically significant site known as Sogorea Te', in present day Vallejo, was threatened by development. After months of protest, a nearby federally recognized tribe was able to sign a cultural easement on behalf of the Ohlone, which committed the city to protect the site from development. The development was built anyway the next year, but the loss further motivated the group, and led to Gould and LaRose forming the Sogorea Te' Land Trust a few years later. Founding the Trust as women was an intentional and integral part of their vision. For one, when federally recognized tribes were allotted land in the 19th and 20th centuries, male heads of households were the ones who were given the title to land. Furthermore, upon realizing that a vast majority of land trusts are run by men, they wanted to disrupt the cycle of patriarchal power. As Corrina describes, "what has happened to our land has happened to women's bodies."[122] From this premise, the Land Trust set out to rematriate the land–returning land to Indigenous people while reclaiming the history of matrilineal power in Indigenous culture.

In 2016, Indigenous and environmental activists joined together to resist the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock. Planting Justice–a Bay Area community farming nonprofit–was part of the Standing Rock movement and was committed to continuing the legacy of the protest upon their return to the Bay Area. They did so by gifting a half-acre of their land to the Sogorea Te' Land Trust: the first parcel that the nonprofit acquired. The following year, Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf offered the Trust a site in Joaquin Miller Park. Through a conservation easement for cultural preservation, the city conferred land ownership to the trust via approval of city council required–a much more straightforward process than applying for federal recognition or garnering approval from other government bodies.

The mission behind acquiring land is that it can serve as a place for gathering and ceremonies, planting and harvesting, environmental restoration, and education and outreach. Through the rematriation, the City of Oakland remains the official property owner of the land, and the public will continue to have access, but the Land Trust will be able to close the site for projects and ceremonies. Any construction will require a permit, rezoning and an environmental review. Beyond the land itself, the rematriation is a means of recognizing the Ohlone as people, creates a physical place for the community to claim to reconnect to their ancestors and spiritual practices, and it also provides environmental value, through restoring native plants and habitats.

Johnella describes the Ohlone's connection to land as essential to their existence: "We thought we

120 Kate Golden, "How Indigenous People Got Some Land Back in Oakland," Bay Nature, December 21, 2022, https://baynature.org/2022/12/13/how-indigenous-people-got-some-land-back-in-oakland/

121 Julian Brave NoiseCat, "'This Land Was Stolen': Behind the Fight to Recover Sacred Indigenous Lands in the Bay Area," *Fix Solutions Lab*, May 25, 2021, https://grist.org/fix/justice/sogorea-te-land-trust-ohlone-shellmounds-world-we-need-book/

122 Melissa Nelson, "Rematriating the Land with Corrina Gould," February 3, 2022, https://Www.Nativeseedpod.Org/Podcast/2021/Ep17-Corrina-Gould.

were going there to save the land, but that is not what happened. The land saved us."[123] From the years of organizing, raising awareness, and educating both the Ohlone and broader community, the work of Corrina and Johnella became known and supported locally. They had developed a strong relational network of individuals and organizations, which set the foundation for financial support for the organization to form, for other organizations to offer their land, and for the advocacy that led to the approval of the conservation easement. The Sogorea Te' Land Trust sees their process as a vital blueprint for other unrecognized communities to follow.

Occidental Arts and Ecology Center

About 70 miles north of Oakland in West Sonoma County, sitting on 80 acres of sprawling wildlands, the Occidental Arts & Ecology Center (OAEC) has committed to embodying, and disseminating, the interconnectedness between people and the biosphere. In 1994, a group of 10 people bought the title to the land and established residency as an intentional living community they named the Sowing Circle. They subsequently formed OAEC as a non-profit organization on the same land, to center stewardship practices and educational programs around permaculture and ecological design, biointensive horticulture, conservation hydrology, restoration ecology and traditional ecological knowledge.[124] The Sowing Circle and OAEC are mutually supportive entities, which both foster projects and partnerships that cultivate resilience across social, cultural, ecological, and economic issues.

Kendall Dunnigan is the Director of OAEC's Permaculture Program and one of the original Sowing Circle residents. In our conversation, she foregrounded her work with a history of the ecology, people and community where the OAEC sits, from the millennia of federated Coast Miwok and Southern Pomo groups that have traditionally been on the land, to the clearcutting that took place to rebuild San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake.[125] Recognizing the harms of colonialism and uplifting Indigenous knowledge are not only part of the story behind OAEC, they are integral to the ethos and practices of the organization. The land that OAEC sits on is part of the ancestral homelands of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria (FIGR). FIGR and OAEC have collaborated on traditional ecological knowledge workshops since 2007, working with tribal citizens to reconnect them to their land and traditional practices, and with the wider population, to restore people's connection to natural systems.

Beyond educational programming, OAEC is also an education and retreat center. They offer their space and land to help support organizations as individual entities, and foster collaboration and coalition building across organizations. Part of OAEC's mission is also mirrored in their own organizational structure. Both the non-profit organization and the living community are consensus-based collectives. New hires are trained in consensus-building, which takes place at the larger organizational level, and smaller team level. To Kendall, this practice is multi-purpose: "Often the only participation in decision making we get is either in our most personal lives or by voting, and there's a lot of space between those two things." Consensus-based decision making, she went on to explain, is a way to "practice 'small g' governance, and to participate in the decision making of our daily lives and exercise that muscle."[126] The governance structure speaks to their philosophy of collective ownership, and non-hierarchical labor, as well as creates a mechanism for people to feel and exercise agency both as individuals and as a collective. In embedding agency into their organizational practices, and collective power in their partnerships, OAEC helps people build awareness of their impact on relationships with one another and with the environment.

123 Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, Ananya Roy, and Chris Carlsson, eds. *Counterpoints: A San Francisco Bay Area Atlas of Displacement & Resistance*. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2021.
124 Occidental Arts & Ecology Center. "About OAEC," February 16, 2018. https://oaec.org/about-us/.
125 Kendall Dunnigan (Director of the Occidental Arts & Ecology Center's Permaculture Program), in discussion with the author, January 16, 2023.
126 Ibid.

Relationship to Place as Relationship to People

Indigenous groups and conservation organizations share a common goal: to protect the environment. But whether that goal necessitates protecting land from people, or recognizing people's role in protecting land, leads to conflicting approaches. Indigenous people, as the stewards of biodiversity prior to colonization, have been found to be the most effective groups at conserving and sustainably managing the land and forests that they live in and depend on.[127] The Land Back movement is not only a form of resistance against histories of displacement, it is also a movement for reconnecting contemporary Indigenous communities to their ancestral heritage, and for fighting for future generations' rights to thriving ecologies.

The challenging road that preceded Sogorea Te' Land Trust's acquisition of its first parcels of land is a microcosm of the forces and counterforces behind the broader Indigenous rights movement. The codification of Indigenous people's displacement and disenfranchisement has created a context in which to this day, communities are deemed as "federally unrecognized" and are excluded from access to resources that should never have been taken away in the first place. In a political system so entrenched in modern day colonialism, there is significant work to be done towards repairing colonization's harms. But until then, networked support systems are a critical means to reclaiming land and power at a local scale.

This network necessitates the allyship of Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups, and of movement organizers and decision makers. OAEC, as both a physical space and network of allied groups, is a powerful example of the momentum that can be built when values align. Land-based movements have the benefit, and additional challenge, of having highly tangible impacts. Their impact has the potential to permeate several different scales. For example, both OAEC and Sogorea Te' create value internally amongst their respective communities, offer physical space for others to benefit and learn from at the community scale, and have become a convening site and blueprint for other organizations to build from at the scale of broader movements.

Affordable Housing

Housing and wealth–and the racialization of both–are highly intertwined in the US. In Oakland, the average median income–which is used to determine affordable housing eligibility–is nearly three times higher for white households than black households, at roughly $119,000 and $43,000, respectively.[128] If an affordable housing developer uses 80% average median income as a threshold, then they predominantly serve the white population, rather than a lower threshold which would prioritize the Black population. The 2008 financial crisis surfaced many of the precarities that underpin the US housing market: the lack of housing availability and affordability, pervasive speculation, risk of displacement, and high barriers to ownership. For low-income and communities of color especially, these issues had long plagued their experience with housing.[129]

Oakland Community Land Trust

In Oakland, a combination of historic redlining, a majority renter market, and housing costs outpacing income levels made the city, and communities of color, particularly susceptible to the housing crash. The Oakland Community Land Trust (OakCLT) entered the scene in 2009, with the goal of preserving and expanding housing and economic development opportunities for these communities in the city of Oakland.[130] OakCLT follows a similar model to other community land

127 Asyl Undeland, "Indigenous Land Rights -- a Critical Pillar of Climate Action," *World Bank Blogs*, November 19, 2021, https://blogs.worldbank.org/climatechange/indigenous-land-rights-critical-pillar-climate-action.

128 Alameda County-Oakland Community Action Partnership, "Data Profile: Alameda County and Oakland," 2021, https://cao-94612.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/Alameda-and-Oakland-Data-Profile-2021.pdf.

129 Kalima Rose and Margaretta Lin, "A Roadmap Toward Equity: Housing Solutions for Oakland, California" (City of Oakland Department of Housing & Community Development's Strategic Initiatives Unit and PolicyLink, 2015), https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/pl-report-oak-housing-070715.pdf.

130 "Mission & Values," OakCLT, accessed January 27, 2023, https://oakclt.org/about/missionvalues/.

trusts: they acquire land (usually consisting of vacant or occupied property) in order to remove it from the speculative market. By removing the land value and eliminating the risk of speculation, the trust is able to sell homes for a much lower rate than it would be on the market.

The need for affordable housing is urgent. But the current model of affordable housing development perpetuates many of the inequities that are at the heart of the racialized wealth gap. Affordable housing developments are generally financed from a top-down approach through federal tax incentives that prioritize new construction, and those incentives primarily benefit the investors and financial institutions.[131] What distinguishes the community land trust model from other interventions is that they not only address the need for affordable housing, but in ensuring affordability in perpetuity, they also create long term pathways to community wealth building.

While community land trusts generally share a goal of decommodifying housing, they don't all emphasize tenant control to the extent that OakCLT does.[132] Beyond home ownership as control, the governance of CLTs are generally distinguished by a tripartite structure: a split of residents or lessees of the land, residents living in the surrounding neighborhood, and organizations or elected officials. OakCLT has not only adopted this structure for their board, they also are intentional about their full time staff representing the community. While currently half of the staff are residents from the Trust's properties and half are not, a new resident hire will soon tip the scale to a majority-resident staff.

OakCLT is driven by its mission to preserve space for communities that the market may not otherwise allow. But how it achieves that mission is adaptable. When they first launched, the organization focused on acquiring vacant or foreclosed homes, rehabilitating them, and selling them at affordable rates. Since then, in response to community needs, they have shifted to a focus on housing preservation and anti-displacement. They have expanded their focus on housing to also stewarding mixed-use properties that can serve the community, and support groups of tenants who are at risk of displacement to convert their buildings to community ownership.

Housing is a fundamental human right, and in the US context, home ownership is often a proxy for wealth, stability, and power. The recovery from the foreclosure crisis did not improve conditions universally: marginalized communities continue to face systemic challenges to securing loans, and face higher risks of physical and cultural displacement caused by gentrification. By reclaiming land for community control, OakCLT not only provides more access to housing, but it also supports residents in reclaiming the processes that have historically dispossessed them of control. As Alex Acuña, a Stewardship Coordinator at OakCLT, explains, "CLTs create the opportunity for individuals and communities to experience ownership, autonomy, and self-determination that is independent of market conditions."[133] Beyond the right to being housed, providing access to home ownership extends people the opportunity to remain in a neighborhood, and to have a say over decisions made in their neighborhood.

East Bay Permanent Real Estate Cooperative

While nonprofit housing organizations, like CLTs, are a critical intervention to the lack of affordability, the greatest hurdle they face is obtaining adequate funding to secure land.[134] The People of Color Sustainable Housing Network (POCSHN) and SELC partnered to respond to this barrier and formed East Bay Permanent Real Estate Cooperative (EB PREC). A Black and women-

131 "Increasing Community Power and Health Through Community Land Trusts. A Report from Five Movement-Driven California CLTs," December 2020, http://oakclt.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/TCE-BHC-CLTs-Dec2020.pdf.
132 Mathilde Gustavussen, "How Oakland Tenants Forced Their Landlord to Turn Over the Keys," Jacobin, August 30, 2022, https://jacobin.com/2022/08/how-oakland-tenants-forced-their-landlord-to-turn-over-the-keys.
133 Alex Acuña (Stewardship Coordinator, Oakland Community Land Trust), in discussion with the author, January 25, 2023.
134 Urban Habitat and East Bay Community Law Center, "Rooted in Home Community-Based Alternatives to The Bay Area Housing Crisis," 2018, Https://Oakclt.Org/Wp-Content/Uploads/2018/12/Report_rooted-In-Home_urbanhabitat_ebclc.Pdf.

led, multi-stakeholder cooperative corporation, EB PREC builds wealth, stability, and access for those most disenfranchised by the real estate market, by permanently removing real estate from the speculative market.[135]

Similar to the CLT model, EB PREC works with tenants and community groups to purchase properties in the East Bay, taking them off of the speculative market to create permanently affordable housing. But unlike OakCLT, EB PREC is a for-profit cooperative corporation. As a cooperative corporation, rather than a traditional corporation, the organization is member-controlled, and net income is distributed across the member base. Thanks to the California Worker Cooperative Act, EB PREC is able to raise capital from their members in the form of shares of up to $1,000. By pooling community capital, EB PREC was able to accumulate enough funding for their first project. In 2020, they were approved by the SEC to raise money through a direct public offering (DPO)–one of the few organizations doing this in the cooperative space.[136] While no simple feat to get there, now that they have a DPO, the organization can bypass financial intermediaries, which opens investment to individuals and small groups who are traditionally excluded from investment opportunities. The investment model is both critical to EB PREC's operations and allows the same community members they serve to receive returns on investment, rather than allowing wealthy investors to profit. EB PREC currently targets a 1.5% return to each investor, which though a nominal amount, helps fortify their legitimacy as a viable alternative to the speculative real estate market.

Policy changes reflect a growing support for housing protection measures. Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) ordinances, for example, promote the transfer of property ownership to tenants; When a landlord sets out to sell a building, tenants must be notified, and are given the first right to make an offer, secure funding, and make a bid or pass the rights to an affordable housing developer.[137] The ordinance has passed in San Francisco, and is being considered in Oakland and Berkeley. While these policies reflect momentum in the right direction, as EB PREC's finance director Ojan Mobedshahi describes, TOPA and other policies that are intended to center tenants' rights, and even to explicitly support co-ops, sometimes fall short: many policies and accompanying programs were designed with large affordable housing nonprofits in mind who have been around for decades.[138] As a result, these organizations are particularly fluent in providing qualifications and applying for the programs, whereas newer housing cooperatives lack the track record that the program's criteria requires, and are therefore unable to qualify for the programs.

EB PREC's membership falls under various tiers: community and investor owners, residents, staff, and the board. Community level owners are local Bay Area residents who pay only a small due and help to shape decisions that impact their neighborhoods. Investor owners, on the other hand, don't have to be local. Through buying $1,000 shares, investors can contribute to the organization's mission (which in turn is a way for them to divest from more extractive industries), and benefit from the 1.5% return. Resident owners are those who live in a property that EB PREC has purchased. There is also fluidity between these groups: community owners can form together to purchase land with EB PREC, and become resident owners, for example. Across these owner types, everyone has an equal amount of say as a single voter, regardless of how many shares they have. Additionally, the organization's board is made up of 5 elected directors, and 3 appointed directors – the latter of which are designated as roles for a POC Housing Justice Director, Indigenous Director, and Black East Bay Director. The minutiae of these governance features speak to how far they go to codify

135 "What We Do," EB PREC, Accessed February 13, 2023, https://ebprec.org/about-us.
136 The Nonprofit Quarterly. "Remaking the Economy: Redefining Risk," March 11, 2022. https://nonprofitquarterly.org/remaking-the-economy-redefining-risk/.
137 Julie Gilgoff, "Giving Tenants the First Opportunity to Purchase Their Homes," Shelterforce, January 4, 2021, https://shelterforce.org/2020/07/24/giving-tenants-the-first-opportunity-to-purchase-their-homes/.
138 Steve Dubb et al., "Remaking the Economy: Redefining Risk," Nonprofit Quarterly, March 11, 2022, https://nonprofitquarterly.org/remaking-the-economy-redefining-risk/.

equity and inclusion, committing to not only centering community voices, but extending formal power to the community. Alongside access to housing, EB PREC emphasizes community education and leadership development. Even the format of their bylaws speaks to their community-centric values: rather than a long document of legalese, their bylaws are easy-to-read, jargon-free slides, featuring illustrations.[139] EB PREC has forged multiple pathways for community members to build wealth, through access to home ownership, access to investment opportunities, and access to power over decisions that impact their communities.

Housing as Economic Justice

America's nationhood was founded on the ideology that property is integral to independence, through establishing property as the primary criteria for citizenship and enfranchisement. But not just any property or "home" is deemed valuable, and not just anyone has access to property: these cultural preferences are largely shaped by political ideologies and private sector interest. Single-family homes in particular have historically been given special prominence in the US, protected and promoted through zoning. As Lawrence Vale examines, single-family homes were seen as an antidote to the poor conditions of 19th century tenement conditions in urban areas, and touted as an alternative to "Soviet-style collectives" following World War I, evoking a sense of stability that protect the nation from radical influence of socialism and communism.[140] And while the benefits to homeownership are certainly ample, equating homeownership and morality–as politicians and real estate entities did in the 20th century–doubles down on the disparities between who does and does not have a home, especially when there are explicit financial and legislative barriers for certain groups to obtain housing.

Efforts to expand home ownership to communities who have been systematically discriminated against by the real estate and housing market, and financial institutions, are critical equalizers. But the value of organizations like OakCLT and EB PREC doesn't just stop there; the governance structure of these organizations speaks to their commitment to create more equitable conditions. The tripartite model of CLT governance, and EB PREC's member-ownership structure convey to the community that their input is valued, in holding equal power to traditionally powerful stakeholders.

While giving more people access to wealth and home ownership is vital to repairing historic inequities, it perpetuates the inherent risks of capitalism that equate power with wealth. For example, one study found that homeownership substantially increases an individual's propensity to participate in local elections, to pay attention to issues that affect them as homeowners, and to participate in ways consistent with protecting their investment in the value of their property, on average.[141] The implications then are that homeownership creates downstream effects that give homeowners an advantage in political processes. Though alternative home ownership models are proliferating, they are far from the speed and volume necessary to meet national housing demands, and therefore continue to leave behind the subset of the population without a permanent home (either by choice or by necessity). Alongside expanding access to home ownership, efforts should be made to distribute the benefits of homeownership–such as financial stability and political engagement–to non-homeowners. Ultimately, the opportunity to have agency and choice in homeownership and wealth-building, is a critical step towards equity.

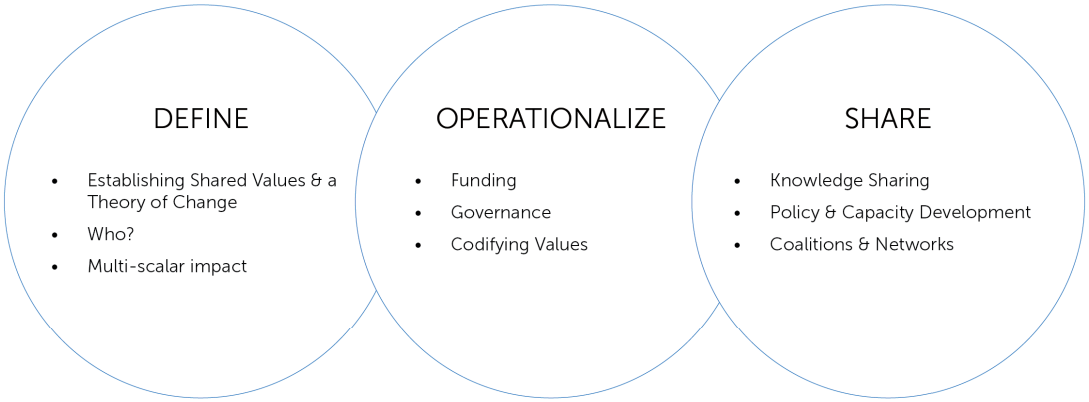
139 "East Bay Permanent Real Estate Cooperative, Inc. Bylaws," theselc.org, *EB PREC*, 2022, https://storage.googleapis.com/wzukusers/user-22872016/documents/2c4611b3f8254976b305e3655eb345ce/EB%20PREC%20Bylaws%20-%20Adopted%204-21-2022%20%5BDO%20NOT%20EDIT%5D.pdf.

140 Lawrence Vale. "Chapter 2: The Ideological Origins of Affordable Homeownership Efforts." In *Chasing the American Dream,* edited by William M. Rohe and Harry L. Watson, 15–40. Cornell University Press, 2019. https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501731136-003.

141 Andrew Hall and Jesse Yoder. "Replication Data for: Does Homeownership Influence Political Behavior? Evidence from Administrative Data." Harvard Dataverse, 2020. https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/MWBXDN.

CHAPTER 5. A PATHWAY TOWARDS SHARED POWER

The organizations featured here may be characterized as alternatives, or perceived as radical or even utopic, but aside from being anomalous in terms of their numbers, they approximate a truer version of democracy than dominant institutions. Rather than be seen as fringe movements, these organizations should be redefined as models that we can collectively orient towards. Michael Menser aptly uses the term "maximal democracy" to describe cooperative power, and "the ability to act with others to enhance the capacities of and obtain benefits for individuals while reducing inequalities among all."[142] These organizations offer a pathway to maximal democracy, of a window into what our society could look like if it were to rest on values of shared power. The challenges and opportunities that these organizations share, while specific to their individual experiences and contexts, offer learnings that are applicable to any organizing body, from grassroots organizations to political processes. In particular, their learnings highlight how more representative, participatory, and democratic systems can be built, through defining, operationalizing and sharing values.



The pillars of defining, operationalizing, and sharing values ensure that the are explicit tactics to resist the status quo.

Defining Values

Establishing Shared Values & a Theory of Change

Injustice manifests in acute and systemic ways. Transformative justice sets out to address the acute, material conditions of injustice, while addressing the systemic roots of injustice, to build alternative futures. This dual approach distinguishes organizations who align with the solidarity economy framework or more generally are trying to transform social, economic, and political systems; they recognize that society's problems are interconnected, and therefore that the solutions need to be as well. Developing such an approach rests on establishing values and articulating a theory of change. As Eve Tuck describes, a theory of change is a way to "operationalize the ethical stance of the project, what are considered data, what constitutes evidence, how a finding is identified, and what is made public and kept private or sacred."[143] Similar to a mission statement, a theory of change outlines an objective, in addition to outlining achieve that objective. The theory of change behind SELC, for example, is outlined as follows: "Sustainable Economies Law Center exists to bridge the

142 Michael Menser. *We Decide!* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2018). Menser defines "Maximal Democracy" as a type of deep, participatory democracy that features collective determination; capacity development and delivery of economic, social, and political benefits to members or constituents; the replacement of unequal power relations with relations of shared authority; and the construction, cultivation, proliferation, and interconnection of movements and organizations with overlapping normative frameworks.
143 Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (October 6, 2009): 409–28, https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.79.3.n0016675661t3n15.

gap in legal expertise needed to transition from destructive economic systems to innovative and cooperative alternatives."[144]

Values can extend from or anchor a theory of change. For values to be realized, they must be linked to processes and procedures. Values can be embedded in everything from the employees' wages to how an organization is governed and financed. Values and theories of change might distinguish organizations in the same network from one another; in the context of fundraising, for example, some organizations directly seek the support of financial institutions or philanthropic funds to legitimize and meet their demands now, in order to build towards an alternative future, while others resist interaction with these institutions all together, and focus on how alternatives can be built in their entirety now. For communities who have been systemically excluded, this tension is particularly potent: without generational wealth or ease of access to loans and grants, relying solely on economic resources outside dominant systems is not necessarily feasible, yet relying on resources that are exploitative is not sustainable. The choice doesn't always come down to values, and sometimes is rooted in necessity. But establishing explicit values from the outset and maintaining transparency creates a foundation for organizations to be nimble when necessary, without sacrificing accountability.

In public processes, establishing a theory of change creates an explicit link between a process and outcome, and therefore can help ensures that the mechanisms of a process are aligned with the intentions of an outcome. For example, California's California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), which was passed in the early 1970s, was created to allow significant public input on public projects, to identify if a project will have any adverse environmental effects. While a critical tool for environmental protection, it has become frequently manipulated as a tool to halt projects that might spur any type of change, regardless of its environmental implications; so long as a member of the public makes an argument that a project will have some form of negative, local impact, the project is delayed until a comprehensive study is undertaken to prove otherwise.[145] As a result, changes that are necessary to address climate change or the housing crisis are being met with pushback, and the loudest voices have the power to not only voice their concerns, but to entirely pause or terminate projects. Even if the original goal of CEQA was environmental protection, like most legislation, its purpose and use have evolved, and therefore, the values it seeks to accomplish need to be reassessed, in order for the accompanying process to uphold (rather than directly conflict with) those values.

Who?

Understanding who is impacted by an issue and who is best suited to address it are building blocks of developing solutions. But simply serving those who are most impacted people is acting in charity, not solidarity. Those who are most impacted are experts in navigating local relationships and institutions and understanding context-specific challenges and opportunities. Therefore, to both create a more robust understanding of problem and solution, and to foster citizen control, the voices and power of those most impacted should be legitimized. Community participation often relegates input to finite stages, without any formal authority. But those who are most impacted, and therefore who are likely to be the ones with the most to lose, should be part of critical moments like agenda setting and implementation, so that they can be embedded in seeing their demands through. This requires a shift from tokenizing, extractive, or damage-based narratives that disenfranchised communities have come to expect, to instead center self-determination and dignity.[146] The "who" may be in part determined by quantitative measures, but it also necessitates relationship building.

144 "Our Mission, Theory of Change, Governance, and Financial Transparency," Sustainable Economies Law Center, Accessed January 30, 2023, https://www.theselc.org/mission

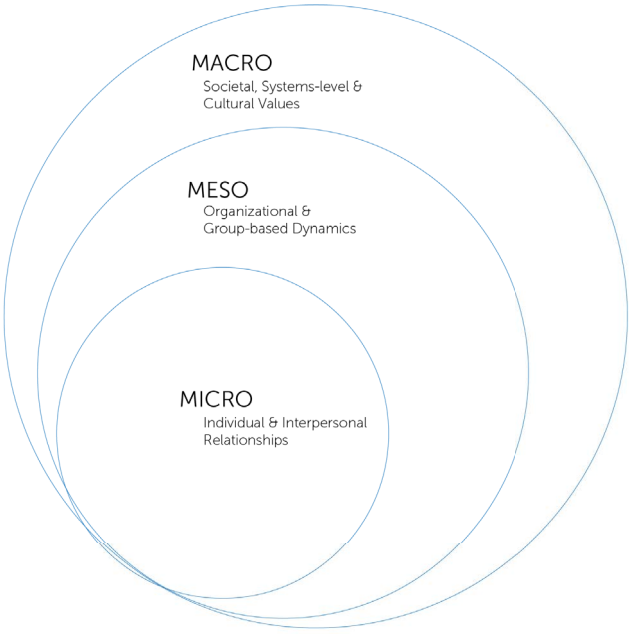
145 Chris Elmendorf, "California Refuses to Fix CEQA. Here's How Newsom Can Take Charge," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 14, 2023, https://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/openforum/article/california-ceqa-environment-law-17713699.php.

146 Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities." Eve Tuck describes "damage-centered research" as narratives that describe disenfranchised communities through the lens of deficit and oppression, focusing on how they have been exploited and colonized. While important to not diminish these harms, damage-centered research can also be dangerous when it singularly defines a community. Desire-based research, conversely centers "complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives."

Inequality not only creates unjust material conditions, but it also dispossesses communities from organizing to meet their needs. While the voices of those most impacted by injustice should be centered, it's important to also recognize that their capacity to do so may be limited. Therefore, collective power building necessitates partnerships. Coalitions of parallel organizations doing the same work elsewhere, or different work but in the same community, can be a roadmap to what support is needed. Additionally, identifying allies who hold power, and calling them in as supporters, can be a vital pathway to accessing financial and political resources to build momentum.

Multi-scalar impact

Organizations who are not only setting out to enact broad social change, but are embodying social change within their own structures, create impact at multiple scales, from the individual, to the organizational, and the societal. These simultaneous impacts can be thought of as concentric circles that encompass micro, meso, and macro-level scales, as illustrated by the following diagram:



Either directly or indirectly, transformative change has implications at the micro, meso, and macro levels.

Mujeres Unidas y Activas' (MUA) mission of building community power for Latina immigrant women takes an approach of seeing individual leadership development as a path to liberation, and of shifting power from the inside out.[147] At the individual level, the organization provides services that range from legal support to counseling, to support community members in obtaining basic human rights that were otherwise highly inaccessible. From meeting their needs, the organization additionally provides leadership development and skills training. In 2005, MUA committed to having a constituency-led board to institutionalize their commitment to using leadership to transformation. Through creating clear pathways to build leadership skills, they not only empower women through the leadership skills, but they are also actually given power through opportunities to take on roles in the organization. As a result, the organization can also better serve its mission, by more intimately linked with the needs and desires of the community. With access to leadership roles and power, women who began as members and are now staff leaders, can partake in strategy and decision making roles outside of the organization, and help shape broader advocacy and movement goals.[148] Transformative change, as MUA symbolizes, is not solely a matter of policy

147 "Shifting Power from the Inside Out," RoadMap, 2018, http://mujeresunidas.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/RM-MUA-FF-Report-2018-Final-Web-1-1.pdf.
148 Ibid.

changes, but also of empowerment and liberation through individual transformation.

In worker-owned cooperatives, the democratic governance structure creates an opportunity for people to engage with democracy outside of the occasional trip to the polls for elections. At the micro or individual level, cooperatives imbue employees with a sense of voice and agency within the context of the organization, by having influence over their own and their peers' well-being. The impact of influence is tangible within the bounds of an organization, which means that agency also comes with a sense of accountability and responsibility–in this context, passivity has more disincentives than engagement, because one's personal stakes are conflated with those of the collective. By exercising the muscle of democracy–a popular phrase amongst cooperative organizations–people engage with a proof of concept of the potential of democracy, which in turn, can foster people's motivation to enact change outside of the organization, in their local communities. The economic benefits of worker-owned cooperatives also span various scales, from enhancing job quality for their members, to enhancing the business's productivity by reducing employee turnover and ensuring its longevity and can be an economic development tool that expands access to business ownership. In movement-aligned cooperatives, the collective power of their members or employees can be used towards forming coalitions and networks across organizations, to mobilize towards social change.

The question of scale as it relates to growth is more complicated, especially for organizations that are both values-driven and for-profit. In traditional businesses, scale usually means growing to increase profit. In organizations that are trying not to emulate the harms of capitalism and mitigate the accumulation of wealth and concentration of power, the role of scale is not so clearcut. Scale often implies interacting with dominant institutions, which can risk diluting or distorting an organization's values. For worker-owned cooperatives, their barriers to scale are often referenced as an argument against their feasibility. Unlike traditional businesses, in a cooperative model where profits are shared, growth is not necessarily tied to profit. Instead, growth can be a mechanism to broaden impact. The Cheese Board, for example, saw more value in incubating other businesses, than replicating their own. In fact, for cooperatives, scale can seem antithetical to their values, because involving more members can make horizontal decision making more complicated. To reconcile this, larger cooperatives like Rainbow Grocery have subdivided their decision making into smaller, semi-autonomous departments.

The relationship between scale via growth and scale via impact can be at odds when scale is emphasized over values. But growth and impact don't have to be mutually exclusive, in either capitalist or non-capitalist models. Expanding the impact of cooperatives model outside of just employees and the organization, to broader goals of economic justice, requires opening the model to others. This means disseminating the cooperative model through knowledge sharing for other cooperatives to proliferate, but also thinking about how the values of cooperatives can become benchmarks for non-cooperatives to adopt in terms of job quality and worker power. To build momentum around cooperatives may also mean expanding the network of allies outside of just those who want to start a cooperative from a values-driven standpoint. Project Equity's work takes this approach in supporting traditional businesses to transition into becoming worker-owned. While the values of economic justice, worker power, and self-determination are still central to their arguments, Project Equity also frames the value of cooperatives as contributing to a community's economic development, for the longevity and sustainability of the enterprise, and for the individual owner to maintain their legacy without having to fully relinquish or close their business.

Operationalizing Values

Funding

Financial support is critical for organizations to grow, but where funding comes from is not only a matter of seeking support from values-aligned sources, but also of finding sources that are willing to support these efforts to begin with. For organizations that seek to reclaim extractive processes from different sectors, often this intersection of interests doesn't yet exist. To build alternatives, movements need to identify allies who hold political and financial power, to bring them in as supporters and co-builders of the infrastructure needed to grow and sustain coalitions on the ground. Divest and reinvest campaigns for example, advocate for divestment from fossil fuels and investment into renewable energy. Taking a similar approach to supporting community development, Public Bank East Bay's proposal creates a financial institution that diverts municipal money away from the extractive industries that traditional banks would invest it in, instead towards community benefits.

Philanthropy

American abolitionist scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore describes philanthropy as the "private allocation of stolen social wages," and the wealth distributed through philanthropy as "twice-stolen wealth–(a) profit sheltered from (b) taxes."[149] Funding from philanthropies and foundations can pose ethical dilemmas for some groups, who are often intentionally trying to build models that don't perpetuate the harms of the non-profit industrial complex.[150] While there are certainly funders who are more values-aligned with organizations, there is also the challenge of philanthropic funders wielding power through their investment: funders have their own investors and board members they are accountable to, who are often motivated by profit, or by goals that may impinge on an organization's ability to fully and authentically serve the community. The risk then becomes a limitation to self-determination.

Loans and grants

Traditional financial institutions often categorize loans to low-income people and communities of color, and the organizations that serve them, as high-risk. Groups like the Public Bank East Bay, OakCLT, and EB PREC, set out to help frontline communities secure access to loans that are low interest and have no strings attached. But when it comes to their own sources of funding, they must contend with the fact that the very system they are trying to change is the same one that directly limits their ability to do that work. MIT's CoLab outlines some of the financial challenges, and solutions, for land-based organizations in particular, in "A Guide to Transformative Land Strategies: Lessons from The Field."[151] In the report, EB PREC's As Executive Director Noni Session describes the problem, "You're going to be hard-pressed to name a grassroots community endeavor that would qualify as low-risk enough for that loan to be deployed to them. Because risk, even the definition of risk, which is really important, is racially classed, gender based." Many community organizations look to alternative funding sources in place of traditional banks, such as CDFIs (Community Development Financial Institutions). CDFIs themselves are often under-resourced and may be constrained by inflexible federal requirements. As a result, CDFIs may be more willing to lend money to community organizations, but may do so at high interest rates, which then spurs organizations to need to seek profit more actively in order to pay back loans.

149 Ruth Gilmore, "In the Shadow of the Shadow State," *Duke University Press EBooks*, January 13, 2017, 41–52, https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822373001-003.

150 Incite!, "The Revolution Will Not Be Funded," *Duke University Press*, January 13, 2017, https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822373001. This book outlines the harms associated with the non-profit industrial complex, and the ways in which it institutionalizes forms of dominance.

151 Nicholas Shatan and Olivia Williams, "A Guide to Transformative Land Strategies: Lessons from The Field" (MIT CoLab, 2020), https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59e749467131a5e036c15d82/t/5f06708154b02120ab2c8ef0/1594257540711/Community+Land+Trusts_CoLab.pdf.

Investment

Even when investing in a community organization, investors are habituated to expect high rates of return. But for organizations who prioritize values beyond profit, a return on investment is conceptualized beyond just terms of capital returns. Organizations like EB PREC emphasize slow growth through their modest annual dividends of 1.5% (even having the option for investors to opt for 0%). As EB PREC's website professes, "We move at the pace of community, not capital."[152] To move at a slower pace of growth requires reframing the role and the goal of investment through non-financial benefits. Investing in community-oriented organizations is a commitment and buy-in to their values and the impact they create. EB PREC's community investment model is a testament to the literal community buy-in of their model. EB PREC was successfully able to secure alternative sources of funding in part because of the technical assistance they received from SELC that helped them navigate the DPO process, and because of the first round of community investments that gave them the initial capital and momentum to do so. Other sources of funding include donations. The Sogorea Te' Land Trust has instituted a voluntary annual contribution in the form of the "Shuumi Land Tax," that invites non-Indigenous Bay Area residents to pay into as a way of supporting their rematriation efforts.[153]

Ultimately, the inevitable need for capital can be challenging when capitalist systems have perpetuated the very injustices that these organizations seek to undo. Economic self-sufficiency is a vital pursuit, but until institutions shift to more widely enabling non-extractive financing options, a networked approach can help marginalized individuals and organizations navigate the technical hurdles to securing accountable sources of funding.

Governance

A process may be set up with values around equity and justice, but the difference between whether or not those intentions result in equitable outcomes is in large part tied to its governance: who makes decisions, how they make decisions, and how power is defined. Governance both reflects the values of an institution and holds an institution accountable to its values. In traditional organizational structures, investors' power is proportionate to the number of shares they have. Similarly, in the political system, those with existing power are often able to access and wield more power. The governance structure of cooperatives and collectives disrupts the correlation between wealth and power. For example, in Community Land Trusts, the tripartite model equally divides power amongst residents/lessees of the land, community members, and organizations or elected officials. In cooperatives, each worker, regardless of their position or number of shares, is given one vote. An equitable governance structure can safeguard against the concentration or manipulation of power.

Governance is also a way of fostering and formalizing relationships, both internally and externally. How employees relate to one another, relate to the organization, influence decisions, are empowered, are all questions that are determined by governance. The organizations featured here all have varying membership and stakeholder models, and decision making processes, but all are intentional about how they use governance as a mechanism towards building transformative change; relationships are built on trust, and long-term collaboration is emphasized. Many of the governance structures discussed are a microcosm of the world these organizations seek to create. Participatory and democratic procedures have direct benefits to workers and community members, especially to those who have been historically disempowered or excluded, through providing voice and agency. At Mujeres Unidas Activas, the organization both meets the immediate needs of the women they serve while also meeting their whole personhood, as community members, healers, educators, and conduits of change. Through positions within the organization and their board structure, they not only give women the tools to be empowered, but they also offer opportunities for them to enact change.

152 "What We Do," EB PREC, Accessed February 23, 2023, https://ebprec.org/about-us.
153 "Shuumi Land Tax," Sogorea Te' Land Trust, Accessed February 23, 2023, https://sogoreate-landtrust.org/shuumi-land-tax/

When empowered individuals come together around a shared cause, collective power can be built. In cooperative and collective organizational structures, governance can be the proof of concept for members of the organization to experience what relationships that are built on solidarity can look like, and to realize the value of collective power. And while hierarchical organizations may be more prone to reproducing oppressive systems, and concentrating power and wealth, hierarchies are not inherently bad. Rather, as the report *Solidarity not Charity* (2021) professes, "any hierarchies should be consciously designed, not unconsciously assumed, consented to by their participants, and part of larger heterarchical systems that allow power to move in fluid and diverse ways to many parts of a group."[154] Again, a theory of change is the critical link between process and outcome, and governance can be a way to clarify and formalize that link, to ensure that values are not just claims, but are operationalized into outcomes.

Codifying values

Beyond just a legal hurdle, bylaws codify the values of an organization, and hold stakeholders accountable to them. When new organizations set out to develop bylaws, the path of least resistance is to adopt templates or best practices that already exist, but which as a result, may carry over traits that are misaligned with the intention of codifying equitable and democratic values. In response, SELC has developed a Bylaws Toolkit which guides organizations in framing bylaws in a way that is values-oriented, collaborative, and iterative, while also providing tools to simplify the process, like their own version of a Bylaws template.[155] In its work supporting coops and nonprofits, SELC has supported organizations in creating customized bylaws that ensure power cannot be concentrated, and that distribute wealth more equally. For example, EB PREC's bylaws, which SELC assisted with, has safeguards against members being able to simply cash out as prices rise, in order to prevent one generation of members from monetizing off the work of previous members.[156]

For communities who have been historically disenfranchised and systemically disempowered, claiming empowerment and actually codifying power are entirely different. Along with an organization's bylaws, processes like participatory budgeting, or governance structures that allocate seats of power to community, are other ways that shared power can be codified.

Sharing Values

Knowledge sharing

Our political system consists of convoluted procedures and jargon-laden language that result in high barriers to access information and participate. People's limited impact on outcomes further disincentives participation. Additionally, the extent to which our democracy perpetuates inequity, from disenfranchisement to dispossession, requires us to use imagination to consider what anything different could look like. To start to reimagine, we must be aware of what is possible. Knowledge sharing plays a critical role in both developing an awareness and building a strategy to realize that imagined alternative. Knowledge sharing can take the form of an internal orientation or training, like the worker-owned cooperatives featured have implemented; leadership development programs like that of MUA; or public education through convenings and conferences. Corrina Gould, for example, first formulated the idea behind Sogorea Te' after attending a conference on Native land trusts.

154 Nati Linares and Caroline Woolard. *Solidarity Not Charity: A Rapid Report*. (Grantmakers in the Arts, March 2021). https://art.coop/assets/downloads/solidarity-not-charity_full-report.pdf
155 "Bylaws Toolkit for Worker Self Directed Nonprofits." Sustainable Economies Law Center, https://www.theselc.org/wsdn_toolkit.
156 "Janelle Orsi and the Art of the Legal Hack," interview by David Bollier, November 1, 2020, https://david-bollier.simplecast.com/episodes/janelle-orsi-and-the-art-of-the-legal-hac.

Education is also vital to the process of democratizing systems. Budgets and banks are wrapped in technical processes. Both the Community Democracy Project and Public Bank East Bay emphasize education as a pillar of their work. Their proposals are not just oriented around outcomes, but around the process of empowerment through education. In creating spaces for people to have access to bureaucratic processes, they recognize that to engage with these systems, let alone imagine anything different, requires a pathway to access and understand them. Educational practices can also be a resource to help build and strengthen aligned organizations. OAEC's legacy of hosting coalitions and networks of organizations serves this exact purpose: in physically convening people–either in the same, or different ecosystems, so long as they share a commitment to transformative change–they create opportunities to exchange ideas, lessons, and challenges. Knowledge sharing can be an antidote to oppressive systems, to illuminate what is flawed, and what is possible.

Policy & capacity development

Policy can have multiscalar implications, from enabling organizations to establish and grow, to codifying social change. As organizations with far less precedent than traditional entities, cooperatively owned businesses must continually eliminate roadblocks or develop new paths to legalize their organizational models.

In 2020, SELC and Project Equity, along with others, formed the Worker-Owned Recovery California (WORC) coalition to advance a state policy agenda in response to both COVID-19 and the "Silver Tsunami" of business owners nearing the age of retirement.[157] Together, the coalition drafted the California Employee Ownership Act, Senate Bill 1407, which establishes an Employee Ownership Hub within the Governor's Office for Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz).[158] The legislation formalizes California's support of employee ownership, and paves the way for more information and resources to be more easily accessible to businesses looking to transition to worker-ownership or create new worked-owned businesses, to build capacity and support for businesses, and to more comprehensively remove statewide barriers to cooperative ownership. The work builds off years of preceding advocacy efforts, including the passage of the previously passed California Worker Cooperative Act (AB 816) in 2015, which first legitimized cooperatives in the state. Critical to its success was leadership and support of State Senator Josh Becker, a Democrat representing California's 13th Senate District. Having an ally within the legislature who could champion the bill allowed it to move "smoothly through the legislative process."[159]

The coalition who helped craft the bill included national organizations who provided technical assistance, bipartisan co-sponsors, labor union leaders, business owners, and community organizations. The diversity of the coalition was critical in being able to overcome legislative hurdles, and in strengthening the proposal itself by incorporating intersectional input. Project Equity describes having to trade off various components of the bill that would have created grant programs, in the interest of not letting the bill die all together.[160] While falling short of their goal to include the budget requests, the components that did pass, along with the process of building important relationships with politicians, drive their longer term vision of advancing worker ownership.

Identifying allies, building broad coalitions, and being nimble, are essential to political strategies. But policy also needs to be paired with capacity building. In Oakland, the successful passage of

157 "Worker-Owned Recovery California," Sustainable Economies Law Center, Accessed March 1, 2023, https://www.theselc.org/worc_coalition.
158 Franzi Charen, "California Passes Employee Ownership Act," Project Equity, January 10, 2023, https://project-equity.org/community/california-passes-employee-ownership-act.
159 Ibid.
160 Hilary Abell, "California Passes Employee Ownership Act," Project Equity, January 10, 2023, https://project-equity.org/community/california-passes-employee-ownership-act.

Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) ordinances has made it easier for tenants to gain ownership of a building, but the policies, and funding that could support these policies, have long been designed to serve the dominant affordable housing developers in the region. As a result, smaller organizations that support co-ops can't access the benefits of these policies because they lack have the qualifications to apply for funding, or the capacity to navigate the system.[161] Policies are critical to codifying change, but policy innovations need to be paired with innovations in structural and administrative processes within the government, as well as capacity building resources on the ground, in order for policies to be effectively implemented. Whether policies are drafted from the bottom up, or the top down, alignment up, down, and across organizations at all levels can help to tailor legislation to what is needed, and to develop accompanying strategies that ensure policies can be effectively implemented.

Coalitions & networks

Organizations in the solidarity economy, cooperative, or collective context, whose very existence is a call to action to change dominant systems, face a particular dilemma: while building towards entirely new systems, they also need to leverage existing systems in order to meet the critical and urgent needs of their communities. Whether they are just starting out, or have been running for decades, the organizations that were interviewed do not feign autonomy; they proudly and transparently express interdependence, and the role that peer-mentorship and support has played. Coalitions and networks are forms of collaboration that are often used interchangeably. Generally, coalitions consist of groups of people or organizations who coordinate action in relation to shared goals, while networks might be more informal arrangements around a shared goal, that aren't necessarily grounded in coordinated actions.[162] Collaboration can foster mutual aid within organizations, wherein organizations support one another through technical assistance, funding, sharing resources, aligning projects, and more. In the Bay Area, various organizations form with the purpose of building coalitions, connecting grassroots groups with one another, with projects, and with resources. For example, the People of Color Sustainable Housing Network (POCSHN) is a group that formed to foster an ecosystem of cooperatively and community-controlled housing for people of color, through what they deem "long-term replicable strategies and tactics for housing, food, and land-use movements."[163] They act as both a convener and an educational resource, provide training, and align people on strategies and projects. POCSHN has also partnered with SELC to develop a training program that supports low-income residents in spearheading their own pursuits.

Through their policy advocacy and legal aid, SELC has become a unique actor in interacting and supporting numerous organizations and regional movement building efforts. Their Resilient Communities Legal Cafe, for example, is an office hours program that supports organizations through legal questions. It was through these office hours that POCSHN members and SELC formulated the idea of a permanent real estate cooperative, and together incorporated EB PREC in 2017.[164] SELC has directly funded and incubated the launch of organizations like People Power Solar Cooperative.

The Occidental Arts and Ecology Center role in coalition building has been as a physical convener, facilitator, and host. They offer training in permaculture and climate justice as well as political advocacy and movement leadership, and help organizations build capacity through strategies that help them integrate ecological design principles and practices into their land, systems, and cultures.

161 The Nonprofit Quarterly. "Remaking the Economy: Redefining Risk," March 11, 2022. https://nonprofitquarterly.org/remaking-the-economy-redefining-risk/.
162 Jonathan Fox, "Coalitions and Networks," *UC Santa Cruz: Center for Global, International and Regional Studies*, 2010, https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1x05031j.
163 "Impact Story: People of Color Sustainable Housing Network," Sustainable Economies Law Center, https://www.theselc.org/impact_pocshn.
164 Oscar Perry Abello, "A New Kind of Cooperative in Oakland Fights Against Speculative Development," *Next City*, December 3, 2019, https://Nextcity.Org/Urbanist-News/A-New-Kind-Of-Cooperative-In-Oakland-Fights-Against-Speculative-Development.

In 2019, the OAEC hosted SELC, POCSHN, and the Sogorea Te' Land Trust, along with several others, for a multi-day Bay Area Land Justice Convening at the Center.[165] The convening created an opportunity for the groups to not only step outside their day-to-day work, but to do so jointly, to develop a collective long-term vision for land justice in the Bay Area region.

The Worker-Owned Recovery California coalition that formed to advance a policy agenda around worker owned cooperatives and drafted the California Employee Ownership Act, brought together organizations and advocates around the specific goal of passing legislation that would support employee ownership across the state. This coalition was built to serve a specific goal and timeline but was also embedded in a broader network of on-the-ground cooperatives, technical assistance organizations, and businesses at large, who as a collective, represented the demands of workers and business owners. In building a coalition, the group is now equipped to continue their efforts, to advocate for the budget requests that failed to be included in the initial bill, along with additional demands that will inevitably arise.

Coalitions and networks, and collaborations more generally, form the synergy that gives organizations the support, legitimacy, and momentum to enact change. But these collaborations are not just an arrangement of relationships. They build relationships atop shared theories of change, align short and long term goals, and orient around knowledge sharing. As a result, they are able to generate momentum around collective demands, and turn challenges into opportunities for change. As Xavier de Souza Briggs puts it, "Without wider civic strategies that connect to coalition agendas, alliance or partnership arrangements are "boutique" efforts–appealing miniatures–without the promise of significant impact on public problems."[166]

Collaborations allow for more robust strategies to be developed, because they are embedded in the demands of a diverse group of people. The same commonalities that forge a network of organizations such as geographies, values, histories of injustice, or demands for justice, simultaneously forge a network of communities that these organizations are built by and for. Networks help to expand the base of resources available, in order to mobilize across geographic and issue-based boundaries that individual entities might be confined to. Resources might include political power or capital, but most significantly, consist of people and shared values. The link between networks of organizations and networks of communities acknowledges that injustices across communities are as intertwined as the solutions to address injustice. They not only advocate for collective power through the strategies they develop, they embody collective power in and of themselves.

165 "Seeding a 100-year vision for land justice in the Bay Area," Sustainable Economies Law Center, https://www.theselc.org/land_justice_100_year_vision.
166 Xavier De Souza Briggs, *Democracy as Problem Solving: Civic Capacity in Communities Across the Globe* (MIT Press (MA), 2008).

CHAPTER 6: WHAT'S WRONG WITH OUR DEMOCRACY AND WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

The principles which our Constitution set out to protect–equal rights, labor, land, and wealth–are the same opportunities that communities across the country are systemically excluded from; our democracy has been codified by a few, and therefore the values that dominate our political system are far from representative. To embody a true democracy requires us to first ask what the values and functions of democracy are, before developing solutions that can serve those functions.

Many attempts at inclusion in our political system fall short when they overemphasize process as the problem, and process as the solution. In doing so, inequities in our democracy are more likely to be displaced than eliminated. Process improvements may signal values, but as piecemeal interventions, often allow the status quo to prevail, and the dominating culture to be upheld. Bottom-up approaches have an ability to be imaginative, to innovate and iterate, because they happen in the relatively unconstrained context of civil society, rather than the confines of the state.[167] The power of grassroots movements lies in being able to establish explicit values from the ground up. In doing so, the values of solidarity and collective power are not just an afterthought, but become the foundation from which subsequent processes, structures, and decisions form.

Bottom-up and top-down approaches are often pinned against one another, as being in direct conflict, or even mutually exclusive. But neither can act alone. How change is enacted is not a one-size-fits-all process: a coalition of grassroots organizations may be productive for one cause, and a top-down policy may serve another. From the perspective of alternatives, some see value in engaging and leveraging powerful institutions, while others adamantly resist dominant systems in order to preserve self-determination. For organizations led by and serving historically oppressed communities especially, the manipulation and co-optation of values from outside forces is a legitimate risk, and resistance can be a form of protection. But when creating boundaries around values–and in turn around relationships, projects, and approaches–turns into gatekeeping, organizations can risk perpetuating the same dynamics that they are trying to eliminate. Different contexts may warrant different theories of change around how the state and civil society relate, but so long as the two exist, the role of each must be considered within the realm of the collective. The most critical resource in enacting change is collective power, as a force to resist forms of oppression, and to make injustice visible and justice actionable. Collective power is both the means and the end to a truer democracy.

A democracy that is based on exclusion, and the concentration of power and wealth, is not inevitable. It is the result of deliberate decisions, and a set of supporting systems. A democracy that is based on solidarity and equity, and collective wealth and power, is therefore possible. To begin solving our social, economic, and environmental crises, we need a democracy that strives to not only ensure our rights and liberties, but also ensures our rights to participation and information, to housing and education, to health and safety, and high quality jobs. The alternative systems that are being built at the grassroots level are an important proof of concept that a truer form of democracy is not only imaginable, it is underway.

167 John S. Dryzek. "Political Inclusion and the Dynamics of Democratization." *The American Political Science Review* 90, no. 3 (1996): 475–87. https://doi.org/10.2307/2082603.