

A Mutual Aid and Pleasure Society:
New Orleans and the Solidarity Economy

Susan Sakash

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the Goddard College Graduate Institute Master of the Arts
Degree, Social Innovation and Sustainability Concentration, Spring 2015

Karen Campbell, First Reader

Sarah Bobrow-Williams, Second Reader

ABSTRACT	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	5
PREFACE	9
INTRODUCTION	15
I. WHAT IS THE SOLIDARITY ECONOMY?	25
The solidarity economy as a framework.....	26
Brief history.....	29
On-going connection to Movement Building	34
Values & principles.....	35
A note on cooperativism	37
Intentional expressions of solidarity.....	38
II. SOLIDARITY ECONOMY AS SOCIAL INNOVATION	40
Processes of community-envisioned and enacted social innovation	41
Facilitation, conversation, and the art of social innovation	45
What makes the solidarity economy a social innovation	46
The local food economy: A system for solidarity and innovation	49
III. SOLIDARITY AND INNOVATION IN NEW ORLEANS	53
Why New Orleans needs an economic reframing	53
Historical precedents and case studies	55
Expressions of Solidarity in New Orleans.....	58
Common Ground Collective.....	58
Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Corporation.....	61
Circle Food Store	63
Working through what gets in the way.....	65
Racial analysis.....	66
Solidarity and trust	68
The language that we use.....	70
IV. MOVING TOWARDS ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY	73
Key tools and strategies	74
Asset-based inventory and evaluation.....	80
Popular education models	83
Ongoing connection to social justice movement building	86
V. OPENING TO THE POSSIBILITIES	88
Youth engagement.....	89
Making the case for collective impact: Youth employment.....	93
Culture and the solidarity economy.....	98
Putting it all together	101
CONCLUSION	103
Future initiatives	106
Final thoughts	110
Appendix A: Diverse Economies Matrix	111
Appendix B: Definitions of Social Innovation	111
Appendix C: J.K. Gibson Graham’s Diverse Economies Tables	114

Appendix D: Worker-owned and cooperative businesses in New Orleans	116
Appendix E: SWOT Analysis of New Orleans Food System	117
Appendix F: Five Forms of Capital: New Orleans Food Sector Assets	122
Appendix G: Asset/gap mapping of the local food system.....	125
Appendix H: Diverse Economies Iceberg.....	126
Appendix I: Project Names and Descriptions.....	127
Annotated Bibliography.....	131

ABSTRACT

This final product explores how expressions of the solidarity economy function as social innovations with the potential to transform the economic status quo and promote economic democracy. Offering an overview of the history, principles and practices that comprise contemporary understandings of the solidarity economy, I then make the case that this participatory, ethically-driven, framework is in fact an example of community-envisioned and enacted social innovation. This assertion is then grounded in an in-depth, place-based study of the historic and current economic landscape of the city of New Orleans. I focus particularly on local food – in New Orleans and the greater Gulf South region – as a system, sector, and economy to delve into the specifics of what aspects of that system would need to be reinforced, evolved or changed in order to uphold the values of the solidarity economy and community-envisioned and enacted social innovation. I advocate for strong networks of solidarity, asset-based inventories/evaluation, and popular education models to be part of a robust tool-kit of practices and strategies. I also highlight the importance of engaging youth and cultural producers in the creation of new narratives around solidarity economy efforts in the city, particularly when it comes to youth workforce development. When all of these stakeholders, strategies, and tools are brought to table, there is, I believe, an opportunity to achieve real collective impact around youth employment specifically, and community economic development more in general, that shares the values of the solidarity economy and promotes economic democracy.

Key words: Solidarity economy, New Orleans, social innovation, economic democracy, youth workforce development, local food system, collective impact, economic identity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to acknowledge here the people, projects, and coalitions that have impacted and supported my intellectual growth over the past two years. Some of these people and projects I know quite intimately; others I have admired and been influenced by from afar. All have shaped this thesis in one way or another, and to all of them I extend my deepest gratitude and commitment to furthering our solidarity in the future.

First and foremost, I am indebted to the righteous wisdom and loving leadership of social and economic justice advocates who have coalesced around popular education projects such as the Center for Popular Economics (Emily Kawano, Olivia Geiger, and Jenna Allard), the Southern Grassroots Economies Project (Ed Whitefield), Project South, the Highlander Research and Education Center (Elandria Williams), and the Center for Strategic Storytelling.

The theoretical aspects of my research have been informed by academics working across the disciplines of human geography, critical pedagogy, cooperative economic development, and group facilitation. In particular, J.K. Gibson Graham and Ethan Miller shaped my thinking around community engagement and envisioning diverse economy frameworks. The writings of Paolo Freire, Ernest Morrell, and historian Jessica Gordon Nembhard offered theoretical, practical, and historical orientations to how communities use popular education models and critical pedagogy to envision and advocate for change. Nembhard, along with the staff at the East Bay Community Law Center, Cooperation Jackson, and the U.S. Federation of Worker

Cooperatives specifically enhanced my understanding of the history of, and operational strategies for, worker-owned cooperatives.

I appreciate how Goddard College encourages its students to critically engage with leading voices in their areas of interests. As such, I have been able to critique authors such as organizational development consultant Peter Block, social capital theorists Pierre Bourdieu and Richard Putnam, and local investing and new economy advocates such as Michael Shuman and Jenny Kassen from Cutting Edge Capital, Gar Alperovitz and Ted Howard from the Democracy Collective, and John McKnight and the Asset-Based Community Development group. Despite immense contributions to their respective fields, I have tried to shed light on the under-acknowledged racial considerations that impact their various proposals and theories. Unless they explicitly engage in the racial implications of their writing, ideally in collaboration with those working at the grassroots level and within minority and other marginalized community economic efforts, the potential of their contributions will be lost to those who stand the most to gain from the ideas they have to offer.

Closer to home, I am indebted to the insights and openness of those doing the good work of building a just and sustainable local food system in New Orleans. In particular, I want to thank the youth and staff at Grow Dat Youth Farm for agreeing to a semester-long collaboration in which we co-created curriculum that introduced aspects of the solidarity economy framework and social enterprise into their Advanced Leadership Program in the Fall of 2014. I also am blown away by the folks working out of the Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Corporation (MQVNCDC) in New Orleans East, especially Daniel Nguyen (VEGGI Farmer

Cooperative) and Chika Kondo (Food Justice Collective), who are already putting into action many of the ideas I write about here.

Also on the ground in New Orleans, I want to thank friends and urban agriculture activists Sanjay Kharod (New Orleans Farm and Food Network), Nico Krebill (New Orleans Community Kitchen and compost buddy), and Dan Etheridge (Pagoda Café and board member at Grow Dat Youth Farm). Not only did they generously introduce me to a number of the organizations and projects I ended up writing about, they also entertained the occasional bellyache session, in which we commiserated over current states of affairs and schemed up potential futures. I consider Willa Conway, my fellow New Orleanian and Goddard residency roommate, to also be part of this special club of co-conspirators. I honestly don't think I would have gotten as much done, or had as much fun getting through Goddard, without her.

In the Goddard vein, I am indebted to all three of my faculty advisors: Kat Lissard, Sarah Bobrow-Williams, and Karen Campbell. Not only did they accept unreasonably long packets, but also pushed my critical thinking along the way with humor and compassion. I especially want to call out Sarah Bobrow-Williams for leading the charge in creating the Social Innovation and Sustainability concentration within the Goddard Graduate Institute and accepting me in as part of its inaugural student cohort. I am honored to have shared space with my fellow Social Innovation and Sustainability and GGI students and am proud of our efforts to redefine the terms of our studies in ways that fit the Goddard ethos of progressive, trans-everything thinking!

Finally I want to thank my family for believing in my decision to continue my learning path at Goddard amidst a number of other major life changes (i.e. deciding to move across the country

and get married – neither of which happened in the same place!); Casey Coleman, my co-conspirator, co-habitator, and husband, deserves extra kudos for saying “You got this!” whenever I became overwhelmed by a deadline or intellectual task at hand. Which was often. And much appreciated.

PREFACE

When I tell people that I am studying the *solidarity economy*¹, I'm often met with looks of quizzical confusion. I understand that confusion to be born from the many economists and policy strategists, not to mention political and corporate business leaders, who would like us to believe that the economy is something outside of our influence, a force of nature that happens to us. However, this confusion shifts to illumination when I point out that the solidarity economy is actually happening right now, all around us, in communities across the country and around the globe.

The solidarity economy is people growing food for their families and neighbors in a community garden, investing in their local farmer through a Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) program, or pooling together funds to start a community-owned grocery store. The solidarity economy is communities protecting their neighborhood from opportunistic development and assuring that housing remains affordable through the creation of Community Land Trusts. It is also people who choose to do their banking with credit unions, knowing that their money will in turn provide loans and investment into local businesses. And the list goes on and on.

What excites me about the solidarity economy, and the above examples, is that they are all locally envisioned and sustainable efforts rooted in the idea that economies can be structured around

¹ Throughout this essay, I am following the United States Solidarity Economy Network's practice of using 'the' as a definite article for solidarity economy as opposed to pluralizing it as 'solidarity economies'. I do so, not to define the solidarity economy as one known and singular system, but rather as shorthand for its function as a framework.

principles of cooperation and mutual aid instead of mainstream neoliberal paradigms of individualism and competition. Through the process of learning more about such efforts and beginning to locate my own work, experiences, and values within their frameworks, I have come to view the economy as a less abstract, and instead more intimately relational, space of exchange and decision-making. Indeed when one explores a more expansive definition of ‘the economy’, it can encompass so many other forms of identity, including our social, cultural and ecological selves.

Personal trajectory

For me, the values and principles of the solidarity economy resonate on both an idealized, intellectual level, but also in my lived experience. Although I never formally studied economic theory prior to Goddard, I often found myself interacting with the kinds of initiatives mentioned above within the socially-engaged art practices and food justice systems in which I worked. Additionally, time spent visiting friends in off-the-grid and under-the-radar creative enclaves around the U.S. as well as traveling and living in Mexico and other countries in Central America, exposed me to communities in which solidarity functioned as a necessary, everyday, occurrence.

I was inspired by these vivid and complex examples of communities practicing solidarity and mutual aid in order to survive, and in some cases, thrive, amidst the dominant economic values of competition and corporate opportunism. Part of what drew me to the solidarity economy, when I first read it named as such in the middle of my first semester at Goddard, was its resonance within these lived and observed experiences. I also felt drawn to its connection to ethics and

values that I, and many of the communities I have been a part of, practice without considering that they fall within any particular named framework of principles and practice.

What are some of these practices that I personally have been involved in prior to beginning my graduate studies? They include a five-year creative investigation of collective living/working out of an unheated warehouse that doubled as an event venue; starting a Spanish-speaking community garden with my neighbors Irma, Jose, and Jairo; and playing music with a twenty-member brass band that redirected some of its profits to social justice groups and radical organizing efforts. In these roles I have learned how to facilitate interpersonal group dynamics, act as a connector, and inject celebration and performance into my activist/organizing strategies. I have been exploring how to best situate myself as a change agent acting within the frameworks of the solidarity economy and, in this paper, I draw on the skills and perspectives gained from those past experiences.

Relationship with New Orleans

“...but it could harden her heart a little each day, to see people showing up all the time with jobs, or making new work for themselves and their friends, while folks born and raised here couldn’t make a living, couldn’t get investors for business. she heard entrepreneurs on the news speak of [the city] as this exciting new blank canvas. she wondered if the new folks just couldn’t see all the people there, the signs everywhere that there was a history and there was a people still living all over that canvas.” (brown, 2015, p. 26)

Though this quote, drawn from science fiction author adrienne maree brown’s short story “the river,” refers to a futuristic Detroit, the sentiment of the character speaks directly to the tension of disruption and change I experience living here in contemporary New Orleans. As a newcomer

to this city, these past two years have found me grappling with so many questions around identity and place.

I started my graduate studies at Goddard a month before moving to New Orleans, a city that I had been visiting regularly since 2009. It would not be an over-exaggeration to say that the first five years of my relationship to the city unfolded like a dramatic love affair, one infused with playing music in the streets, long leisurely bike rides, infatuations with newfound friends and collaborators, and an actual real-life romance with my now-husband, Casey, to whom New Orleans was already home. Nonetheless, my arrival in September 2013 marked the start of a new relationship to the city, one that I entered along with a wave of fellow newcomers and transplants.² Part of my intention in timing graduate school with my arrival in New Orleans was to seek a way to understand the city and its workings, what is here today, what was here and has left its mark, how people (and here I include myself) are surviving within a socio-cultural-economic landscape that feels as much insurmountably difficult as it does hopeful.

New Orleans, as a place, has a distinct feel that truly is “like no other place in the U.S.”. As a transplant from the Northeast, I am both drawn to and frequently baffled by these differences. Navigating unfamiliar cultural and geographic landscapes has yielded new insights and perspectives about the discrepancies in economic, social, and ideological realities that exist in the United States. It forces me to remember that who I am and how my relationship to New Orleans is tied to the particular histories, places, and people that inform my past. These relationships and

² This influx of newcomers is largely comprised of educated white people and Latinos (Hondurans and Mexicans make up the largest groups) who to work in the city’s rebuilding industries. Their arrival, combined with the challenges many low-income, overwhelmingly Black, residents faced in returning after Katrina, has greatly impacted the demographics of the city. In 2000, the city was 67 percent African-American; in 2012, that figure had dropped to 59 percent. And while overall the middle class has grown, the proportion of the Black middle class has shrunk, and Latino families remain the working poor. (Source: <http://www.datacenterresearch.org/data-resources/who-lives-in-new-orleans-now/>)

experiences shape who I have grown into; conversely, as I move into community with people who look, speak, or interact differently from me, the more rich and complex my definition of self becomes.

How then to appropriately enter, and learn from, a new community (or multiple communities) while respecting the boundaries that I have set for myself to also prioritize self-care and slow-burn (i.e. long-term, accumulative) relationship building? How to bring my past experiences to the table while recognizing that not all of them will translate to this new place, with its complex recent history of trauma, disinvestment, and increased economic speculation and social experimentation from outside interests? These reflective questions have percolated my studies, as I have attempted to ground my understanding of economics as a deeply relational study.

In addition to my past experiences, it feels important to acknowledge the role that identity plays in how I experience and approach not only my research but how I engage with the people and entities that I've come across over the course of my study. It has been a slow process of realization and self-discovery, but gradually I have been able to locate myself within the intersection between unlabeled solidarity and more officially organized efforts to promote “social innovation” here in New Orleans. Part of this process has been recognizing my own positionality – read white, middle-class, college-educated, and socially-progressive newcomer – as someone who shares many of the same cultural orientations and biases as those individuals who are increasingly recognized as the city’s class of social innovators. I use the word ‘class’ here intentionally. Similar to how city branding offices and new urbanist developers have embraced

the notion of the “creative class”, New Orleans has built much of its post-Katrina identity on its rebranding as a city of social entrepreneurship and innovation.³

Audience

With that positionality in mind, I have written this paper for two primary audiences. The first is comprised of community economy practitioners, organizers, and activists here in New Orleans, and their networks across the South. I also want to speak to those New Orleans’ social innovation organizations that have been most active in shaping how the city thinks of, and defines, what it means to be a social innovator. In particular, I am addressing Propeller: A Force for Social Innovation and the Tulane University Center for Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation, which both run programs to support social innovator/entrepreneurs in their efforts to meet the needs of the city, particularly in the areas of water, food security, healthcare, and education.⁴ Currently these two audiences feel rather disconnected from one another, despite having what I see as some shared goals and areas of focus.

I propose that: a) those who currently embrace their work in New Orleans as “social innovation” look to the values of the solidarity economy to identify an appropriate positionality that enables community-driven social change and b) those engaged in alternative economic practices claim their rightful place in shaping the course of the city's development and framing of its social innovation discourse. Thus both groups might develop more robust networks of exchange that

³ It seems to be working; according to a report by The Greater New Orleans Community Data Center (GNOCDC), there were 501 business startups per 100,000 adults in New Orleans in the three-year period ending in 2012, a rate exceeding the nation’s by 56 percent (Martin, 2013). And in the city’s Central Business District one can be inspired (or repelled, depending on your interpretation) by the light post banners inviting innovators to “Set your own bar” and “Welcome to your blank canvas.”

⁴ I served as a volunteer host at Propeller from October 2014 – June 2015 and continue to use the space as a co-working and meeting venue.

provide better quality of life, *as determined by those living it*, for a larger section of the population in New Orleans.

This paper seeks to use the solidarity economy framework as a means of connecting the seemingly disparate efforts of these two different audiences. The end goal is equitable and diverse participation and discourse as New Orleans moves forward in addressing its economic challenges and opportunities for future development. My hope is to contribute my efforts in building alliances of mutual aid and collaboration that promote economic democracy for a greater number of the city's residents and workers. This is not a selfless desire, but rather born out of the knowledge that the future of New Orleans depends on an activated and interconnected population.

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores how expressions of the solidarity economy function as social innovations that transform current economic institutions and grow alternatives to the dominance and exploitative nature of neoliberal capitalism. While I will later address each of these terms in greater detail, it is helpful to establish a handful of definitions right up front.

The concept of **social innovation** has arisen in recent years out of a growing conviction that today's most pressing societal needs cannot be addressed by using the same thinking that created them. Despite the tremendous efforts of a global network of scholars and practitioners to

document this multi-sector, interdisciplinary body of knowledge and activities, there is still no consensus or common definition that allows for the development of assessment tools or analysis. I would argue that all social innovation practices ascribe to or demonstrate the following: 1) that "social" innovation is about "social" change; 2) that its **open** and **inclusive** ways of thinking and modes of participation stand in stark relief from the modes of operation that created problems in the first place; 3) that the innovation **responds to unmet social needs**; 4) for innovations to work they must be **user-driven**, and consequently although not always explicitly stated this way – **place-based**; 5) they should have wide applications including **the capacity for scaling or iteration**. For the purposes of this paper, I am most interested in what I call **‘community-envisioned and enacted social innovation’**. By ‘community-envisioned and enacted’, I mean a set of tools and practices by which social activists and communities deep in the work are able to co-create visions of social change together with those most in need through invention, improvisation, and iteration.

I consider the **‘solidarity economy’** to be a compelling example of community-envisioned and enacted social innovation. It is a collection of practices, principles and values that coalesce into an economic framework that (intentionally or otherwise) balances economic, social and environmental needs. Rooted in the belief that the best ideas come from collective knowledge and wisdom, the solidarity economy embraces creativity, flexibility and adaptability, recognizing the need for and validity of diverse groups and models of organization to determine their own economic futures.

The ultimate goal of these innovations and alternative expressions is **economic democracy**, a future reality in which workers, producers, distributors, and consumers all have an equal stake in

the ownership of the essential resources and means of production; an equal say in when, why, how, by whom and under what conditions goods and services are produced and distributed; and an equal say in the terms of compensation and/or value exchanged in all economic transactions.⁵

Why this conversation matters

Why is this topic timely and important? Many people from a variety of ideological backgrounds agree that the United States economy is in the midst of a radical transformation. The market economy is failing, even in the belly of the beast that is the United States. The levels of wealth and health inequity that can be found in our communities are harder and harder to ignore. One recent study shows that the gap in the wealth that different American households have accumulated is the greatest its been since the Great Depression (Zucman and Saez, 2014); the combined costs of racial health inequalities and premature death in the United States (between 2003 and 2006) was costing the country \$1.24 trillion dollars (LaVeist, et al., 2011). Just tinkering with the existing system will not work. Addressing inequity requires a larger transformation – of practices, of ways of thinking and interacting with one another.

The more people learn about the mythologies of capitalism – “rugged individualism,” “bootstrap success” – the more those mythologies are exposed as...stories. Of utmost importance then is the need to tell a new narrative (or to elevate existing under-told narratives), to change the frame of the story and/or to subvert the power of a prevailing myth. This, I believe, is the power of the

⁵ I am indebted to the organizers and speakers at the Peoples Movement Assembly held in Jackson, MS on January 26th, 2015 for presenting this definition at the onset of the gathering. In particular Ed Whitfield (Southeastern Grassroots Economic Project), Jerome Scott (League of Revolutionaries for a New America) and Elandria Williams (Highlander Center) contributed greatly to my understanding of economic democracy.

solidarity economy – it is a positive, proactive, story that is powered from the bottom up. It is a framework that houses a myriad of existing practices and expressions that illuminate the collective cooperative nature that is at our core. One of the overarching goals of the solidarity economy then is to reframe the narrative and messaging around how communities determine their own economic futures by a) ensuring inclusivity and diversity with multiple levels of engagement; b) modeling impact strategies, business practices, networks, and ways of being predicated on solidarity and cooperation; c) creating methods for ownership and participation that elevate unheard voices; and d) providing support to navigate the sticky, problematic spaces of learning, working, and making decisions in collective, interdependent spaces.

A proposed theory of change

I am interested, for the purposes of this essay, in proposing a theory of change that will help me assess the viability of the solidarity economy as a framework for creating greater economic democracy in New Orleans. There is no denying that New Orleans has undergone a massive shift in terms of its demographics, economy, and physical landscape since 2005; the question is how is that change being experienced and who is making those decisions. Here are just a handful of relevant statistics:

- New Orleans ranks second for overall income inequity in the United States for 2014⁶, with 27.3% of all Orleans Parish residents living below the poverty line;
- 52% of Black men in New Orleans are out of work and 1 out of 7 Black men in New Orleans are in prison, on parole or probation⁷;

⁶ Atlanta was #1. Source: http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2014/08/new_orleans_is_2nd_worst_for_i.html

⁷ Source: http://www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2012/05/louisiana_is_the_worlds_prison.html

- The food economy (particularly as it connects to tourism sector) has a multi-billion dollar impact on the city's economy; at the same time 22.2% of adults and 23.1% of children are classified as food insecure;
- At the start of the 2014-2015 school year, New Orleans became the nation's first urban school system to have been completely privatized the education of its K-12 students. Of its 87 public charter schools, only 4 were considered representative of the New Orleans demographics; city-wide, 85% of students were Black⁸;
- Post-Katrina New Orleans has over 10,000 blighted properties, many of which are owned by the City without concrete plans for development other than auction sales;

How might the expressions of the solidarity economy work together to address the social and economic inequity as expressed in these statistics? A theory of change, rather than a predetermined framing that provides easy answers, is instead more akin to what in cultural studies is referred to as a 'detour'. Along this line, theory becomes a way to construct a mapping of conceptual pathways that can be driven down to test their usefulness, perhaps coming to a dead end or finding an alternate route that shifts the framing in a new intellectual direction.⁹ Thus a theory can be flexible and adaptable as new information comes to light.

The Center for a Theory of Change (2013) defines a theory of change as "all the building blocks required to bring about a long-term goals...and form the basis for strategic planning, on-going decision-making and evaluation". A theory of change starts by articulating what "change agents"

⁸ Source: <http://www.speno2014.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/SPENO-HQ.pdf>

⁹ Many thanks to Goddard Graduate Institute faculty advisor, Karen Campbell, for introducing Jennifer Daryl Stack's notion of 'theory as detour' in her Spring 2014 Theory (Story) and Change workshop. See: Slack (2005) "The theory and method of articulation in Cultural Studies" in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. Morley & Tsing-Chen Eds. Routledge, 114- 115.

are trying to achieve and then lays out a causal pathway towards those ends. It also is helpful for the actors to state their underlying assumptions behind this theory, so that they can be tested and measured. However, it is important to take into account that some efforts – particularly when dealing with something as deeply engrained as economic mindsets – are not immediately measurable, but rather must be assessed on a longer timeframe.

Here is a brief summary of the main assumptions that inform my theory of change for how the solidarity economy can promote economic democracy by using *community-envisioned and enacted social innovation*:

1. Despite contemporary forces of disinvestment and economic marginalization, communities of color in New Orleans, particularly those connected to neighborhood organizing efforts and/or social aid and pleasure clubs possess high levels of social and human capital that can be activated to build community wealth;
2. Addressing existing systems of privilege – economic, social, political, environmental – and how these impact the allocation of resources (foundation/funding picture) in New Orleans is a necessary first step in building authentic relationships. In order to build a truly democratic and equitable economy, those working on the ground must create strategies that facilitate their seat at the decision-making table;
3. Concerted effort must be made to ensure a shift away from competition and exploitation in favor of a more just and equitable economic ecosystem, and one that supports the development of community assets, resources and sources of social and cultural capital.¹⁰

¹⁰ That said, the Bronx Community Development Initiative has highlighted some of the factors that serve as a helpful starting point. They believe that living wage levels, reasonable start up costs, potential for employees to build personal capital (financial and otherwise), and connections to other local assets such as procurement needs of anchor institutions are all necessary for businesses to consider if their aim is to actually create true

This may require those who consider themselves “social innovators” and who are normally used to sitting in places of privilege to facilitate entry points for more inclusive participation and dialogue to occur. And, for people and institutions with access to financial resources and who advocate for more equitable and responsive frameworks, to make a concerted effort to collectively direct those funds towards community efforts that can achieve maximum local impact.

Based on these assumptions, and for the benefit of the reader, I want to state upfront the following theory of change that informs the overall thesis of this paper. I will argue that the principles, values, and practices that comprise the solidarity economy can indeed promote economic democracy in New Orleans. However the success of the solidarity economy depends on its advocates and practitioners employing socially innovative processes that are community-envisioned and enacted and which include analyses of race and power. Moreover they need also to facilitate greater participation and inclusion in dialogue and decision-making, backed by a more organized and activated power base. This speaks to the adage, popularized during the civil rights movement, “lift up as we rise up,” in which the achievements of any one person or community must necessarily be tied to a commitment to ensuring that those same benefits are extended beyond themselves.

Why look at the local food system

To test this theory of change, I have chosen to look more closely at the local food system in New Orleans. I am interested in both the ways that local food efforts are currently practicing solidarity

community wealth. (Taken from <http://fieldguide.capitalinstitute.org/bronx-cooperative-development-initiative.html>)

and the possibilities for pushing for greater innovation and wealth creation in the sector through community engagement and cooperation amongst networks.

There are a number of factors that influence this focus. First, food is foundational to New Orleans culture; it is also a primary economic driver. Urban farmers, school children, service industry workers, grocery business owners, and diners – every resident in the city engages with the food system on some level. Moreover, local and sustainable food production and related food businesses are a growing part of the city’s food economy.

Unfortunately, there is great discrepancy in terms of who experiences the benefits of these innovations, leading many food and economic justice activists to push for new approaches that look at how all parts of the food system need to be coordinated to better address community health and wealth. This brings me to my last point; the parts of a local food system are highly dependent upon one another, and thus primed for the stronger networks of collaboration and mutual support that define the solidarity economy. At the forefront of this systemic shift, I believe, must be the same racial analysis and commitment to community engagement that are also present in social innovation as I define it in this essay.

Some additional terminology

Here I want to acknowledge some terms that tend to appear in (especially academic) discussions of economies and that can be somewhat alienating.

The concept “**social capital**” has been used to describe the added benefits that institutions/individuals interacting in community often enjoy. This comes from the notion that

interactions between individuals and groups have value, albeit hard to quantify. Social capital can affirm the importance of trust, generosity, and collective action in social problem solving – in this case, for example, expanding solidarity economies across class and race lines in New Orleans. Conversely it can be a conservative rationale for *laissez faire* governance by insisting that when markets fail, communities and networks will step up to meet their needs, absolving governments' responsibilities (Bowles and Gintis, 2001, p. 2). I share with J.K. Gibson Graham a certain amount of discomfort with the term “social capital” in that attaching the term “capital” to social relationships creates a danger that relationships will be seen merely as investments that can be monetized (Gibson Graham, 2006, p. 97). Nonetheless, ‘social capital’ remains a useful concept when thinking about the added benefits enjoyed by institutions/individuals interacting in a community, or across a “social network”.

My interpretation of “**economic identity**” involves a) an individual or community’s understanding of who they are and want to be as economic actors; b) how and why they make economic decisions; and c) and how other social, cultural, and ecological factors influence the shaping of these identities. Since economic exchanges are ultimately relational, our economic identities thus confer certain statuses within our communities, frame expectations (of self and by others), and influence the kinds of behaviors and choices that are available (perceived or actual). I find this a useful concept for thinking about how people, particularly youth, come to think of themselves as workers and participants in both mainstream and alternative economies.

Many of the perspectives and methodologies I have come across in my study of solidarity economies and social innovation intersect with the field of “**community economic development**” (CED), which has grown in popularity in the United States and Canada since the

1960s. An integrated approach to improving the economic health of communities, CED has been shown to build wealth, create jobs, foster innovation and productivity, and improve social well-being (CCED, 2012). In addition to elements such as resources, markets, and space most commonly associated with economics, CED also incorporates the impact of society, institutions and rules, and decision-making on how communities can best

- understand the range of choices available to alter their economic circumstances; and
- engage willing (and even unwilling) collaborators in building short-term projects and long-term strategies (Shaffer, Deller, & Marcouiller, 2004, pp. 6-7).

Overview of paper

The flow of this thesis is as follows: In **Section One**, I examine the history, values, and principles of the solidarity economy and look in greater detail at examples of solidarity economies in the United States and around the globe. Next in **Section Two** I dive deeper into the assertion that the solidarity economy is a form of social innovation that aims for structural transformation of our current economic models. **Section Three** shows historic and contemporary examples of where the solidarity economy is already activated in New Orleans, particularly focusing on local food system efforts to grow community wealth. **Section Four** examines what it would take to strengthen solidarity economy efforts in New Orleans, highlighting how **strong networks of solidarity, asset-based inventories/evaluation, and popular education models** are all part of a robust toolkit that solidarity economy advocates can carry into their work. **Section Five** shares additional insights around **engaging youth** and **cultural producers** in the creation of new narratives around solidarity economy efforts in the city. Together all of these strategies and tools must be brought to the table to make **collective community economic impact** grounded

in the values of the solidarity economy. In the **Conclusion**, I return to the central question of the thesis of whether or not the solidarity economy can promote economic democracy in New Orleans. I answer in the affirmative, depending on how effectively its advocates and initiatives can amass broad-based community participation and support. Towards that end, I will introduce a handful of potential future initiatives that have been sparked over the course of my research in order to stimulate conversations around possible next steps in the city. These strategies represent my best thinking about how to keep the movement as pluralistic as possible by increasing collective knowledge around the issues, while being tangible and action-oriented. Finally, I speak directly to this paper's audience, inviting advocates of social innovation and solidarity economies to work together around shared core values that are mutually beneficial to foster economic democracy in New Orleans and the region.

I. WHAT IS THE SOLIDARITY ECONOMY?

The solidarity economy is just one of a number of “alternative” economic frameworks that have gained considerable traction in the past decade. Numerous coalitions, conferences, and publications advocate for how the New Economy, the Cooperative Economy, the Green Economy, and Community Economy (see Appendix A for a matrix comparing these various framings) can, each in turn, bring the United States out of its current economic miasma. Much of this debate centers on the question of whether framing the model as an alternative to capitalism ends up reinforcing the dominance of capitalism. J.K. Gibson Graham (2006) calls this “capitalocentrism”, or “the dominant economic discourse that distributes positive value to those

activities associated with capitalist economic activity however defined, and lesser value to all other processes by identifying them in relation to capitalism” (p. 56).

The solidarity economy as a framework

Unlike other economies meant to counter capitalism’s hegemony, the ‘how’ of the solidarity economy is purposefully left open to interpretation. Instead of a blueprint or action plan, the solidarity economy is an ideological framework. How one community's version of a solidarity economy looks as compared with another depends upon its particular political, industrial, and cultural past, as well as social and physical geography, indigenous knowledge and collective shared experience. In other words, place matters: cultural specificities, as well as the particular demographics, assets, and resources of region, city, or neighborhood influence how different communities approach building community wealth and expressions of solidarity.

Additionally the solidarity economy framework incorporates “all the diverse ways that human communities meet their needs and create livelihoods” (Miller, 2010, p. 4). In this way, the economy functions more as an ecosystem that, once established, can facilitate the allocation of resources in a way that is just and equitable. The etymology of economy – ‘home’ (eco) and ‘arrangement/management’ (-nomy) – places this ecosystem in a distinctly accessible context. Indeed this emphasis on care of the home, family, and community is a 180-degree shift from the capitalist focus on competition and individual choice.

In an attempt to articulate the movement that occurs within the ecosystem of the solidarity economy, Ethan Miller from the Grassroots Economic Organizing and Data Commons Project (GEO) has created this useful visualization:

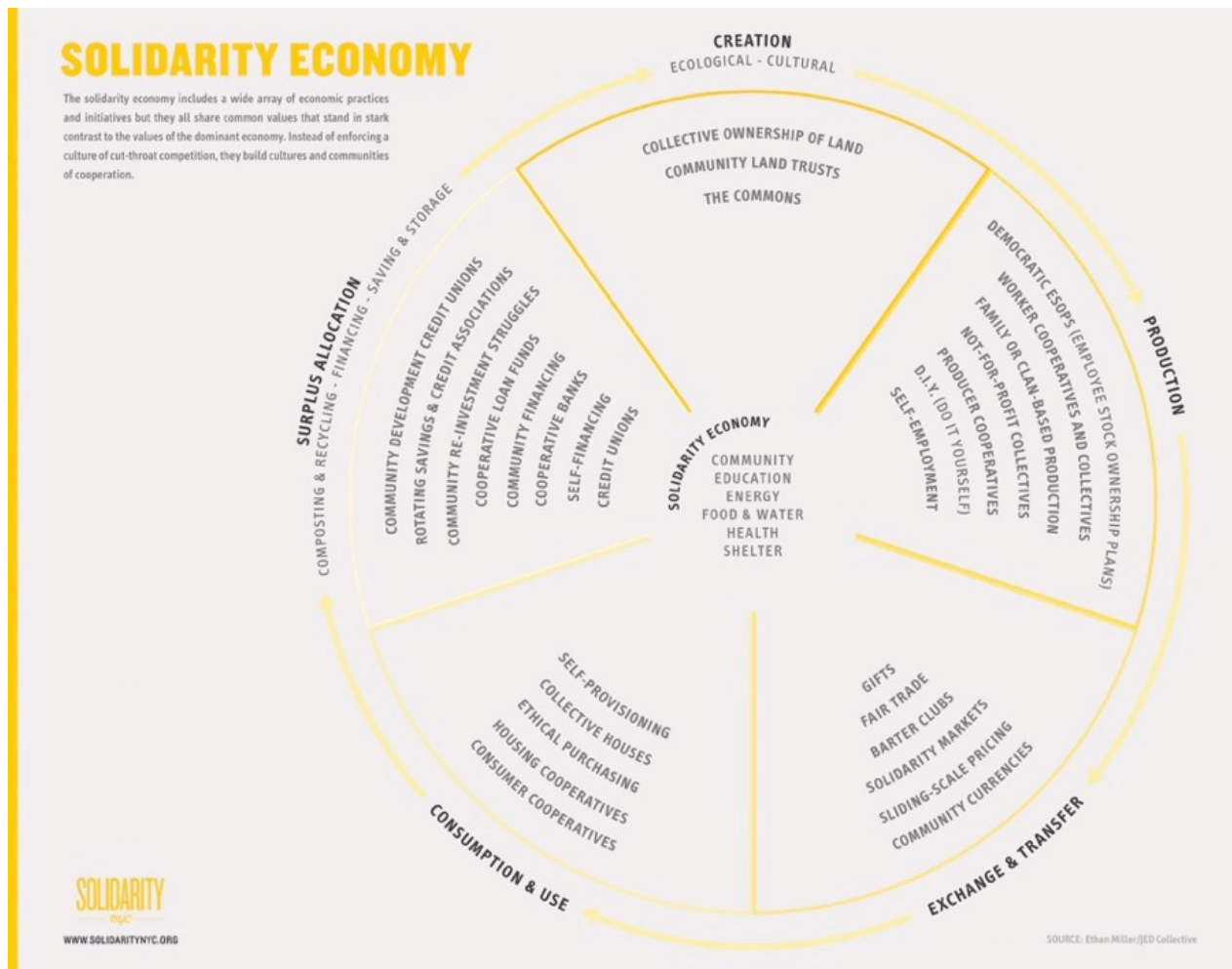


Figure 1: Solidarity Economy Model

This diagram acknowledges the full set of relationships and externalities that go into ensuring access to the basic rights fulfilled within a solidarity economy, namely access to shelter, food and water, education, health, energy and community (i.e. those in the inner circle). Moreover it shows the economic life cycle as resources move from creation to production to exchange/transfer to consumption/use and finally through surplus allocation.¹¹ By building cultures and communities of cooperation, the examples that fill the diagram simultaneously help to build new kinds of

¹¹ When used as an educational tool, this map demonstrates the interrelatedness of the various efforts to create community-generated solutions that ensure basic rights. As such, some of the most potent sites for expressions of the solidarity economy in action take place within the spaces of community-based health care and education, affordable and cooperative housing, and local food systems.

solidarity markets, while identifying financing structures that can take existing initiatives to appropriate scale. Importantly these financial structures must echo the values of the solidarity economy and thus reduce the movement's reliance on the ethically questionable practices of capitalist institutions (Miller, 2010, p. 9).¹²

The ultimate vision, as summed up by Allard and Matthei (2007) is:

- 1) to grow these values, practices and institutions through conscious activity designed to transform civil society, the market, and the state; and
- 2) to link these activities in a network of mutual support, such that they transform neo-liberal capitalism into a just, democratic, and sustainable economic paradigm and system.

Expressions of the solidarity economy arise in response to immediate or ongoing needs often brought on by human or environmental disaster and are richly diverse in their scope and scale. Examples include factories reopening as worker-owned enterprises, efforts to build strong sustainable agricultural networks, open source sharing platforms for bartering and resource sharing, and fair-trade standards that improve the livelihood of growers and producers. Indeed the goal of the solidarity economy is structural transformation of the unfettered rule of the market.

¹² To date, the United States has seen a proliferation of financial institutions (credit unions and community banks, microloan and local investment funds), new investment and incorporation strategies (Direct Public Offerings (DPO), local market exchanges, Low-Profit Limited Liability Corporations (L3Cs) and Benefit Corporations) as well as community forays into participatory budgeting (at the municipal level) and barter and non-monetary exchanges (at the community level), which I will discuss in more detail in Section Five.

It is a lofty goal, particularly when we are talking about a framework that acknowledges that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. How, then, has the now consciously named solidarity economy emerge as a globally-expressed framework?

Brief history

There are two distinct origin stories credited for naming the modern day solidarity economy. Though one has its roots in post World War I Europe and the other in Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s, both can be traced back to age-old practices and ethical values around communal ownership and mutual aid that can be found in every corner of the planet.

European uses – 1920s and 1930s:

In Europe the term ‘solidarity economy’ was first employed during the Spanish Civil War to describe rural and urban cooperative worker solidarity. In France and Italy, the term *économie solidaire* emerged from a tradition of “social economy” activism, which in time shifted to refer to the portion of the overall economy out of which the “third sector” (i.e. non-governmental, non-corporate) operates (Miller, 2010, p. 2). Nonetheless both of these economic frameworks were strongly influenced by the values and ideals that derived from the Rochdale Cooperative Principles, a set of guiding ideals put forth by the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, considered by many to be the founders of the modern cooperative movement, in 1844. Adopted by the International Cooperative Association in 1937, these principles include voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; member economic participation; autonomy; education, training and information; cooperation among cooperatives; and concern for the community.¹³ These principles have in turn shaped the values of the solidarity economy as it is defined today,

¹³ http://cultivate.coop/wiki/Rochdale_Principles

even as cooperatives have come to comprise only one – albeit important – aspect of the framework.

Latin American impetus – 1970s and 1980s:

In Latin America, the solidarity economy approach also evolved from earlier expressions of mutual aid dating back to pre-colonial times, many of which are still being practiced throughout the region. In addition there were a number of distinct social trends beginning in the 1970s and 80s that propelled the approach into its modern phase.

One trend was the wide-spread economic exclusion caused by structural readjustment programs imposed by international bodies such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. For many, these debt-inducing programs led “communities to develop and strengthen creative, autonomous, and locally-rooted ways of meeting basic needs,” manifesting in initiatives such as neighborhood associations, worker-owned cooperatives, savings and credit associations and unemployed or landless worker mutual aid associations (Miller, 2010, p. 17). Meanwhile, a growing sense of disillusionment with the dominant market economy led people from more economically privileged backgrounds to begin a concerted investigation into projects like consumer housing cooperatives, childcare and health care coops, and intentional communities.

Luis Razeto, a Chilean professor of philosophy, is credited as being the first to use the term solidarity economy to connect all of the aforementioned economic exchanges practicing cooperation, co-responsibility, communication, and community (Allard and Matthei eds. 2007, p. 4). In his 1984 book, *Economics of solidarity and democratic market*, Razeto performed a kind of conceptual coup by uniting two terms - *economía solidaria* or ‘solidarity economy’ - that hitherto

rarely appeared in the same sentence. While ‘economy’ had been held within “factual language and scientific discourse,” ‘solidarity’ was more commonly found in “a language of values and ethics” (Razeto, 1999, p.1). Instead, Razeto introduced into widespread intellectual discourse the idea that bringing solidarity as a value and practice into the daily economic activities of a community can generate greater economic equity as well as a whole slew of other social and cultural benefits. Rooted in the existing experience of “informal economies” in Chile and other regions of Latin America, his philosophical writing helped name and build a conceptual framework around the values and practices being expressed throughout the region. In addition, this academic framework proved beneficial in creating a bridge between on-the-ground practitioners and sympathetic members of government and policy makers.

Building a global framework: 1990s and 2000s

The values Razeto observed were reinforced by a third trend that saw the emergence of local, regional, and international movements that together opposed the forces of globalization. These movements coalesced during the first ‘International Solidarity Economy’ gathering held in Lima, Peru, in 1997. Over 32 countries participated in drafting what became known as “the Lima Declaration,” the expressed commitment of those gathered to actively engage – in their home communities and collectively – around the process of building the solidarity economy. RIPESS (Réseau intercontinental de promotion de l’économie), an international network to support efforts in building the solidarity economy (Highlander, 2014, p. 10), emerged out of this same gathering. This was followed the next year by the First Latin Encuentro of Solidarity Culture and Socioeconomy in Porto Alegre Brazil, and three years later (2001) a similar convening in Quebec.

In short order, the solidarity economy had developed into a conscious grassroots economic

movement, “describing an economy run not by the state, nor the capitalist market, but by people at the grassroots” (SolidarityNYC, p. 4). During the late 1990s and early 2000s, the anti-globalization movement burst out of its Global South context and into a wider public imagination, particularly in the United States. Convergences like the WTO and IMF/World Bank protests were, for a whole generation of young activists in the U.S., a first experience with the kinds of organizing and direct action strategies that had been honed throughout Latin America, South East Asia, and Africa. Thus, they learned about, and stood in solidarity with, inspiring examples such as the Argentine Autonomista factory takeovers and municipal participatory budgeting in Brazil.

Emergence in the 2000s

Another powerful product of the anti-globalization movement – and foundational to the further mobilization of the solidarity economy – was the creation of the World Social Forum (WSF), which continues to be held on a semi-annual basis at sites around the globe. The first WSF gathering in 2001 was also held in Porto Alegre, Brazil where momentum from the Encuentro had propelled the Brazil Worker’s Party into leadership positions within a new city government.¹⁴ The Social Forum was designed to coincide with the World Economic Forum¹⁵ gathering in Switzerland. For those 20,000 people who attended this first counter-forum, the event’s purpose was to inject into the world dialogue “the change-inducing practices they are experimenting [with], in building a new world in solidarity” (Allard, 2008, p. 2). Now in its 15th year, the World Social Forum continues to be a moment of convergence for social activists from all over the

¹⁴ Notably this new government quickly put some of the solidarity economy principles into practice, holding open assemblies and implementing a participatory budgeting process.

¹⁵ The World Economic Forum (www.weforum.org) is an international institution for public-private cooperation that engages business, political, academic, and other leaders of society to shape global, regional, and industry agendas.

world, and one in which the global network of solidarity economy advocates share the lessons and strategies that are underway back in their home countries.¹⁶

The Social Forum concept has continued to spread on a regional and country-based level; the first U.S. Social Forum was held in Atlanta, GA in 2007. It was at this first U.S. Social Forum that the ‘United States Solidarity Economy Network’ (USSEN) was born. The idea for a national network grew out of a track put together by a cross-section of groups working on these issues, including the Center for Popular Economics, Guramylay, Grassroots Economic Organizing and Data Commons Project, the U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives, Democracy Collaborative, and more. In addition to publishing the papers and reports from the Solidarity Economy track at the 2007 US Social Forum, *Solidarity economy: Building alternatives for people and planet*, the USSEN subsequently built a robust website – www.usсен.net – that remains active, with links to key concepts, resources, and international and US-based solidarity economy organizations and efforts.

Today, RИPESS continues to serve as the global hub, with the USSEN as its U.S. counterpart. Both entities, as well as other regional efforts, play important roles in building connections through forums; policy formation; value-added supply and demand chains that value all people and natural resources through every level of production, distribution, and consumption; and research development and mapping (Highlander, 2014, p. 9). This globalized network is important to emphasize, particularly for those of us living in the “belly of the capitalist beast” where the solidarity economy is less developed as a framework. Not only does it point to the solidarity economy’s wide embrace by people from a variety of backgrounds, but it is also inspiring for marginalized groups to see the kinds of graceful, empowering possibilities made real

¹⁶ According to one report there were nearly 130 events dedicated to the solidarity economy at the 2003 WSF in Porto Alegre, Brazil, with over 7,000 people attending at least one session.

in other communities through a combination of necessity and ingenuity. These globalized efforts show that truly there is “another world possible.”

On-going connection to Movement Building

As the solidarity economy framework continues to gain traction in the U.S. and around the globe, there is much to learn about how its principles and values are put into practice. What unites all of these disparate efforts is the core idea that, as Ethan Miller (2010) asserts, “alternatives are everywhere, and our task is to identify them and connect them in ways that build a coherent and powerful social movement for another economy” (p. 3). As a loose framework and as a process, solidarity economics is intricately connected to a plurality of social movements – both those from which it emerged (landless workers, anti-globalization, and feminist movements as just three examples) and those that have coalesced more recently.

Another way to look at it is to view the solidarity economy not so much as a *model of economic organization*, but rather a *process of economic organizing*. Organizing for a new economy doesn’t come just from resisting or protesting against a system or industry. Instead it is about reinforcing and taking to scale existing practices of cooperation, reciprocity, and solidarity, thus creating alternative paths towards sustaining the livelihood and vibrancy of our communities and the people that build them (Highlander, 2014, p. 14). The paths that manifest as solidarity economy enterprises are born out of existing community responses to the local needs and aspirations of social justice movements.

One heralded example outside of the United States has been the pioneering efforts of the Chantier de l'Economie Sociale. Over twenty-five years, this nonprofit organization has made great headway in connecting local community efforts to regional development initiatives and, importantly, larger social movements such as the student movement and First Nation rights in Quebec province (Neamtan, 2014). These ongoing, generational efforts have lifted social/solidarity economy up from isolated local initiatives to the same level of recognition as other more mainstream economic sectors. Though there are place-based particulars that have encouraged such a shift (such as federal grants that led to seed funding and the specifics of provincial politics) the story coming out of Quebec points to the need to focus on local efforts while, at the same time, connecting them to other initiatives and support systems across the regional and/or national economic ecosystem.

Values & principles

When viewed as a whole, the solidarity economy framework begins to coalesce as a “positive and comprehensive development vision and plan” that can compete with “low road” economic development trends that are handed down to so many communities (Allard & Matthei, 2008a). Central to that vision is the belief that people are deeply creative and capable of developing their own solutions to economic problems. By highlighting these efforts, they open up the possibility of a more heterogeneous definition of economy by placing its principles and values at the forefront.

While recognizing that different socio-political contexts result in some values being lifted up more than others, the international solidarity economy community have agreed to a more or less

common set of values that underwrite their shared vision. The United States Solidarity Economy Network consolidates them into six interrelated categories: democratic participation; equity in all its dimensions; sustainability; pluralism; cooperation and shared power; and solidarity.

“Democratic participation” speaks to inclusion and empowerment, particularly as concerns those who are often marginalized by mainstream economic systems. Democracy is about collaboration – yes – but not immediate copacetic agreement. Instead, democratic participation means that “everyone should have the ability to participate in the economic, social and political decisions that impact one’s life” (Highlander, 2014, p. 9). Upholding this value means proactively monitoring who is coming to the table and which voices are being left out and why and developing strategies (child care, transportation, space, messaging) to adjust accordingly.

“Equity and Justice in All its Dimensions” is about having respect for diversity and the power of diversity to generate new ideas. It is about creating systems and paradigms that ensure all citizens have access to financial, material, cultural, human and natural resources as well as our most basic environmental and human rights, including food, housing, shelter, and creative expression. It also serves as a reminder that we cannot forget the legacy of past injustices nor fail to address their current forms within our institutions and even the strategies we employ in our efforts to “do good.”

“Sustainability” has many applications: economic, social, environmental and cultural. As Luis Razeto eloquently puts it, solidarity economics is an up-to-date and realistic response to “the harm to the environment and the ecological equilibrium, which is mostly due to the individualistic approach to the production, distribution, consumption and accumulation of wealth” (Razeto,

1999, Section 1.1. paragraph 7). At the same time, sustainability extends to organizational capacity and how people need and treat one another in the process of working towards social change. On the human scale, sustainability thus relates to the quality of our relationships and general well being.

“Pluralism” speaks to the framework’s embrace of diversity when it comes to cultural and conceptual frameworks. Rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach, pluralism is about ensuring people identify and develop flexible strategies to meet their particular needs.

“Cooperation and Shared Power” is about bringing together different sectors and communities to learn from one another in ways that are mutually beneficial. Importantly, this spirit of reciprocity extends to how ownership and decision-making power are shared amongst these communities, people, and businesses (Highlander, 2014, p. 9). Cooperativism allows people to not only take back political and economic solvency but has the unintended side effect of often radicalizing communities in the process. When trust in official institutions is low, communities do well to draw on an asset-based approach to developing their own responses.

A note on cooperativism

As the above definition suggests, cooperativism within the solidarity economy means more than cooperative economic development. While business structures such as worker owned, producer, and consumer cooperatives have a lot to offer, a focus on any one business model closes down the likelihood of creative communal approaches to developing control over distribution, production and consumption.

Instead cooperatives, as democratic and equitable as they try to be, need to remain tied to a holistic strategy – like that offered by solidarity economy – so that further down the road communities don’t just end up with cooperative businesses trying to compete in the same market-driven economies. To paraphrase one cautious cooperative proponent, “A bunch of cooperatives doth not a regional solidarity economy make.”¹⁷ Since not all people, or communities, necessarily thrive in cooperative or entrepreneurial environments, it is perhaps better to view coops as one branch of a multi-limbed community economic development strategy. Other branches include community land trusts, in which community residents own the buildings and/or land they live on, thus protecting neighborhoods from gentrifying redevelopment (Black Social Scientists, 2005), creating local investing opportunities for non-accredited, small level investors (Schuman, 2012), down to families applying solidarity principles to their decision-making at the household level (Parker, 2008).

Intentional expressions of solidarity

The values and principles of the solidarity economy approach are ultimately expressions of intentionality. J.K. Gibson Graham, the pen name of academic duo Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham, (2006) describe “projects that treat economy as a political and ethical space of decision-making” as being part of the “intentional economy” (p. 101). This intentional economy operates on different levels, which Gibson Graham break out into four distinct coordinates:

- 1) what is *necessary* to personal and social survival;

¹⁷ The actual quote is “Worker co-ops cannot build their own regional economy, nor can networks of community gardens, etc.,” (Johnson, 2014).

- 2) how social *surplus* is appropriated and distributed;
- 3) whether and how social surplus is to be produced and *consumed*; and
- 4) how a *commons* is produced and sustained (Gibson Graham, 2006, p. 88).

Note Gibson Graham's attention to surplus and necessity, rather than scarcity and competition. For, as its values and principles make clear, the solidarity economy springs from an attitude of collective abundance. Gibson Graham's four coordinates can be mapped onto the various levels and expressions of solidarity that occur within the solidarity economy framework. Jenna Allard and Julie Matthei, two of the core team of organizers for the Solidarity Economy track at the 2007 U.S. Social Forum, have named three overlapping but distinct expressions of solidarity within economic exchanges: vision-based, values-based, and anti-oppression (Allard & Matthei, 2007, p. 1).

Vision-based solidarity is about building shared visions for local and global economic development that are economically, socially, and environmentally restorative (Allard & Matthei, 2007, p. 1). It also means holding firm to the adage, 'lift up as you rise up,' advocating for transformative institutions and policies that bring this development into being. Even as we begin to generate community wealth on the localized level, it is essential to also share lessons learned with larger networks, so as to spread knowledge and spur further innovation.

Values-based solidarity – occurs on both the individual and institutional levels and emphasizes the role of choice in how we make economic decisions. Individual examples include supporting 'Buy Local' campaigns or becoming a member of a local Community-Supported Agriculture. On the institutional level this might look like establishing farm-to-institution purchase agreements.

Anti-oppression solidarity is the explicit demonstration of support for and collaboration with initiatives undertaken by communities who have been marginalized by mainstream economic opportunities, institutional racism, and ineffectual policies. Individual examples here include organizing with neighbors to create a community land trust to protect your neighborhood from gentrification or rent inflation. On an institutional level, local banks might get creative about how to negotiate a loan to help a community development corporation build a certified industrial kitchen space to incubate small business food ventures owned and run by people of lower incomes.

In each of these expressions of solidarity, the intention is to transform power dynamics by making structural changes to how people interact with economic systems and their own economic identities. Solidarity becomes both a tactic of survival and an action-strategy for moving through challenge and disruption.

II. SOLIDARITY ECONOMY AS SOCIAL INNOVATION

As I have already shown, solidarity economies have, around the globe and over the past several decades, developed and coalesced around a foundational values system that nonetheless promotes interpretation and experimentation.¹⁸ To best meet their culturally specific needs, many communities have envisioned their own initiatives and networks based on the values and principles of the solidarity economy framework. I believe this emphasis on iteration and plurality

¹⁸ As just one example, while the solidarity economy principles in the Lima Declaration focused primarily on human relationships, subsequent international gatherings have expanded to include humankind's relationships to the environment, in recognition of our shared planetary citizenship.

is one of the framework's great strengths and also what aligns solidarity economics with another global phenomena, social innovation. What is socially innovative about solidarity economics? And why is it helpful to view the solidarity economy as social innovation?

In this section, I first will go into more detail of what I mean by *community-envisioned and enacted* social innovation, and how this expands upon current conceptions of the field. Then, using Sebastian Olma's interpretation of Gabriel Tarde's theory on the sociology of innovation, I will discuss what makes the solidarity economy a particularly compelling example of social innovation, and why a more explicit connection between the two is both strategic and illuminating. At the end of the chapter I will introduce the idea that examining the local food system offers an accessible way to show how the solidarity economy and social innovation might intersect to generate transformational change in the way we think about interacting with one of our essential human rights – food.

Processes of community-envisioned and enacted social innovation

As mentioned in the Introduction, there is no one singular definition of social innovation. Instead there are myriad interpretations of the concept and field in social innovation literature. The world cloud below gives us a sense of some of the core concepts¹⁹:

¹⁹ This word cloud was generated from the list of definitions that can be found at: <https://socialinnovationresearch.wordpress.com/definitions/definitions-list/>



Figure 2: Social Innovation word cloud (courtesy of Wordle.net)

As this cloud makes clear, concepts that rise to the top of the current literature have to do with coming up with new models, products, and ideas that address challenges in the public sector and posit solutions to social needs. Also present, but buried within the word cloud, is a sentiment that I want to highlight as a powerful way to think about social innovation. Namely that social innovation is also about supporting community efforts to organize and develop collaborative, creative, and sustainable processes.

I am most excited about these possibilities in which social innovation bubbles from the ground up, imagined and manifested in the communities most impacted by that shift in societal behavior. I call this process *community-envisioned and enacted social innovation*. This process uses practices such as design and asset-based thinking, participatory action research, and community-generated investment strategies. These practices have the potential to subvert power imbalances that compromise the effectiveness of community economic development, education reform, social

research and philanthropy. In the goal of expanding networks of collaboration, I argue that there is much for the social innovation community to learn from initiatives that take this bottom-up approach. By using grassroots projects as valuable case studies (as opposed to only seeking out technological models and products or the solutionism of social enterprise and entrepreneurship) the social innovation community can be more responsive and successful in getting to the core of today's most pressing social issues.

Despite emphasizing the wisdom of user driven innovation (i.e. human centered design thinking, prototyping, end user testing), many practitioners and social innovation thinkers have nonetheless tended to retain the title of “social innovator” as an individual rather than collective identifier. To introduce social innovation as an accessible and empowering process for grassroots and community-based initiatives, a number of initiatives that currently fall under the rubric of social innovation may have to be revised. The question becomes, who is held up and celebrated as the innovator? Is it the seasoned facilitator or serial entrepreneur or is it the community (i.e. the end user/s) that possesses the knowledge and expertise to make the idea, process, or framework stick? Indeed, it seems as though the whole hierarchy of who dictates the terms of social innovation needs to be looked at and possibly turned on its head.

In order to transform social innovation into a *community-envisioned and enacted* process, the following core processes need to be put into action:

- Critical analysis of power dynamics and critical literacy;
- A commitment to sharing power and democratizing access to resources;
- Imagination and creativity;
- Active listening and self-care;

- Inclusive strategies to gather contributions and ideas from people across a spectrum of the community;
- Processes and practices that embody the same values as the stated social change goals (particularly in terms of how these innovations are enacted over time); and
- Moving away from a mindset bent on fixing the problems of community.

This last process of shifting out of a solutions-based mindset may seem counterintuitive.

Shouldn't people – especially those who are most adversely impacted by the status quo – *want* to fix the problems in their community? Indeed the process of surviving as a marginalized community in today's dominant economy requires a continuous state of innovation and adaptation. However, much of the mainstream literature on social innovation fails to acknowledge the complexity of factors that are at the root of many societal “problems”.

Individual and collective trauma, systemic racism, cultural belief systems, generational oppression; all of these – and more – are factors that compound and influence the daily realities of any one community. People who operate from a place of power (read white, well-educated) tend to rush the fixing process in ways that negate the space to unpack these complexities. If these processes prioritize tools and technologies over human values, I worry that the “solutions” will remain superficial and not manifest in transformational change. Building in a more robust tool kit that includes training in participatory decision-making (group process) as well as intergroup and external communication skills is essential. Strong facilitators can help move community processes deeper into the problem space such that whatever emerges as best thinking on how to move forward will result in faster implementation and staying power.

Facilitation, conversation, and the art of social innovation

In terms of the the ‘how’ of facilitation and community-envisioned and enacted social innovation, author/facilitator Peter Block has dedicated much of his career to writing about the process and design of conversations that bring people together to make positive social change. Block defines communities as “human systems given form by conversations” meant to build relatedness (Block, 2008, p.178). Drawing on contemporaries like John McKnight, co-founder of the Asset-Based Community Development Institute, Block believes that true community transformation becomes achievable when people shift the focus of their conversations from the *problems* of community to the *possibility* of community.

This shift towards opening a space of possibility, I believe, is key to fostering space in which *community-envisioned and enacted social innovation* can take place. Block refers to these spaces as supporting communities of belonging, in which people come together around a common interest, and examine existing skills and assets held within the community that can be employed towards making change. He views leaders as facilitators of group processes, conversational guides who prioritize making space for marginalized voices rather than projecting their own vision.

The art, as he calls it, comes into play in generating the ‘right’ kinds of conversations.

Juxtaposing the concepts of stuck versus flowing communities, Block claims that a stuck community often gets burdened by retributive frameworks that identify deficiencies, interests and entitlement. For the stuck community, its lived experience is that of a world of problems waiting to be solved (Block, 2008, p. 39) – what Marshall Rosenberg (2005) might see as an inability to identify individual/communal needs arising from previous wounds. Block instead proposes that

leaders guide communities to shift their mindset from approaching their situation as a problem to be solved (retributive) and instead a possibility to be lived into (restorative) (Block, 2008, p. 53).

Here one begins to see how Block's ideas might apply to the art of social innovation. Insights offered by Block that apply equally to social innovation include: small group conversations that inform larger group processes; a willingness to learn from and iterate upon failure; and a recognition that everyone has the capacity to lead, as well as the capacity to listen. It is one thing to make the claim, as many in the field do, that social innovation processes are accessible to everyone (Bacon, Faizullah, Mulgan & Woodcraft, 2008; Marcy & Mumford, 2007).²⁰ However, it is another challenge altogether to appropriately set up spaces that move invested parties into a creative space of experimentation. These convictions around how to create communities of belonging are, in and of themselves, innovative as they challenge status quo notions of top-down change.

What makes the solidarity economy a social innovation

How do Block's ideas about creating communities of belonging and spaces of possibility intersect with social innovation? How does that intersection impact our understanding of the solidarity economy as community-envisioned and enacted social change? With the aim of proposing a more expansive, and collectively-framed, definition of social innovation, I am inspired by a recent article entitled "Rethinking Social Innovation Between Invention and Imitation" by Sebastian Olma (2014) of the Dutch design group, Serendipity Lab. In it, Olma extrapolates on a theory of social innovation put forth by three German sociologists, Jürgen Howaldt, Ralf Koop, and

²⁰ Design thinking and open source innovation are just two examples often heralded as democratizing the playing field for innovation.

Michael Schwarz, who in turn base their insights off of 19th century sociologist Gabriel Tarde, who determined invention and imitation as the necessary elements of any lasting innovation.

Based on Howaldt, Koop and Schwarz's interpretation of Tarde, Olma (2014) writes, "inventions form the material and driver of social change. Yet innovations become innovations only by way of imitation... This is to say that inventions have to be "picked up" by a significant part of the population in order to acquire social significance, i.e. become a "social fact". I agree that imitation and iteration are related to, yet distinct from, the notion of "scaling" that is so popular in innovation circles. While scaling is conceptually tied to the capitalist fixation on growth, imitation and iteration more closely resemble natural processes.

Inventions are similarly evolutionary. Whether processes, practices, or products, inventions are never actually isolated events, or the work of singular genius but rather the "outcomes of alternations of previous ideas or inventions" (Olma, 2014). This line of thinking leads Howaldt et al. to provide what Olma describes as an "initial and emphatically non-normative" definition of social innovation, as "*an intentional reconfiguration of social practices*" (Olma, 2014; emphasis mine). This is an admittedly cautious definition, yes, but one that places emphasis on the relational, communitarian aspects of social innovation.

This definition moves forward my argument of why the solidarity economy can rightfully be viewed as social innovation. I have already shown how the solidarity economy is a remarkable "social fact" with a global network counting hundreds of millions amongst its practitioners.

Other considerations include how:

- The nuanced nature of place, people, and culture generates a diversity of expressions that, despite their place-based specificity, operate from a common set of values and ethics;
- Its adaptability lends strength and staying power to the transformative potential of communities who iterate and improve upon existing practices; and finally
- The principles and values that inform the solidarity economy present an ethical framing that transforms how people experience themselves as economic actors.

Interestingly, many of these expressions are just imitations (or iterations) of ways that people have collectively worked together for millennia – cooperative farming, community-supported agriculture, giving circles, farmers markets, gleaning. It is only as they resurface in response to the failures of dominant economic practices that they “become” innovations, or that they are perceived as such. Participating in solidarity economy initiatives, whether it is by growing your own food in a community garden, establishing a community land trust to protect neighborhoods from shady redevelopment plans, or shifting your investments from the stock market to local businesses, requires that individuals work together and take responsibility for the future of their communities by their actions in the present.

In thinking about how to pull all of these concepts together, it is useful to hone in on one particular aspect of economy that is often connected to both the solidarity economy and social innovation, namely the local food system. I am interested in how bringing a solidarity economy lens to examining the local food system and food economy can promote not only physical health, but community economic self-determination and wealth as well.

The local food economy: A system for solidarity and innovation

“We should be teaching the politics of living systems, the economics of living systems, the science of living systems. All of these things would be united by that central concept.”

– Elizabeth Sahtouris, geobiologist

The diversity of efforts involved in growing, processing, distributing, and managing food (and food waste) in an urban area makes the local food economy an illustration of both social innovation and the solidarity economy in action. Local food growers and distribution networks provide alternatives to corporate and GMO-dominated grocery store chains. Urban agriculture specifically addresses food injustice and reconnects people in under-resourced neighborhoods to shared histories around food-growing and community self-determination. Lastly, the local food system points to the importance of building networks of exchange and collaboration, whether it is between farmers and farmers markets, neighbors and community gardens, or other sustainability efforts.

Stepping back a bit, the local food economy shows the ways that the food system is a “sequence of activities linking food production, processing, distribution and access, consumption, and waste management, as well as all the associated supporting and regulatory institutions and activities” (van Hemert & Holmes, 2008, p. 5). Below is a visual representation used to illustrate how food moves through the system:

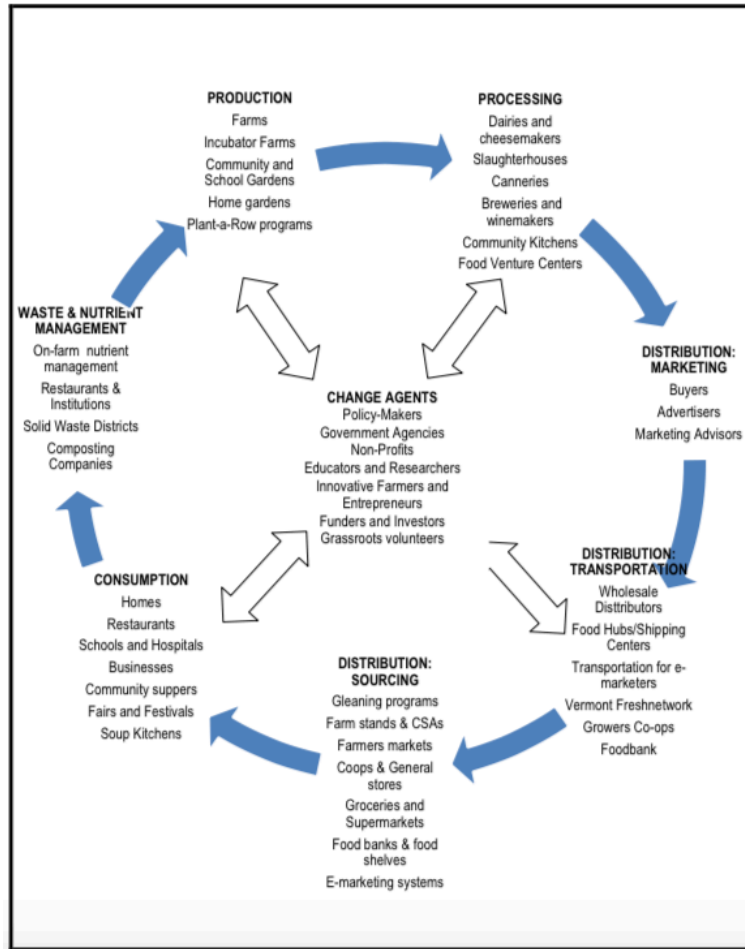


Figure 3: Components of a local food system, prepared by Virginia Nickerson in her report: “Understanding Vermont’s Local Food Landscape,” 2008.

I am struck by the parallels between the parts of the local food system diagram and Ethan Miller’s cyclical model of economic practices that comprise the solidarity economy framework (see

Figure 1):

Solidarity Economy

- Creation
- Production
- Exchange/transfer
- Consumption & use
- Surplus allocation

Local Food System

- *Production*
- *Distribution*
- *Marketing*
- *Consumption*
- *Post-consumption / waste*

Of course, the solidarity economy operates at the macro level, while the local food system is a micro expression of a solidarity economy in action. Moreover, both models echo a closed loop system such as those found in ecological framings. Thus the processes that drive the solidarity economy and local food systems are, in their most functional state, meant to follow organic, natural processes in which each part of the cycle impacts the next. It is also important to note that both processes acknowledge the central role of human actors in moving each aspect of these economies. In its ideal state (which is not the current reality) we won't see corporations setting the sustainable and local food agenda; instead change agents – including community food activists and youth – can be found participating at all levels; often taking an embodied, participatory stance in shaping their own economic future.

Bringing the solidarity economy into conversation with this understanding of social innovation is strategic, particularly when I turn to on-the-ground manifestations of the local food economy in New Orleans. The surge of interest in local food over the past decade is both a response to national trends and a reflection of place-based particulars.

On one hand the catastrophe of Hurricane Katrina and man-made disaster that followed revealed the extent of food insecurity in the city. Production and distribution channels connected to the global/industrial food system were interrupted for weeks, and in some cases, months. That, compounded by the fact that many neighborhoods, even pre-storm, were essentially food deserts (given the relatively low number of cars and inadequate public transportation in low-income neighborhoods) experiencing a public health epidemic from diet and nutrition-related diseases, has led to an influx of funding and tax-incentives for urban agriculture, farmers markets, grocery stores, and school gardens.

While these initiatives certainly fall within the solidarity economy, there is another aspect of the local food economy that is less about access and community health and more a response to the intense food culture of the city and region. Locals and visitors alike fetishize the regional cuisine and have supported the explosion of farm-to-table restaurants, regional food markets, and boutique urban farms. There are a handful of recent economic development projects that have used the rhetoric of food access and food deserts to get financing for what end up being high-end retail businesses selling local food products (often value-added products rather than fresh produce) in low-income, majority African American neighborhoods, but marketed towards up-scale tourists and visitors.²¹

I hope that the previous sections of this paper have made it clear why these are not examples of the solidarity economy. Instead of moving the city towards a vision of a food system grounded in the values of equity and mutual aid, the city's local food economy as it stands now, is not focusing nearly enough on creating meaningful work pathways for the city's underemployed or tapping into local food growing/preparing/cultural expertise that is needed to actually shift the city's relationship to food. As local food advocates whose intentions are about food justice and economic self-determination, there must be concerted effort to build robust toolkits that lift up a values-based framework for assessing and evaluating the economic, social, environmental, and health benefits of the local food system. These tools and strategies, in turn, can be adapted and

²¹ Examples include the St. Roch Market (opened April 2015) and Jack and Jake's (slated to open Summer 2015). To better understanding of how these enterprises are portraying themselves, see *New York Times* coverage of the opening of St. Roch at http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/04/09/st-roch-market-new-orleans-food-hall/?_r=0 and *Times Picayune* story about the economic development renaissance of the Central City neighborhood where Jack and Jake's is set to open: http://www.nola.com/business/index.ssf/2014/06/oc_haley_renaissance_continues.html

adjusted to meet the needs of other sectors as they address their own questions around equitable wealth creation.

III. SOLIDARITY AND INNOVATION IN NEW ORLEANS

Why are some populations more easily turned on, or turned off, by the process-driven, democratic structures that form the basis of the solidarity economy? Is cross-class and cross-cultural mutual aid possible? If so, what does it look like and where is it happening in New Orleans? All of these questions have motivated aspects of my research. What follows is by no means an exhaustive account of the current state of affairs in New Orleans, as there are many activists, researchers, and institutions that could paint a more comprehensive picture. Despite these shortcomings, by highlighting a handful of both statistical and anecdotal insights I will demonstrate a) why New Orleans at large would benefit from an economic reframing; b) where the solidarity economy already resonates here; and c) how these contexts may influence how the values of the solidarity economy may be received. This understanding will inform the deeper exploration that follows in Section Four about the tools and strategies that can help move the city towards greater economic democracy.

Why New Orleans needs an economic reframing

The economy of New Orleans has been defined, since the time of its indigenous Woodland and Mississippian residents, by water. The Mississippi River, Lake Ponchartrain, and the Gulf of Mexico all provided harvest and passage that continue to this day. Indeed the interaction

between the city and its waterways has also been the city's primary site of economic innovation – steamships, river jetties, the cotton gin – all of which also helped to drive its other infamous economic engines, the trafficking of human slaves and the extraction of southern Louisiana's natural resources, oil in particular (Campanella, 2010).

Though perhaps less blatant in its modern day forms, an exploitative and racialized economy (read: oil, gas, industrial agriculture, and tourism) persists in New Orleans and Southern Louisiana. Despite the city's proclamations that, ten years after Hurricane Katrina, business is back and booming, its economic recovery has not benefited everyone equally. The economic statistics highlighted in the Introduction, as well as the brief foray into the New Orleans local food economy, show the myriad ways that systemic racism has cut Black and Brown people out of the formal workforce and impinged on their efforts to build assets or, in some cases, access basic resources.

The results of these inequities is glaring in terms of standard measures of economic wealth. Despite the presence of a Black middle class, African American and Hispanic households in New Orleans earn 48 percent and 24 percent less income, respectively, than white households. Many of the city's poor and under-served neighborhoods have upward of 34% unemployment. Of the jobs that are available, the vast majority is tied to the hospitality and tourism industries, both of which are export economies meaning that they rely on outside money coming in rather than circulating that wealth locally. Indeed tourism is the largest sector in the region, employing over 33,000 people – more than the next two largest industries (oil and gas and shipping) combined – in low-wage jobs that offer little by way of income security or opportunities for advancement.²²

²² Source: http://www.nola.com/politics/index.ssf/2014/10/new_orleans_tourism_industry_b.html

By contrast, true community wealth occurs when working class people have the opportunity to develop and accumulate assets. This is best facilitated by local ownership and control over the means of their production and distribution. It also means access to meaningful work – i.e. jobs with advancement potential and training opportunities – and leadership opportunities at all skill levels. Importantly, processes towards building community wealth in the South must not only address, but prioritize, racial equity. To work towards those goals, people organizing around economic democracy can look to the frameworks of the solidarity economy as guides for how to ensure inclusive participation in shaping economies that work for a greater number of citizens in the evolving community that is New Orleans.

Historical precedents and case studies

Thankfully, New Orleanians do not have to look far to find examples. Indeed, throughout the South, in both urban and rural settings, Black citizens have a rich history of coming together to provide for their own needs and build community wealth. Segregation, as an enforced law and widely-held mindset, made it necessary for African Americans to be economically innovative amidst a mainstream economy that was exclusionary and discriminatory. As community economic development scholar Jessica Gordon Nembhard amply demonstrates in her groundbreaking book, *Collective Courage: A History Of African-American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice*, Blacks have, in every era of American history, pooled their collective resources to address economic (as well as social, familial, and political) challenges, often forming “distinct, purposive, and formal/informal organizations through which to coordinate and channel collective action and joint ownership” (Gordon Nembhard, 2014, p. 28).

One of the most popular local expressions of what Helen Regis and Rachael Breulin call the Black New Orleans economic “subaltern mainstream” is the social aid and pleasure club (or SAPC) (as cited in Huff, 2008, p. 10). Historically, with the white political elite withholding supports such as life insurance or public welfare, these mutual aid or benevolent societies (as they are often referred to in other Black communities) stepped in to provide working poor and working class African Americans a form of community buffer against death and calamity. In exchange for membership dues, mutual aid societies offered members life insurance, financial help with burial services, and other expenses that occurred with the loss of a loved one. Although their numbers and community function have shifted, the potent legacy of social aid and pleasure clubs continues to make them one of the locus points within the solidarity economy of New Orleans.²³

There are many reasons for speaking to this past history of cooperativism in African American communities. First and foremost it repositions agency and political organizing within the telling of the African American experience (Gordon Nembhard, 2012, p. 4). In order to get behind any kind of economic movement, people need to see themselves in the stories and leadership roles of that movement. Thus far, other than Gordon Nembhard’s contributions, there has been little done to promote and share the racial, cultural and ethnic demographics of solidarity economy

²³ At their heyday in the late 1800s and early 1900s, there were hundreds of these fraternal social organizations; today they number around thirty. Their function now is less about insuring against sickness and death and instead around social activities like the second line parades and community volunteerism.

initiatives emerging in American cities, especially among more mainstream audiences in the South.²⁴

In locating the possibilities for its homegrown version of the solidarity economy, New Orleans has abundant contemporary examples as well. Many reports (Black Social Scientists, 2005; Huff, 2008; Paul, 2013; Tang, 2011; Weil, 2011) have examined the roles that solidarity and cooperation played in the rebuilding efforts following Hurricane Katrina. Frederick Weil (2011) writes that the years after the storm have been marked by an increase in civic engagement by a wider cross-section of the city's residents. Some of this engagement even spilled over into economic exchanges in which "community members pooled their efforts for the common cause of recovery and improvement" (Weil, 2011, p. 210).

Social aid and pleasure clubs were one of the groups that Weil researched. He found that

...despite being mostly lower income and thus lack[ing] strong individual resources, they are nevertheless more civically active, service oriented, and trusting than even the rich or well educated. That finding is a powerful testament to the importance of social capital or collective resources in compensating for the lack of individual resources. (p. 205)

Indeed in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, he notes that members of SAPCs drew on their collective social capital to support the return of members' families and businesses at a rate much faster than other low-income communities that lacked these networks.

²⁴ HBCUs (historically black colleges and universities), other Southern universities, and a number of community-based and nonprofit organizations have been conducting and publishing research for decades. Wider distribution of this research offers interesting potential for creating bridges between mainstream Southern audiences (including municipal and state governments) and solidarity economy networks.

Now, months shy of the ten-year anniversary of the storm, there are a number of real time solidarity economy efforts up and running in the city, with more in the planning phases. Some are actual worker-owned or producer cooperatives (see **Appendix D**); others exist as independent nodes of activity being run out of nonprofit and volunteer activism efforts. These include the ten+ weekly and/or monthly farmers markets, at least three functioning Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares, including one run out of the urban Grow Dat Youth Farm, anti-hunger efforts like Community Kitchen, local food distribution sites such as the Hollygrove Market and Farm, and food workers justice campaigns such as Fight for \$15.²⁵ Importantly, while some of these initiatives readily identify with the solidarity economy framework, others may be practicing similar values-driven economic efforts without positioning their projects in the same way.

Expressions of Solidarity in New Orleans

Here I want to highlight three different approaches to growing the solidarity economy and community-driven innovation born in the post- and post-post Katrina era²⁶ – the Common Ground Collective, VEGGI Farmers Cooperative, and Circle Food Store.

Common Ground Collective

The Common Ground Collective/Relief is a grassroots volunteer organization that sprung up in the days immediately following the storm, led by local community organizer and former Black Panther, Malik Rahim. In its first year of operation alone, the organization demonstrated its

²⁵ For a more detailed listing of New Orleans food system initiatives, see Appendices E, F, & G.

²⁶ Historian Eric Tang credits local community organizer and writer Jordan Flaherty for the coining the term “post post-Katrina era.”

slogan “solidarity not charity!” by organizing 10,000+ volunteers, gutting 1,200 homes, setting up medical clinics on both sides of the river, and documenting the ownership, contact information and remediation wants of more than 12,000 houses in the Upper and Lower 9th Ward (Paul, 2013).

At the same time, many who came to New Orleans as Common Ground volunteers were so engaged by the scale and complexity of the rebuilding efforts, that they never left. Those who stayed learned from and were inspired by the strategies of local residents, including their extensive network of backyard gardens, as well as bartering and alternative currency forms that had started as early as the 1930s.

The organization has left an indelible imprint on the city, both in terms of new organizations, businesses and projects born out of its networks, as well as how residents perceive outsiders and what I will call ‘do-gooder-ism’.²⁷ Nonetheless, Common Ground Collective has its detractors and critics, not to mention a number of scandals²⁸ that have complicated its public perception. Overwhelmingly, CGC’s volunteer pool was young, white, relatively affluent, and activist-minded. As such there was understandable concern and questioning as volunteers set up shop in neighborhoods that were historically African American, dramatically shifting the demographics of those neighborhoods during a moment of deep instability. This first wave of newcomers may have been activists working under the banner of solidarity and community self-determination, but for many local residents, they also were early warning signs of the Black displacement that was to

²⁷ A sampling of these businesses include the May Pop Herb Shop (started by former volunteers from the CGC Herbal Clinic), R.U.B.A.R.B Bike Collective, Common Ground Tech Collective, and a tree planting business.

²⁸ As a sampling, check out: <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2011/08/brandon-darby-anarchist-fbi-terrorism> or <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/381/turncoat>

come. In addition, questions were raised by residents about volunteers' sense of entitlement and actual commitment to long-term systemic-change. These concerns led to the organization's decision to embed anti-racism trainings into their volunteer programming and to shift from direct relief to longer-term sustainability efforts.

Importantly, the organization also launched a number of solidarity economy initiatives – employing a number of low-income New Orleans residents in the renovation of the Woodlands Apartments complex in the Algiers neighborhood, and launching a number of urban agriculture programs that provided residents more self-determination over their food needs. Recognizing that Black families getting back into their homes was a way of protecting one of their primary economic (as well as sentimental) assets, Common Ground also coordinated the gutting and rebuilding of thousands of homes. Today, the organization continues to host hundreds of volunteers, though their efforts have largely shifted to wetlands restoration and the development of a native plant nursery in the Lower 9th Ward.

The story of CGC offers one perspective on how solidarity economic efforts have unfolded in post-post Katrina New Orleans. There are a handful of factors that are worth reflecting on here that impact how helpful this story is towards shaping the local solidarity economy framework. First, despite being founded by local Black activists and working in solidarity with local residents, the public perception and media portrayal of Common Ground is that of a relief organization largely comprised of white, outside volunteers. Second, over the years, CGC has attempted to start a handful of collectively-run and cooperatively-owned businesses but these efforts, like the bulk of the organization's finances in the first several years of operation, were largely funded by out-of-state donations, not necessarily in collaboration with city initiatives. Indeed some people

feel that by taking a “DIY” and anti-collaborative approach with city or federal recovery channels, CGC’s autonomous recovery efforts helped pave the way for the city’s subsequent neoliberal policies that prioritized private efforts over public investment. Finally, the continued reliance on nonlocal volunteers, most of whom are working for only a handful of days or weeks, complicates long-haul efforts to make sustainable, long-term changes.

Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Corporation

To look at a more homegrown example of solidarity economics in action, I’d like to turn further east to the neighborhood of New Orleans East. This working class neighborhood was largely developed after the 1960s and is currently home to the majority of the city’s Vietnamese and Vietnamese American community. Fleeing the violence in their home country, New Orleans East’s Vietnamese population arrived in waves throughout the mid 1970s, many settling in the Versailles housing development. As refugees, these newcomers arrived without much in terms of financial resources. More established, and thus more financially-secure, residents developed ‘giving circles’ that pooled resources to help new arrivals get their feet under them during the first crucial months. Pooled funds were used to pay rent, children’s school supplies, or tide someone over until he or she were able to find a job. Once settled, those who had benefitted from the giving circles were expected to join in and give back.

Versailles was also the site of one of the most compelling expressions of post-Katrina community solidarity, in which Vietnamese American and African American neighbors came together to rebuild after flooding devastated the homes and business districts of New Orleans East. Historian and activist scholar Eric Tang (2011) wrote extensively about the area immediately surrounding

Versailles, using sociological and anthropological analyses to challenge the mainstream perception of interracial communities only co-existing as antagonistic neighbors. Instead, Tang shows how in post-Katrina New Orleans, these groups practiced solidarity and mutual aid to rebuild not only their homes and businesses, but also their sense of identity as a community.

The New Orleans Vietnamese American community emerged from the aftermath of Katrina with a politicized sensibility. As the residents of Versailles shifted from solidarity around immediate needs towards more strategic and politicized goals (such as a series of direct actions that shut down a proposed toxic Katrina waste dump site), they drew on the lessons shared by their African American neighbors and seasoned activists in the environmental justice movement.

The community activism that grew out of these practical, immediate examples of solidarity can be directly linked to the unfolding of a series of new social enterprises undertaken by the Mary Queen of Viet Nam Community Development Corporation (MQVN CDC). Principle amongst these is the VEGGI Farmers Cooperative, born in the aftermath of the 2010 BP Oil Spill. The spill pushed many fishermen and shrimpers in the Vietnamese American community off the water and out of work; community meetings about the economic impact of the spill led to the idea of a creating a farming cooperative comprised of people who were already growing food in the neighborhood's well-known floating gardens.

Today the co-op has thirteen grower members, who collectively sell their produce to restaurants, grocery stores, and at farmers markets across Greater New Orleans. The co-op splits their profits 80-20 with MQVN CDC, which helps with marketing, translation, and accounting. The group

makes decisions using majority vote rather than consensus²⁹; one such decision, which also reflects the group's interest in intergenerational solidarity, was to share their food growing knowledge with local youth (see Section Five for a more in depth look at the resultant Food Justice Collaborative).

Circle Food Store

The final example of a Black-led solidarity economy initiative is Circle Foods, a locally-owned grocery store in the 7th Ward. Before the storm, not only was it an affordable place to buy food, but functioned for decades as the community hub for neighborhood residents. Its distinctive circular building also housed a pharmacy on the first floor, and a doctor's office, dentist's office, and banking services on the upstairs balcony. Its owners were seen as community leaders who took care of their own, hiring neighbors as employees and having incredible sales, such as four green peppers for \$1!

The building was completely flooded during Katrina and remained shuttered for years following the storm due to a lack of city support and much bureaucratic red tape. Eventually, after eighteen months of community planning meetings, and design and planning support from the Tulane City Center and financing from federal new market tax credits, federal and state historic tax credits, funds from the state Office of Community Development, the city's Fresh Food Retailer Initiative and the city's Economic Development Fund, the store reopened in its original location in January 2014.

²⁹ A decision itself made by the co-op members a couple years back.

While current owner Dwayne Boudreaux doesn't define his values as being part of the solidarity economy, he has nonetheless put many of those practices in place: he's created loyal customers by building a local workforce that in turn boost the individual and community wealth of the store's immediate neighborhood; he offers lots of regionally sourced veggies and lean-cut meats out of consideration of the health of his customers; and instead of strategizing for new clients, the store is responsive to the needs of the local community because it recognizes that the best kinds of community businesses meet multiple, including emotional and social, needs.³⁰

What do these three efforts have in common as examples of community-envisioned and enacted social innovation? Do they offer processes such as end-user design in ways that were open and inclusive? Are their initiatives place-based and intended to create social change in those locations? How well are they addressing unmet social needs? Evaluating the socially innovative aspects of these initiatives must include not only whether the community was engaged, but to what degree the community participated in crafting the innovation and carrying it out. If the community is not fully engaged in the envisioning and enacting processes, then the result will be less ownership in the outcome (i.e. "less staying power").

In reflecting on these three case studies, I feel that each to a greater or lesser extent were end user driven, engaging community members in idea generation and decision-making processes. Each reflects a different place-based, community-relevant approach to addressing not only immediate and longer-term food needs, but also the larger social need to connect over imagining ways of working through shared hardship. Interestingly each has experimented with both market and

³⁰ Sources include Dwayne Boudreaux's StoryCorps interview - <http://media.nola.com/storycorps/audio/SC%20Boudreaux%20extended%20clip.mp3> – and an in-person conversation I had with Sarah Howard, the Farm Manager at Grow Dat Farm, who worked as a campaign organizer to bring back Circle Foods in 2008-2009 on March 18, 2015.

non-market enterprises and transactions, indicative of their participation in what J.K. Gibson Graham call “diverse economies” (see Appendix C, Table 1 for a further breakdown of this concept). All three, on some level, relied on collective resources and networks (i.e. social capital) rather than waiting for governmental or other formal response. In the case of MQVN CDC and Common Ground, some of those resources were internal and accessible; at times both groups galvanized funds, supplies, and reconstruction labor from communities outside of New Orleans that shared a similar set of values. While MQVN CDC was much more insular in its reach, both had mutual aid, cooperation, and sustainability as their end goal. Importantly all created mechanisms to engage community members who contributed their vision for how to strategize for change. Some of these experiments had staying power, others failed but also created learning moments that informed next steps.

Finally, all three examples highlight the question of how to extend and expand upon their solidarity economy efforts. Any steps forward require an acknowledgement of those aspects of New Orleans that threaten to hold back the further evolution of these transformative experiences.

Working through what gets in the way

In order to make systemic social changes, change agents must understand histories and institutions that underlie contemporary social systems, as well as how these histories and institutions shape culture and ways of collectively making meaning. (Reinsborough & Canning, 2010, p. 18)

Given its rich history of mutual aid and contemporary practices of economic cooperation, New Orleans nonetheless has yet to strongly connect the dots between these disparate efforts or build

bridges to the national solidarity economy community. Here I lay out what I see as three of the greatest threats to the solidarity economy firmly taking root, namely a lack of racial analysis, an atmosphere of distrust, and the language used in growing the movement.

Racial analysis

Race matters because how we live in and experience the economy differs drastically depending on our race and class. Race also informs how we organize to leverage power and create opportunities to have a seat at the decision making table. In building both solidarity economy and social innovation initiatives here in New Orleans, I believe there must be a commitment to applying a racial analysis to each level of engagement and participation. A failure to do so undermines even well-intended efforts to create inclusive environments.³¹ Acknowledging race requires diving into the difficult conversations that can necessarily put the breaks on processes that want to move quickly into the solution space. This also requires a reconsideration of who is at the table and a reconfiguring of processes that elevate the underheard/unheard voices of people typically left out of the current discussions around economic development, particularly youth of color who will be most impacted by decisions made today.

³¹ For example, I was baffled by Peter Block's oversight of how the politics and personal experiences of racism impact how people show up and engage in community process. His hometown of Cincinnati is, like New Orleans, a city of unequal access to quality jobs, education, food, housing, and transportation, with this inequity often drawn along racial lines. How can he encourage facilitators to make space for transformative, inclusive conversation, while simultaneously saying that any airing of grievances by people dealing with unresolved trauma and/or generational disenfranchisement is a symptom of a 'stuck community' process? To me this seems like an instant recipe for closing down communication and my primary critique of his work.

While the solidarity economy community has dedicated much time in analyzing the colonization effects of the dominant neoliberal economy, certain members have taken it upon themselves to turn this self-critical lens on themselves as well. To paraphrase Rinku Sen's 2011 commentary on diversity within the Occupy Movement, "How can a racial analysis, and its consequent agenda, be woven into the fabric of the [solidarity economy]?"

Part of that practice will be to remember and speak to our racialized economic histories, as well as their intersections with economic justice battles waged by the women's and LGBTQ movements. People interested in naming and growing solidarity economy efforts in New Orleans would do well to engage the full spectrum of its marginalized populations and their experience with economic devaluation. Since the majority of solidarity economy efforts across the globe have been undertaken by, and for the benefit of indigenous peoples and communities of color, organizers need to pay close attention to shifting power dynamics. Otherwise there exists the very real possibility that these efforts will be colonized by a surge of interest from more mainstream institutions, including funders and academia.

Another strategy, suggested by community activist Penn Loh in a recent *Yes Magazine* article (2014), is to support and ally with the leadership and initiatives for economic transformation already underway in communities of color, even if they do not prescribe currently to the solidarity economy label. This would mean including the voices and experiences of New Orleans Black and Asian communities but also members of its growing Latino population, many of whom have brought their own solidarity networks and diverse economic strategies from their home countries. The goal is not to exhaust our collective resources by reinventing the wheel. Instead the challenge is to learn from and build upon the efforts and gains of those communities who have

managed to thrive despite a history of dehumanization and under-capitalization, reclaiming our collective right to live in a self-determining economy.

Solidarity and trust

The historic disenfranchisement that plays out along racial lines has led to a fractured sense of trust amongst many communities in New Orleans. According to political economists Alberto Alesina and Eliana Ferrara, in “Who Trusts Others,” the strongest factors in reducing trust are: (i) a recent history of traumatic experiences; (ii) belonging to a group that historically has been discriminated against, such as minorities (Blacks in particular) and, to a lesser extent, women; (iii) being economically unsuccessful in terms of income and education; (iv) living in a racially mixed community and/or in one with a high degree of income disparity (Alesina, 2002, p. 208). Given how closely its findings speak to the challenges faced in post- post-Katrina New Orleans, it is no wonder that there is a great deal of mistrust directed towards authority figures, outsiders, and even their own neighbors amongst the residents of the under-serviced, over-policed neighborhoods of the Black and other poor communities of color.

This ought not to come as any real surprise as communities of color have experienced historical and current exclusion from any number of large-scale public projects, such as the redlining of home-financing loan districts, the dismantling of Black economic and social centers, and the replacing of major pedestrian thoroughfares and business blocks with highway overpasses and hospital complexes. Citizens have grown skeptical of politicians and real estate developers who come around promising the next big boon for economic redevelopment. This distrust in New Orleans has been compounded by the lack of follow-through from the myriad of community

visioning sessions that followed in the years after the storm.³²

Quite simply this means that hard work must be done to rebuild peoples' belief in the possibility for democratic participatory processes to bring about change. Part of any true community or cooperative economic development conversation necessarily must include efforts to build trust and solidarity among oppressed groups and connect those efforts to sites of power building. These conversations need to be facilitated in such a way that respects each community's right for self-determination while highlighting the common struggles that connect their work.

Expertise around these issues already exists in a handful of New Orleans grassroots organizations, including the Peoples' Institute for Survival and Beyond, which facilitates its 'Undoing Racism' and other solidarity-building workshops, and the New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice, which organizes workers across race and industry to "build the power and participation of workers and communities".³³ In addition there is currently a cohort of youth leadership development programs, comprised of Kids Rethink New Orleans, Grow Dat Youth Farm, and the VEGGI Farmers Cooperative, working explicitly to engage their youth in a cross-racial (Black, Latino, Vietnamese) analysis of food and economic justice issues. I see these entities as just a handful of local leaders in the conversation of how to further expand these networks of trust and solidarity.

³²This sense of mistrust is compounded by by generational poverty and exploitation. It makes sense that families caught in patterns of debt and lack would fail to see the positive aspects of sharing outside of close family networks. As Devita Davison, the co-director of FoodLab Detroit, a network of local food entrepreneurs, remarks in a recent *Yes! Magazine* article (Schneider, 2014), "People who have been without for a long time often operate with a mindset that they can't share what they have, because they don't know when that resource will come along again."

³³ From the CWRJ website. For more on these organizations, see: pisab.org and nowcrj.org.

Unfortunately, this mistrust and skepticism has impeded efforts to connect across difference, particularly the divide between what is considered the old and the new New Orleans. While a number of native New Orleanians are excited by the fresh ideas and perspectives that come with each wave of migration, there are also those who cling to the city's strong identification with tradition that seems to say "well, that's just how we do," making it somewhat challenging to find the right means of engaging new interest. Another factor, that is often overlooked, as to do with the language that gets used in coalition building efforts.

The language that we use

How people think and talk about the economy influences how people act.³⁴ However, the process of creating new language can also fall short of its liberating potential. I have found that, when discussing this framework with others, the term 'solidarity economy' often fails to elicit much response. Unless people are already familiar with the concept, the phrase requires a great deal of explanation; even then, I find myself groping for which ethical value I think the person will respond to best. Mutual aid? Cooperation? Plurality? Participatory democracy? Of course, the language that resonates in turn depends on their own past experiences, as well as the cultural and conceptual frameworks that color their worldview. This seems especially important to be

³⁴ The Community Economies Collective, an international group of scholars who coalesced around J.K. Gibson Graham and her cohorts, talks about how contemporary economic politics have separated the economy as "a bounded object separated from other social processes" (Key Ideas page at communityeconomies.org). Part of the Collective's mission is to return economics to a social sphere of relational performance. In a related vein, feminist and queer theorist Judith Butler (1993) wrote about what she calls the *performativity of language*, or the transformative power and ability to facilitate experience. With its intrinsic ability to create the effects that it names, language provides particular resonance in the phrase "solidarity economy" depending on a person's particular orientation and affinity with the concept of solidarity. It is one thing to 'perform' a way of being that finds parallels in other communities; it is another to have those ways of being supported such that they coalesce into a framework that strengthens these disparate efforts.

aware when working across class and racial differences. Language matters; the words we use affect how our messages are received and who feels they are being spoken to.³⁵

Let's look at the way certain terms associated with the solidarity economy might alienate along racial or socio-political lines. One example with particular resonance in New Orleans is 'resilience.' Some community leaders bristle at how frequently the word crops up again and again in outsiders' understanding of post-Katrina, and post-post Katrina rebuilding efforts.³⁶ The term 'resilience' can unintentionally smack of condensation for low-income and minority people who, after generations of discrimination, experienced individual and collective trauma with Katrina, only to be held, on the other side, to an unrealistic double standard in their own recovery process.

Celebrating a community's capacity to recover from catastrophe, without recognizing the unmet need to process, heal, and gain access to long-denied resources, will result in furthering the distrust that already afflicts the city. How then do those of us working towards social justice in New Orleans understand and navigate this collective experience of alienation by the very words that are meant to bring people together? One step, perhaps, is to acknowledge that negative reaction and listen carefully for which words are being used by community members that speak more directly to their lived experience and desires for change.

³⁵ In a similar vein, Shamako Noble, West Coast cultural activist, conscious hip hop MC, and one of the co-organizers of the 2015 U.S. Polycentric Social Forums, has stated "English language has concepts that stop the conversation as soon as they drop" (Comments made at the USSF Peoples Movement Assembly in Jackson, Mississippi, January 25, 2015).

³⁶ "I always talk about how folks from New Orleans are distrustful of folks who are coming in from outside of New Orleans and thinking they know what we need...when you keep hearing...'this community is so resilient.' I mean, what else are we supposed to do but pick up the pieces and move on? People are tough and rise to the occasion...it should be celebrated but not made to feel like we are some kind of superheroes in the media when we are bringing a city back, then, on the other hand, we are the cause of all the city's problems...You can't have it both ways" (Gina Womack, Executive Director of Families of the Formerly Incarcerated, personal communication, spring 2014).

Within community activist circles in the South, the preferred phrase often used by African-American leaders is *self-determination*.³⁷ In a conference call with leaders from the green and environmental movements, Reverend Edwards, a Black social justice activist from the Zion Travel Cooperative Center in Plaquemines Parish, highlighted the distinction between the two terms:

I've been doing this work for 44 years and resiliency has been a very new term for us; we have always dealt with the issue of self-determination. We come from a history of being dehumanized, as slavery was a dehumanizing process, Jim Crow, segregation.... So resiliency wasn't a word we used; it was about self-determination and survival. I believe that resiliency came about as a result of disaster and hurricanes that a lot of white people started experiencing so they had to come up with a language. But we have been dealing with tragedy all our lives so to us it's about self-determination so that is the language we will continue to use. (Edwards, et al., 2014)

As Edwards illustrates, economic democracy activists and the solidarity economy advocates must think carefully about the cultural resonance of language. In order to posit a new world-view that moves towards an inclusive economic future, we must space for diverse expressions of shared humanity that are recognizable not by their similitude but rather their authenticity.

Carrying that concept out of the realm of theory and into on-the-ground action, I believe that part of the process must necessarily involve a revisiting of terminology and a vigilance to not let the words we use become catch phrases, or worse, point to futures we aren't actually working

³⁷ Self-determination, or *Kujichagulia*, is the second of seven principles of the Kwanzaa holiday, and the Black nationalist movement, meaning “to define ourselves, create for ourselves, and speak for ourselves.” Taken from: <http://www.officialkwanzaawebsite.org/NguzoSaba.shtml>

towards. Critical race theory needs to be embraced and put to use within the solidarity economy movement. Thankfully there is recognition amongst certain leaders within the U.S. solidarity economy community that, despite its grassroots origins, it nonetheless must remain vigilant around the potential for solidarity economy advocates to colonize alternative economic strategies that predate the framework's naming.³⁸

IV. MOVING TOWARDS ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY

“The task of those seeking economic transformation should be to connect and strengthen these already-existing alternatives.” – Marco Razeto

An assessment of New Orleans, based on the opportunities and threats I've laid out in earlier sections of this paper, suggests that there is still much work to be done locally around naming, connecting, and growing the number of solidarity efforts in the city and region. To bridge these efforts towards the larger goal of economic democracy, New Orleans advocates have an opportunity to adapt and iterate upon socially innovative practices that are flourishing elsewhere. Here, I need to make clear that iteration is not mere imitation, but rather a calibration to fit the particulars of the cultural, social, and economic context of New Orleans. While there is much to learn from cities like Cleveland (OH) and Jackson (MS) as well as regional efforts taking place in the Pioneer (MA & VT) and Silicon (CA) Valleys, New Orleans must also turn its attention towards the assets and opportunities that are unique to its people and history, as well as this place and time.

³⁸ As an example, see Annotated Bibliography for an overview of the “Decolonizing the Solidarity Economy” conference call panel held in January 2015.

Key tools and strategies

That said, there are tools and strategies that have demonstrated their utility in all solidarity economy efforts. These can operate at the scale of personal and interpersonal interactions, as well as at the level of organizational enterprise and system-wide infrastructure. The Highlander Research and Educational Center (2014) identifies the following four separate but interdependent strategies for organizing for the solidarity economy³⁹:

1. Developing and advocating for progressive policies and practices to create a legal framework that supports alternative infrastructures on local, national and international levels;
2. Developing infrastructure, transformative models, and solidarity economy enterprises on all scales;
3. Political and popular education that deconstructs the current reality while envisioning a new system and enterprises for the present and future; and
4. Resisting and organizing against destructive policies and practices.

In the section that follows I will address each of these strategies, focusing in particular on how tools such as asset-based inventories, holistic evaluation, and popular education practices can aid solidarity economy advocates in their long-view movement towards true and lasting economic democracy. Connected to the functionality of each of these tools are networks of solidarity that stabilize the infrastructure of these solidarity economy efforts and keep them connected to social justice movements.

Networks of solidarity

³⁹ For the purposes of this section, I have reorganized them from the order in which they appear in the original.

For solidarity economic initiatives to succeed, advocates must devote energy and resources into creating the foundational structures and support systems upon which cooperative and solidarity scaffolding are built. Towards that end, the first point raised by the authors of the Highlander report is how to build networks of solidarity that operate at a variety of scales. In New Orleans, I see prioritizing the following networks as key strategies for moving toward change: interracial solidarity networks; collaborative networks; and networks that direct political, legal, and financial resources to solidarity initiatives.

Interracial networks

In order for solidarity economic development to stick, its activities must engage with and draw on the inherent knowledge of those communities that have been drawn to cooperativism out of necessity. This involves building networks of interracial collaboration by pointing out shared histories and mutual interests. Not only will solidarity networks help to create a larger web of knowledge flow, but the relationships and exchanges that emerge can reveal possibilities and perspectives that might otherwise be overlooked in less diverse settings. Within the local food system, this might look like formal and informal spaces for sharing knowledge about the growing and preparing of food that recognizes the generational backyard garden tradition of Black New Orleanians, the translation of subsistence farming and fishing of Southeast Asian, Latino, and Southern Louisiana indigenous peoples to an urban context, and the imported practices of edible schoolyard gardens, aquaponics, and vertical gardening heralded by largely white newcomers.

Local and regional networks

Proponents of diverse economies have taken other angles to approaching the issues of network creation. Zooming out from the more intimate scale of interpersonal networks of solidarity,

Michael Johnson (2014) calls for regional webs of solidarity economic enterprises and local mediating institutions that ground regional cooperative/solidarity economies into the communities where people live, work, or for which they feel a deep affinity. Additionally, these cooperative networks provide a social web to link base communities, their mediating institutions, and second-tier institutions (aka a network of networks).

Mediating institutions working on food system advocacy at the neighborhood level include groups the Backyard Gardeners Network (Lower 9th Ward), NOLA Green Roots (7th and 8th Ward), and Parkways Planters community garden network. Additionally, local offerings like the Gris Gris Lab's "Intentional Living and Community Building" program are working to build interconnectivity by training local urban farmers, social entrepreneurs and community builders to be Holistic Community Organizers. When stepping back to look at the Gulf South region, groups like the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/ Land Assistance Fund (<http://www.federationsoutherncoop.com>), a sixty year-old organization supporting Black farmers across the South, and the Southern Grassroots Economic Project (<http://sgeproject.org>) are also making connections between local food initiatives and larger solidarity efforts. They also have much to offer in the way of regional cooperative business development, marketing, and supply and distribution channels. While these institutions and organizations are valuable starting points, it is still clear that more interconnectivity is needed, particularly in terms of galvanizing resources to support solidarity economy efforts.

Political, legal, and financial networks

Keith Harrington (2015) in his article, "Is the local economy too local? Why co-ops and credit

unions need a broader strategy,” writes about the need for pioneers in the solidarity and new economy efforts to establish what he calls “networks connecting islands of innovation.” He draws on the analogy of healthy ecosystems – how diverse, interconnected, ecosystems are much more environmentally stable than homogenous or fragmented ecosystems broken up by piecemeal development. Harrington argues that interconnected networks are thus key to ensuring the overall ecological health of the solidarity economy, helping to make sure “political, legal, and financial resources get to the places that need them most and allow successful institutional species the room to scale up” (p. 1).

The seeds of such hubs of support do exist in New Orleans, though they would benefit from a stronger affiliation with grassroots economic activism. These include the Good Work Network and NewCorp Inc., two Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) that specialize in providing technical assistance and access to capital to small, minority, and women owned businesses in the greater New Orleans community. NewCorp Inc., in addition to partnering with the city of New Orleans to administer the city’s \$2 million Small Business Assistance Fund Program in 2012, is, along with Good Work Network, also a leading partner in the Collaborative for Enterprise Development to offer comprehensive assistance to entrepreneurs (other partners include the Capital Access Project and Idea Village, a New Orleans-based business incubator).

What would it look like if grassroots solidarity economy initiatives approached a group like the Collaborative for Enterprise Development with the goal of building support systems (funding, supply chains, purchasing contracts from anchor institutions) for minority-owned businesses and social enterprises specifically designed to build wealth in minority communities? While it would be a major undertaking to introduce the ethical framework of the solidarity economy to these

more mainstream entrepreneurial groups, I believe it is an essential piece of the overall work. Not only might new levels of trust and collaboration emerge but greater input and buy-in at the grassroots level would likely result in more dynamic and impactful community wealth creation. These kinds of collaborations help pave the way towards also building stronger networks of financial support for businesses and organizations working at the intersection of the solidarity economy and social innovation in New Orleans.

There are a handful of policies changes that have the potential to drive private investment, as well as philanthropic support, for these kinds of projects. The first of note was the 2010 passage of the L3C incorporation status by the Louisiana state legislature. The L3C status allows a traditional LLC for-profit entity to incorporate an explicit societal benefit into its purpose. This change makes private investment in social driven business entities, including program-related investments (PRIs) made by foundations and governments, more attractive, circumventing the need for a private letter ruling from the IRS.⁴⁰

In 2012, Louisiana also passed the Benefit Corporation (B Corp) legislation, which allowed corporate for-profit entities to incorporate a societal or environmental prioritization at the same level as the duty to shareholders to maximize financial value. A 'B Corp' expands the duty of the business's officers and directors, requiring them to consider other factors such as its employees and suppliers; its community and social impact; its environmental footprint; and the ability of the business to accomplish its public benefit goals.

⁴⁰ As of 2013, there were at least 214 L3Cs registered in the state of Louisiana, the highest number in any of the nine states, and two tribal districts, that had adopted the status (http://www.intersectorl3c.com/l3c_tally.html#Louisiana). According to its website, the Foundation for Louisiana has provided approximately \$3.6 million in Program Related Investments to projects and initiatives in Louisiana since 2008 (http://www.foundationforlouisiana.org/grants_programs/program_related_investments/)

Finally, at the national level there is a growing interest in the concept of ‘local investing’. Michael Schuman (2012) and other local investment advocates are inspiring communities around the country with the vision of individuals re-directing some of their long-term savings away from Wall Street and Fortune 500 companies and instead into solidarity economic development happening in their local communities. This includes investing in family-run, community-minded, and/or cooperative businesses. The case for making this a viable financial channel for cooperative businesses is particularly compelling. The United States SBA (Small Business Administration) states that one of the major issues with launching a cooperative business is obtaining capital from investors, especially large investors. In part this is because, with cooperatives, decision-making power lies in the hands of the member-owners, rather than the investors, who can also expect to get less return on their investment because of the way surplus earnings are distributed.

Jenny Kassan, a California-based securities lawyer and founder of Cutting Edge X Marketplace, believes Direct Public Offerings (DPOs) may be a key part of the solution. DPO, which are legal at both the Federal and State level, is a form of investment offering that allows businesses to offer stock directly to the public. As such it is a way to democratize the investment process, allowing unaccredited, smaller-level, investors to align their investments with their values. While there are costs associated with registering for a DPO, cooperatives are exempt at the state level, and in the case of agricultural cooperatives, at the federal level as well.⁴¹

41 At a recent presentation in New Orleans, Jenny Kassan indicated that there is a loophole in Louisiana law that greatly speeds up the process of cooperative business registration to under 10 days in most cases, which is one of the major deterrents against DPOs in other states.

L3Cs, B Corporations, and DPOs are just a few of the emergent financial and legal strategies that are being tested around the country. As these forms continue to be tested and more responsive models emerge, there is an ongoing need to educate New Orleans investors, state policy makers, and business owners of all scales and sectors. Connecting these groups to regional and national networks who are tracking the evolving landscape of solidarity financing will help these groups better leverage their investment for change. Beyond network building, another strategy to leverage investment and make change is developing a more robust analysis of the various sectors – like the food system – that interact with the investor’s belief system and priorities.

Asset-based inventory and evaluation

In researching the local food system in New Orleans, I noted an important missing component: a coordinated analysis of the assets that currently exist and what is needed to create a more equitable and just food system. This lack of coordination has resulted in a number of policy and zoning decisions that threaten to undermine or limit the potential of efforts to build a robust local and regional food system.

What would an appropriate inventory look like? In addition to the more commonly used SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis, the authors of *The Roadmap for City Food Sector Innovation and Improvement* encourage cities to create an assets/gap inventory. They define assets as “forms of human, social, financial, physical, and natural (or environmental) capital that are essential and interactive building blocks for an investment and its wealth generating capacity at varying scales, including metropolitan or citywide, community, business, and household (Pansing, et. al., 2013, p. 15). Caution must be taken, lest the city and/or other investors in the

local food system view such inventories through a capitalistic framework, in which the human and environmental assets are merely tools to generate wealth from investment. On the other hand, encouraging investors to consider the human, social and natural resources inherent in low-income communities as worthy of additional funding, training, and protection seems an argument that may get traction within certain investor audiences. Further examining the impact of these investments through the ethical lens of solidarity economics offers a more holistic inventory of the local food system. Much more than an analysis of revenue numbers, size and scale of different businesses/organizations, or existing policies, a solidarity analysis would also need to assess everything from geographic and cultural considerations to financing patterns.

After a city has articulated a vision for its food sector, the next step is to create an asset/gaps inventory that illuminates the future potential of these investments to strengthen these assets and their wealth-generating capacity. To date, New Orleans sustainable and regional food advocates have yet to convene such a visioning process. However, even a precursory investigation identifies an abundance of existing and potential assets in the city (see **Appendices E, F, and G** for examples of all three assessment tools addressing the New Orleans local food system).

Once an asset inventory has been performed, and decisions have been made about where to focus energy and make investments, the next step is to evaluate the effectiveness of those investments. Here again it is useful to think of the local food economy as a space for what J.G. Gibson-Graham call ethical decision-making (see page 43). While progressive actors in the field of community economic development have advocated for certain policies to maximize investments, such as social enterprise capital funds, CED tax credits, and local procurement policies (CCED Net, 2012), the framework of the solidarity economy provides an important

added relational dimension. In New Orleans, this means incorporating the activities of a larger network of family and community health advocates who are pushing for legislative reforms around family food stamp benefits and healthier school food options.

“Healthy Food Systems”, a 2008 research report co-authored by James Van Hemert & Joe Holmes, includes a number of suggestions for how to improve coordination and evaluation of local food investments. These include the creation of sustainability measurements that allow municipalities to better assess their success or failure to connect urban residents to healthy, locally grown or harvested, food.⁴² The authors also advocate for reclassification strategies around land use and zoning that eliminate excessively restrictive regulations around open land use for agricultural and animal husbandry use and, in general, deemphasize the old world notion of urban areas as areas of food consumption and rural areas as areas of food production. They also suggest the creation of incentives such as tax increment financing and less restrictive requirements for grocery stores wishing to move into underserved areas, exclusive contracts with local food producers for all government functions, and local government oversight of land trusts that protect agricultural land (van Hemert & Holmes, 2008, p. 9).

To this extensive list I would also advocate for the following measurements of *social value*:

- Number of jobs created by local food businesses that are filled by local residents rather than recruiting from elsewhere;
- Opportunities for training and company career advancement;
- Community-asset and wealth creation, measured in terms of living wages and opportunities for workers to build assets;

⁴² These include: the average distance a food item travels; percentage of community demand met from agriculture within the community; the average distance a person must travel to access healthy food, and energy consumption to food production ratios (van Hemert & Holmes, 2008, p. 9).

- Price scaling that makes food accessible to a variety of incomes; and
- Accessibility to healthy food options as influenced by transportation, quality health care and child care services, educational offerings, etc.

These kinds of added measures will likely require advocacy at the community level, with the end goal of adequately evaluating issues that matter at the household and neighborhood level. This process speaks to how a solidarity economy lens shifts the kinds of metrics that are collected when evaluatory tools place emphasis on the direct impact these policies have on peoples' daily lives. Between the farmer and her CSA members or regular farmers market customers, or a food hub distributor who coordinates a diverse array of local food producers, these economic exchanges are intimately relational. By extension, these interactions impact the relationships that people have to the food they eat and the way that they experience their neighborhoods and larger communities. As such, a relational framework can also foster more communication across sectors, while raising the visibility of the economic and social realities of marginalized families. This, in turn, can influence the needs for other kinds of supports and initiatives that can address healthy food access, health care, transportation, and child care concerns, which are all contributing factors into a just and equitable local food economy.

Popular education models

Popular education models give people a better understanding of past experiments and allow them to explore future models. By validating peoples' own firsthand experience, popular education practices also help connect the dots between the impacts of large anonymous economic systems and individuals' everyday lives. These are essential components of bringing the solidarity economy to life in our communities.

Popular education, as a tool for leadership development within social movements, connects the personal to the political and validates the pluralist and diverse perspectives within the U.S. solidarity economy movement, especially those held by young people and people of color. Embedded within its pedagogy is the powerful belief that everyone possesses the capacity for leadership. As a tool for leadership development, popular education provides ways to: 1) educate greater numbers of people about the issues at hand; 2) develop joint analysis that prepares the groundwork for; 3) developing strategy (Project South, 1999, p. 19).

Brazilian educator, the late Paolo Freire, was one of the first to draw out the theoretical and practical underpinnings of the popular education model. In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire argues that social justice and equity can only occur with a simultaneous redesign of existing educational models so that they privilege dialogue and consciousness-raising. Thus, by its nature, popular education tends to occur largely outside of traditional learning environments, often teaching that which is not taught in school.⁴³

Popular education was a core organizing practice amongst African American communities throughout the early and mid 20th century, especially in the South. Of particular note is these communities' use of popular education pedagogies to learn about cooperative business principles. In pushing for economic opportunities beyond sharecropping, mining, and pandering to discriminatory labor unions, cooperative advocates drew on learners' experiences with economic disenfranchisement and desires for greater economic self-determination (Gordon Nembhard, 2014, p. 245). These courses, which occurred in formal settings (in 1944, a survey of Black universities, colleges, and junior colleges in the South found 37 schools out of 57 included the

⁴³ Though not exclusively so. There are examples – as documented by Ernest Morrell and others (Morrell, 2011; McSurley, et al, 2013; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998) – of teachers who have found ways to bring curriculum embracing the popular education modality into high school classrooms.

cooperative movement in their curriculum) and informal learning circles run through churches and community centers, also had a politicizing affect that helped lay the groundwork for the civil rights movement.

More recently, groups like Project South, have expanded upon this foundational work to redefine popular education within the particular historical context of the United States. Christine Wong, one of the staff leaders at Project South, refer to popular education as “neither a tool nor a strategy, but a life,” (as cited in Project South, 2011) in which people are encouraged to make connections between their own personal experiences and the embedded systems of injustice that have perpetuated racism and poverty in this country. Thus, popular education, when introduced as an interactive, action-oriented, justice-based process, becomes “education for liberation that develops new leadership to build a bottom-up movement for social change” (Project South, 1999, p. 9).

Additionally, many of the tools and strategies used in popular education settings have already found their way into the practices and initiatives of the solidarity economy. Organizers of the U.S. Social Forums have historically hosted Peoples’ Movement Assemblies and Movement Schools in the build-up to these national gatherings, while community research-driven institutions like the Center for Popular Economics and the Community Economies Collective lead workshops and conferences that use popular education tools such as guided visioning, timeline creation, role-playing skits, and mapping exercises to better connect big systems-level thinking to the everyday experiences of participants.

The process of empowerment through education also informs movement building. With popular

education as a tool, movement leaders are able to guide members towards a shared vision and winning strategy. These tools, once grasped by participants, can then be used in community meetings, leadership development trainings, and campaign organizing.

Ongoing connection to social justice movement building

Social movements have greatly informed solidarity economy efforts in the U.S. and abroad. Thus, as Michael Albert points out, the solidarity economy framework draws its gender definitions from feminist struggles, its anti-racist definition from movements around race, its labor definition from the U.S. labor movement, and its understanding of ecology from efforts within the environmental justice movement (as cited in Allard, 2008, p. 74). Moreover these definitions have evolved and shifted as new movements arise – Occupy Wall Street, the March for Climate Change, and Black Lives Matter are all significant contemporary examples. Each of these mass mobilization movements, in their own way, have illustrated direct connections between neoliberal economic policies and their effect on low income communities and communities of color, as well as the destruction of our natural environments.

I believe this alignment with social movements is both an organic part of the birth and evolution of the solidarity economy framework but also a strategy for how to connect the framework's relevance to an ever-widening network of practitioners. As our current systems continue to fail the majority of people in this country, more and more communities will start to seek out other ways to meet their needs. There are any number of directions that this reorientation could go – if driven by fear and the scarcity mindset, we could be looking at a bleak post-capitalist future. On the other hand, moving forward with strategies that embrace the values of the solidarity economy

– mutual aid, collaboration, equity, sustainability – there exists another future in which communities moved from disenchantment to re-enchantment with possibility.

I believe, for the solidarity economy framework to continue to grow, it is important for practitioners and advocates to align their initiatives with strategies emerging from today’s social justice movements. Many activists from the racial justice, climate justice, and prison abolition movements have found common ground with the solidarity economy framework because its practices and principles work to address the economic and structural roots of injustice. After the urgency of direct action and protest has passed, organizing around solidarity economy initiatives offer ways to productively channel that energy. For example, in the wake of the Mike Brown verdict, Missourians Organizing for Reform and Empowerment (MORE) launched a new initiative, Solidarity Economy St. Louis, in recognition that, according to MORE organizer Julia Ho, “racial divisions restrict access to resources in the city...a robust solidarity economy network could play a role in addressing those problems.”⁴⁴ Based in an ethos of collective self-actualization, expressions of the solidarity economy proactively function less as political strategy and more as examples of democracy in action.

What is important to note in each of these examples is the fact that the solidarity economy is actually a “movement of movements” rather than an economic initiative working in isolation. SE St. Louis, for example, functions less as a hub and more as a convener of other organizations and

⁴⁴ Two concrete outcomes of SE St. Louis’s organizing are the city’s decision to clear warrants for over 220,000 nonviolent offenses and the development of a time-banking program that gives people a way to work off their bench warrant fines with nonmonetary contributions within their own neighborhoods. Quote by Julia Ho excerpted from <http://www.occupy.com/article/missouris-solidarity-economy-organizing-wake-mike-brown#sthash.wKIWH67S.dpuf>

groups doing social and economic justice work around the region.⁴⁵ As such, much of the work of the solidarity economy is to make what Ethan Miller (2010) calls “circuits of solidarity exchange,” one of which is to “integrate economic alternatives into social movements and social movements into economic alternatives” (p. 8). This concept resonates with me because it takes economics out of the removed realm of theory and abstraction and makes it a cultural strategy. It also offers a way forward for people to sustainably engage in activism for the long haul.

Part of this cultural strategy is the emphasis on iterative experimentation and putting values and principles into practice. Within activist circles this is often referred to as ‘prefigurative politics’.⁴⁶ Similar to the adage “we make the road by walking” prefigurative politics embodies the ethical stance in which the means themselves are understood to also be the ends. While this road will inevitably have potholes and detours, starting and continuing the walk is a proactive strategy that moves away from passivity and toward activity.

V. OPENING TO THE POSSIBILITIES

So much of the work of building the solidarity economy involves connecting the dots and remaining open to the possibilities. For the solidarity economy framework to be accessible and attractive to an increasingly widening segment of the population, there needs to be close attention

⁴⁵ A list of their partners includes the Cowry Collective Timebank, the Organization for Black Struggle, Sistahs Talkin’ Back, the Coalition to Abolish the Prison Industrial Complex, Grace Hill’s MORE Dollar Network, Blank Space, sustainable deconstruction and recycling organizations, free stores, art collectives, and immigrant rights organizations like Latinos en Acción, and the St. Louis Ecovillage Network.

⁴⁶ In applying this ethical approach to politics, anarchist activist and author, Cindy Milstein, reminds us “how we act now is how we want others to begin to act, too. We try to model a notion of goodness even as we fight for it” (Milstein, 2010, p. 111).

paid to how people are invited to participate. The tools and strategies mentioned in Section Four are meant to offer participants in various solidarity economies an increased sense of empowerment and possibility.

One of the other principal tasks of advocates of the solidarity economy is to shift the mindset of those with power and resources such that they begin to recognize the economic potential of supporting community self-determination and grassroots innovation. However, given that peoples with power and resources are not above pitting groups and communities against each other along racial and ethnic lines, there has to be a simultaneous process of building trust and solidarity among marginalized groups and connecting these efforts to sites of power building. The overall goal is to model a mentality that sees a world of abundance in which power is not an exhaustible resource. This mentality supports the view that when disenfranchised groups gain more decision-making space over their economic future, they do not actually threaten other peoples' power but rather improve the overall condition of society.

Perhaps a good place to start building solidarity between marginalized groups is to start with young people. Not only can they offer a fresh perspective and a demonstrable commitment to building an inclusive economic future, but they also come to the table with less formalized political or organizational agendas.

Youth engagement

As discussed in Section Three, much of the economic future in New Orleans depends upon the city's direct engagement with its youth. In addition to popular education models already

mentioned, there are other tools available to help ensure urban youth are seen, and see themselves, as resourceful and creative contributors.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a process through which people investigate social topics that resonate with their own lives and participate in research to understand the root causes of problems that directly impact them (Berg & Allaman, 2012, p. 1). There are three principles that guide most PAR projects: 1) collective investigation into a problem (rather than individual scholarship); 2) reliance on indigenous knowledge to understand and examine the problems of concern; and 3) the desire to take individual or collective action to deal with the stated problem (Andrade and Morrell, 2008, pp. 107-108). A component of this individual or collective action often includes disseminating research findings to policymakers and stakeholders to influence policy and decision making.

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) offers further opportunity by explicitly giving youth advocacy tools to address the systems and structures that dictate their daily lived experiences. Like other types of youth organizing, YPAR promotes youth involvement in their communities and the development of leadership skills. It emphasizes the development of young people's knowledge, skills, and abilities to be experts on issues of importance to them, and catalyze systemic change in collaboration with their peers and supportive adults (Berg and Allaman, 2012, p. 1).

Though used as tools in different disciplines and sectors, PAR and YPAR have a great deal in common with user-driven and transformational design thinking. Both shift traditional power

dynamics by validating the “non-expert perspective” and privileging the ideas of those who are most impacted by the “design” issue at hand (Design Council, 2006, p. 21). Indeed, one could make the strong case that YPAR is an essential practice for bringing the youth voice and perspective into community-driven social innovation processes.

I believe YPAR is a powerful tool for youth to understand their economic identities and advocate for change within the systems and structures that dictate those identities. Testing and tracking, after school and youth employment programs, workforce training models, paying for higher education – young people have a clear understanding of what is, and is not, working for them when they interact with these systems. These interrelated processes meet urban youth where they are at and contextualize their economic identity development as workers within a larger socio-political context.

Using popular education tools such as role playing, historical timelines, and storytelling, young learners also begin to recognize how these constructs not only shape their individual lives but also perpetuate stereotypes and assumptions about urban youth in general. Ultimately the goal is for young people to feel empowered to participate in their full range of identities, not only as workers but also as citizens, family members, and hopefully community change makers. By way of illustration, let’s look at the innovative and collaborative work being done by three different youth leadership programs: Grow Dat Youth Farm, Kids Rethink New Orleans, and the VEGGI Farmer Coop’s Food Justice Collaborative (see descriptions in **Appendix C, Table 2**).

What started as a conversation between these three organizations about how to introduce concepts around cooperative and solidarity economics into their food justice work has evolved

into a months-long collaboration starting in the fall of 2014. The three organizations teamed up to bring youth and staff together for a workshop series that introduced popular education techniques and participatory action research as tools to programmatically engage youth in the social, political and economic histories of New Orleans and the South.⁴⁷

The idea to form the Food Justice Collective grew out of these conversations about the intersection between popular education, food justice, and the solidarity economy. This group of thirteen youth (ages 13-23) is an intentionally interracial (African American, Vietnamese American, and Latino) youth collective that actively seeks to make connections between their communities' past histories of oppression and struggles for economic and health equity and the contemporary industrial and local food systems. The young participants also learn hard skills on the farm, receive mentorship from the elder members of the VEGGI Farmers Cooperative, and engage in design-thinking and group decision-making to maximize the farm's finances, physical spaces, equipment, and labor power.

Recently the group decided to formalize their farming work as its own cooperative venture; youth voted to invest ½ of their stipend into the costs of the cooperative and will share in the profits from produce sales, which are marketed and distributed through the VEGGI Farmers Cooperative umbrella. They also launched a crowdsourcing campaign to raise money to build their own DIY solar system that addresses the energy needs of the youth and elder farmers alike (including walk-in coolers) as well as provides back-up power for their neighbors during outages.

⁴⁷ The groups also collaborated to bring in guest presenters from the Austin-based *Food for Black Thought*, travel to rural Mississippi to meet Black farmers and attend a Peoples Movement Assembly organized by Cooperation Jackson and the U.S. Social Forum in Jackson, MS. Since I was working with Grow Dat at the time of the workshops to develop curriculum modules around the solidarity economy and personal financial literacy, I was able to attend many of these activities.

The Food Justice Collaborative thus offers a compelling example of how youth engagement in solidarity economy initiatives can lead to socially innovative strategies for addressing community wealth creation as well as a deeper ethical grounding in how young people view themselves as workers and community members. Inspired by the above examples, I turn now to the question of what could be achieved if youth, food justice activists, artists and educators collaborated with workforce development program leaders, funding institutions, and city leaders to take a holistic approach towards youth employment in the local food economy.

Making the case for collective impact: Youth employment

New Orleans currently has a shortage in the supply of educated workers relative to demand. The city lost a large proportion of its youth population to displacement after Hurricane Katrina and this loss also impacts the size and skill set of the emerging workforce. Indeed the New Orleans metro scored in the lowest quartile among the largest 100 metros for its gap in 2009 in this regard (GNODC, 2011, p. 5). Meanwhile, one in five New Orleans youth between the ages of 16 and 24 is not working or in school and the vast majority of these young folks are people of color (Sims, 2015, p. 2). All of this points towards the very real challenge that New Orleans must face regarding how it invests in building the education and skills of its future workforce and on the long-term health of its economy.

Unfortunately both the governmental and social service sectors have been slow to address this glaring workforce gap in any kind of systemic fashion. “Prosperity NOLA”, a recent report put out by the New Orleans Business Alliance, discusses the city's “under-prepared workforce and large proportion of youth not ‘possessing the skills’ to enter the workforce” (New Orleans Business Alliance, 2013, p. 41). However, the report skips over root causes of this under-

preparedness and fails to present any vision of how to create legitimate pathways into prioritized industrial clusters.⁴⁸ What would it take to shift this tide and create pathways to meaningful employment for young people?

I believe that taking a “collective impact” approach would be a critical step in the right direction. According to John Kania and Mark Kramer, “collective impact is the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem” (Kania and Kramer, 2011, p. 36). They also identify the following shared characteristics as being indicative of successful collective impact initiatives: a centralized infrastructure; a dedicated (as in hours committed to moving the initiative forward) core team and a structured process that leads to a common agenda; shared measurement, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among all participants” (Kania & Kramer, 2011, p. 38).

Collective processes have already been shown (in Section Three) to be a natural outcome of addressing the local food system in a holistic fashion. For, as the authors of “Roadmap for City Food Sector Innovation and Investment” argue:

increasing connectivity adds value to the urban food system and helps build wealth, including social capital, and a sense of place. Investments in the food sector not only help fill a market supply or demand niche, they also help build upon, knit together, and

⁴⁸ Rather than strategize around how to address from a user-perspective what youth of color, or the chronically unemployed, need in order to develop their skill sets or increase their access to certain sectors, the report focuses on how to make New Orleans more attractive to non-native talent by curbing crime, promoting more choice in education, and marketing the city’s work/play/live balance. This tactic is both an insult to the city’s residents and a threat to maintaining the unique qualities that characterize the city.

strengthen other assets within the food system and the city itself that add multiple forms of value and root the investment in a place or community (Pansing, et al. 2013, p. 17).

This kind of large-scale coordinated effort in New Orleans is not unattainable. As Frederick Weil notes (2011), in the first few years after Katrina, competition between organizations, or neighborhoods, gave way to partnerships oriented towards achieving common goals. While many groups have struggled to maintain that cooperative spirit – due both to lack of follow through and an increase in competition over resources (much of this competition is tied to the proliferations of nonprofits, which have increased fourfold in the past ten years) – the notion of working together towards a larger goal is still fresh in peoples’ minds.

What would a ‘collective impact’ approach look like in terms of youth employment and workforce development in New Orleans’ local food economy? Bringing young people into conversations with adult leaders in the fields of economic development and workforce development would, I believe, have a profound impact on innovating the processes and opportunities currently available within the local food sector. Transformational change would mean increasing the number of young people working within all parts of the New Orleans food system, earning a livable wage in positions that offer opportunity for advancement and match skill sets, interests, and talents. It would mean cross-sector connectivity and unlikely partnerships.

So who would be New Orleans partners in such an ambitious and potentially transformative effort? I have already pointed to a handful of youth leadership organizations as well as the proliferation of Community Development Corporations (CDCs) in many of the city’s low-

income neighborhoods. Some of these – like the Mary Queen of Vietnam CDC in New Orleans East, as well as NewCorp Inc. – are already actively playing key roles in the emerging solidarity and local food economies. Others, with the appropriate education and orientation, will hopefully see the benefits for their constituents and be able to connect already existing efforts to the larger framework. Other collaborators might include school staff (particularly those who represent charter schools with edible school gardens, healthy food initiatives, or internship and other work training programs), the New Orleans Food Policy Advisory Council, and funder representatives from private foundations, credit unions, and small business development organizations.

Given that much of the workforce training that is needed is ultimately about group process and the ins and outs of running a business, it may make more sense to orient these programs to institutions with business incubators, such as sites of higher education, continuing education, or a place like the Propeller Social Innovation Hub. However, these institutions all deal with issues around access and inclusion particularly for low-income and youth of color (which, to their credit, they are attempting to address – often using the same social innovation tools that I have been discussing throughout this paper).

A more accessible, and possibly more trusted, site for workforce development and continuing education programs is Delgado Community College. At Delgado, potential students and potential instructors can both propose courses and training programs through their continuing education offerings. Another would be to engage the Foundation of Louisiana's TOGETHER Initiative Economic Opportunity working group to embed youth workforce development into their four-year strategy. This group, comprised of community members as well as organizational representatives, would be a great think tank for how to introduce cooperative and solidarity

economic educational offerings that would strengthen the emerging youth workforce and its understanding of the principles and practices that are required for cooperative ventures to be successful.

The Office of Workforce Development, which is run out of the Mayor's Office and hosts the JOBS1 and NOLA YouthWorks programs, seems, at least in the abstract, to be another ideal collaborator for this kind of initiative. However, like most workforce development programs, a preliminary reading of their website shows that the office takes a somewhat reductive and paternalistic approach to engaging workers in their own economic identity development.⁴⁹ I would argue that this has everything to do with looking at the question of job acquisition from a scarcity mindset and privileging the needs of the employer over that of the worker, or their community. Within this framework then, there is little room for the kind of youth economic self-determination that is at the core of solidarity economic development.

Regardless of exactly who would be a part of this collective impact effort, I envision a process that would be overwhelmingly informed and guided by youth-participants. Popular education tools could be used to great effect to enhance youth understanding of the historic and current economic landscape of the city and region, while Youth Participatory Action Research methodologies help them envision their current and ideal economic identities. One of the outcomes from this long-term collective impact engagement might take the form of recommendations of how to address the workforce gap in a way that engages, rather than alienates, youth.

⁴⁹ For example, “The Office of Workforce Development identifies and aligns the *supply* of workers in our city with the needs of growing businesses....and leverages the capabilities of our citizens to *fill necessary positions*” (Source: <http://www.nola.gov/economic-development/workforce-development>; emphasis mine).

Here I am not speaking about just growing the next generation of urban farmers or restaurant chefs, but rather how young people can bring their skill sets, natural talents, and whole selves into a more expansive definition of what a flourishing local food economy can look like. Giving more young people the tools, skills, and training offered by organizations like Grow Dat, Kids Rethink New Orleans, and VEGGI Farmers Cooperative and then providing them opportunities to identify, develop, and apply those skills is, I believe, an incredibly powerful next step in this process.

As these programs have shown, youth have so much more to offer than just their manual labor – they also bring to the table their skills as educators, programmers, nutritionists, meme creators, and so on. Recognizing and developing pathways for turning these skills into career paths engages the whole of the food system including under addressed concerns about distribution, transportation, marketing and financing. The opportunities for youth engagement are limited by adults’ imaginations, not theirs. When we create limitations based on our own assumptions of what kinds of work initiatives are appropriate for young people, we underestimate the potential of our own workforce.⁵⁰

Culture and the solidarity economy

The above examples of *community-envisioned and enacted social innovation* within the New Orleans food system and beyond have led me to think about the possibility of “performing” the solidarity

⁵⁰ For example, when groups offer coding classes, or teach financial literacy for youth, what shifts in terms of instructional perspective and curriculum when approached with a social justice lens? You get projects like #YesWeCode, the movement led by Van Jones to train 100,000 low-opportunity urban youth to become world-class computer coders. Imagine the possibilities if the coding challenges presented to youth were to tie directly to the values and initiatives of the solidarity economy (for instance, creating an app that allows a family to measure how much food scraps they are keeping out of the waste stream by composting).

economy as a way of introducing people – including young people – to its potential. How can the efforts to innovate the local economy, as previously showcased, be amplified in an embodied way? Cultural practitioners possess a particular capacity for raising awareness, setting trends, and opening minds. The tools available to artists are as diverse and abundant as the futures they imagine into being: conscientious hip hop artists compose the modern day anthems of a movement; science fiction authors dream new worlds free of patriarchy, racism, and inequity; socially-engaged theatre companies bring their audience to the physical and emotional spaces of their own loss. To return to the language of Peter Block, art has the potential to move a community from being “stuck” in its own unhealed wounds into a restorative place of healing (Block, 2008, p. 45).

Moreover, I believe that the minds and hearts of New Orleans residents, workers, city officials, and visitors can open to the potential of the solidarity economy when cultural practitioners activate public spaces in surprising and innovative ways. In a city that is known for its public and collective acts of celebration, how might the transformative and liberating process of creating public performance intersect with envisioning new economic possibilities and supporting long-term community building? How can it subvert control and certain kinds of hierarchies?

The more I have thought about these questions, the more I have become excited by the possibilities, as performance is one of the city’s greatest assets. From its indigenous Black street cultures (second line parades, brass bands, Mardi Gras Indians, Skull and Bones and Baby Doll krewes) to the city’s remarkable permissiveness for celebration to be played out in highly visible ways, New Orleans is a city that invites its residents to join in and participate. While this propensity for play and celebration can be seen as strategies for coping with, rather than being

beaten down, by certain oppressions (historic, systemic, and internal), I am interested in what it would look like if these were instead used as prefigurative strategies for enticing more people to seek out alternatives to the status quo economy of the city. Indeed, what if the preexisting networks of solidarity that already exist between the art and social communities were built upon to foster city-wide conversations about what true wealth looks, feels, tastes and sounds like?

The story of ‘Exhibit Be’

One only has to look across the Mississippi River for inspiration. In the fall of 2014, as part of the Prospect 3 Art Biennial, a group of street artists, brought together by New Orleans native Brandan Odums, mounted ‘Exhibit Be’, the largest temporary installation of street art in the South. For the exhibition, more than 40 artists took over five gutted buildings and courtyard of De Gaulle Manor, a former housing development in Algiers on the West Bank slated to become a sports complex. During the fall, the site was turned into an immersive art experience seen by tens of thousands of visitors during the exhibit’s two-month run. The culminating event took on a truly festival feel, with high school marching bands, food and drink tents, and performances by conscious hip hop artists Dead Prez and Erykah Badu. Over 10,000 people attended these closing festivities; the energy from this potent combination of art, history, protest, and celebration was palpable to everyone who gathered.

The context of the artwork was grounded in an analysis of blight and development in post-Katrina New Orleans.⁵¹ Several artists used the platform to speak to this complex history while

⁵¹ Interestingly part of the building’s history involves its use in the months after Hurricane Katrina as the base of the Common Ground Collective. In late 2005, CGC founder, Malik Rahim, entered into a gentlemen’s agreement with the former property owner in which they agreed to sell the complex to CGC for \$5 million. During that period, the collective ran holistic drug treatment programs, high school GED classes, and homeownership education programs; over 200 volunteers lived in the complex with existing squatters and

others created pieces that spoke to the Black leadership legacy in the South and beyond. The politicized nature of the artworks presented a fresh angle to view the issue of how redevelopment can lead to displacement and disenfranchisement of marginalized communities. Rather than present a solution for how to combat gentrification and displacement, the exhibit raised awareness and pointed towards the possibilities that transpire when under heard voices are placed at the forefront of the conversation. Using a festival energy, ‘Exhibit Be’ introduced a wide cross-section of people – especially young people – to socially innovative concepts such as urban community land trusts. What’s more, it did so in a setting that brought the need for just and equitable urban redevelopment into vivid clarity.⁵²

Putting it all together

In reflecting on all of these distinct strategies – networks, asset inventories, popular education, the role of youth and culture in activating the solidarity economy, I am struck by how all intersect at various moments with community economic development. Indeed the field of community economic development (CED) may be the best home for the practices of community-envisioned and enacted social innovation that will move solidarity economy approaches forward. Not only does community economic development trace its origins back to the efforts of community activists in the 1960s to bring low-income communities out of poverty but, *by design and necessity*, its practitioners are often both seasoned collaborators and skilled innovators.

families before the owner reneged on their agreement and sold the property to another management group. (Source: <http://www.fastcompany.com/3040852/how-a-single-building-covered-in-eye-popping-street-art-explains-new-orleans#2>)

⁵² The exhibit was just one of a number of creative approaches galvanizing community voices against blight and gentrification in New Orleans. Another, which also grew out of Prospect 3, is Blights Out!, which mixes “visual art, architecture, and performance in order to see, experience, and act on issues of blight, divestment, and housing.” Using an experiential method of “performing architecture” the group asks questions such as “how do we meet the needs of a neighborhood outside of a profit-driven framework?” See <http://platformsfund.org/projects/blights-out/> for more information.

Despite these natural affinities, I nonetheless caution the solidarity economy throwing all of its eggs in the community economic development basket. At its core, CED aims to lift low-income communities into the economic mainstream; how does that reconcile with the deep structural flaws of the mainstream economy? There needs to be a radical rethink from the CED community around how to move away from mainstream values that just end up encouraging people to stay stuck in their economic identities as consumers and instruments of labor. Instead, what can CED learn from these alternative approaches to adopt an asset-based mindset that promotes a healthier, more inclusive, economic ecosystem?

Part of the goal of rethinking community economic development, I argue, is to activate peoples' imaginations around the possibilities of what J.K. Gibson Graham called "a diverse economy." This term refers to the full representation of economic relations and practices, including those that are typically excluded or marginalized by the strong theory of capitalism (Gibson Graham, 2006, p. 59-60). To demonstrate this reframing, J.K. Gibson Graham and the Communities Economies Collective created what they call 'the economic iceberg' in which the tip of the iceberg includes capitalist enterprises, wage labor, market transactions while under the surface lies a wide spectrum of activities and exchanges that make up the much larger portion of a diverse economy (see [Appendix H](#)).

It is difficult, especially in the midst of the onslaught of capitalocentric messaging, for people to even begin to peer below the surface of the water and recognize collective enterprises, household and voluntary labor, barter, sharing and gift giving as equally valid forms of economic exchange. However fissures in the cracks of capitalism's dominance are becoming increasingly visible as

more and more people bemoan the loss of community cohesion, collective resourcefulness, and neighborly generosity that distinguish being 'poor' from being 'impoverished'. Community-envisioned and enacted social innovation strategies such as popular education, participatory action research, and user-driven design enable people to recognize the diversity and vitality of an existing economy and begin to reframe their own economic identities and capacities.

CONCLUSION

This thesis represents my desire to contribute to the conversations occurring across New Orleans about how the city is changing due to rapidly changing social and economic demographics. Which forces have contributed to those shifts, how they address or perpetuate racial, social, and economic inequities, and what it means to be an individual actor (especially an urban youth actor) implicated in those shifts, are big questions being addressed to greater and lesser degrees by decision makers and community activists working throughout the city. While my central question of this thesis reflects my hope that the solidarity economy can indeed be developed and used as a framework to promote economic democracy, the immediate goal of this thesis is to encourage economic identity development and community strategies that provide space for underheard voices to enter into this conversation. To that end I feel that it is essential to sit in these questions and invite others to do the same.

At the same time, it is essential to remember that this journey towards economic democracy – in New Orleans as well as the rest of the United States and the global stage – is a generational effort and one that will be frequently met with obstacles. Much of what gets dreamed up and put in place today will lay the foundations for the lived economic reality of our grandchildren and great grandchildren. As a society dominated by oppressive and extractive economic systems, we have unlearned our instincts of cooperation and collectivity. Although the efforts that make up the solidarity economy may seem minor in the face of monumental challenges, it is essential to continue creating spaces where people can tap back into these inherent capacities. Such efforts, when they are generated at all different levels and scales, will leave people better equipped to handle the seismic shifts ahead, operating out of an ethos of mutual aid rather than fear and greed.

I anticipate carrying this research and its inherent possibilities into more conversations with people working in New Orleans and beyond to further test my theories/visions. In particular, I am interested in gaining a better understanding of how asset-based community development could be used to reframe the issue of community economic development that identifies a community's assets and capacities rather than its needs. I agree with J.K. Gibson Graham (2006) that this approach does not have to take an overly nostalgic view of community, but rather can promote realistic action (p. 231 *n15*) while at the same time addressing the unequal power relationships that go into most community planning processes. Similar to design-thinking, in which limitations can lead to some of the most creative ways of thinking, community action (after a clear assessment of the full spectrum of existing resources) requires creativity and outside-of-the-box visioning.

In all cases, to ensure a functional and sustainable framework for its emerging solidarity economy, New Orleans advocates need to simultaneously work at building a culture of care. Throughout my studies, I have returned again and again to the under-acknowledged role that trauma plays in influencing not only peoples' relationships to money, but also their capacity to participate in efforts that move us all towards greater economic democracy. As John Forester (1999) reminds us, participatory processes (be they a community action group or worker-owned cooperative) are more likely to fail if planners or business consultants refuse to acknowledge the trauma, self-perceptions, and other kinds of deeply defining experiences, of the people involved (p. 245). In a city that, to me, feels largely shaped by experiences of collective trauma, any forward-thinking economic development strategy in New Orleans, including that of groups who are working within the solidarity economy or community economic development, would do well to address this issue as part of its ongoing efforts.

At the same time, this culture of care needs to be cultivated by those engaged in the grassroots, hands-on work. This commitment to learning better communication skills and self-advocacy will help circumvent two of the greatest risks in launching any kind of democratic business endeavor or collective process – burn-out and interpersonal conflict. Australian “apocaloptimist,” Theo Kitchener (2014), refers to this process as holistic management, a way for people committed to this framework to move away from trying to do everything themselves and to divide up cooperative initiatives according to particular skill sets and interests, thus creating a more “efficient” system.

A major, yet under-emphasized, aspect of economic democracy is supporting the creation of restorative and regenerative communities. As Yorman Nuñez, a community economic

development research affiliated with the Bronx Cooperative Development initiative, reminds us, “regeneration makes you think about the activities that get you through a real healing process to a place of wellness. Because of the realities we live with, that is a much harder proposition and process to go through... but necessary if we really want to get to a point of true sustainability.”⁵³

Future initiatives

A while back, I made this following diagram to demonstrate the nodes of activation that fit within the definition of culture:

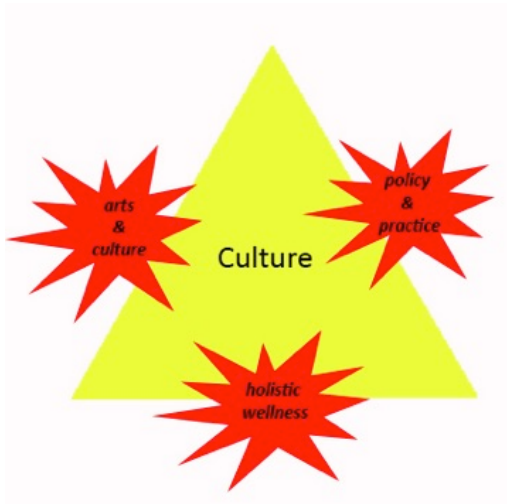


Figure 3: Activating the culture nodes

The second half of this thesis has sought to address all three of these nodes (policy & practice in Section Four; arts & culture in Section Five; and just now cultures of care (i.e. holistic wellness). This recognition made me think that perhaps it makes sense to dedicate these final pages to the question of what it would take to strengthen the culture of solidarity in New Orleans?

⁵³ Retrieved from <http://fieldguide.capitalinstitute.org/bronx-cooperative-development-initiative.html>)

Michael Johnson (2014) speaks to this process when he writes about the three key dimensions to growing a movement culture for developing regional solidarity economies; he calls these: a culture of belief; a culture of empowerment; and a culture of thinking cooperatively. Working to build a culture of solidarity, I believe, incorporates all three of these elements – enough people getting turned on to the idea that economic practices can actually foster cooperation and abundance; people feeling that they have the tools, education, and support systems to step out of the scarcity, consumerist mindset and into one of rightful ownership and mutual benefit; and finally, shifting to a mindset of horizontal solidarity that puts the vision of the Whole ahead of the needs of the individual.

Drawing on the language of anthropologist Patrick Huff, who wrote about the spirit of activist volunteerism that helped to rebuild post-Katrina New Orleans, I see how cultivating a sense of solidarity “not only resists hegemonic structures on a tactical level but [is] also strategic, and thus potentially culturally transformative” (Huff, 2008, p. 4). I have tried to avoid positing definitive solutions or dwelling on the particular social and economic problems faced by New Orleans. Rather the point, or the ambition, is to pose possibilities and then step back so that the voices of people who are most directly impacted by the injustices of our current economic reality can be heard.

And while it is not entirely in the spirit of community-envisioned and enacted social innovation to present my own suggestions for strategies that might spur on the solidarity economy, I can't help but share a couple of ideas that have bubbled up over the course of the past two years that hold *potential* in terms of shifting the economic landscape towards a deeper appreciation of the values of solidarity, mutual aid, and equity.

An emphasis must be placed on the use of the term *potential*. There exists great potential in New Orleans for actors to transform the city's economic environment, but until the action is taken, it only exists potentially. None of what follows could be classified as a "new" idea, but rather an amalgamation of ideas and visions collected from people working on the ground here in New Orleans and in other places around the country. I present them here as iterative offerings in the hopes that they may find further resonance, whether or not I am an active player in moving them forward.

Creating A Solidarity Incubation Center

The first idea is to build an incubator site for the initiatives, business models, and networks that comprise the New Orleans solidarity economy. Multiple people working for social justice organizations have brought up the lack of support in New Orleans for starting new initiatives that fall within the solidarity economy framework. These include cooperative businesses, yes, but also projects like urban farms, affordable food hubs, and compost pick-up services led by community residents who may lack the necessary start up funds, business acumen, or particular form of social capital to launch their project. This particularly applies to collaborations and business ideas born out of a community-driven process in a neighborhood, like Central City, undergoing rampant change as well as youth-driven economic initiatives.

For those who have an understanding of the New Orleans social innovation landscape, the question will undoubtedly arise: "but doesn't Propeller already do that?" While there is indeed much overlap here in terms of mission, the criteria by which these projects would be evaluated

are quite distinct from the evaluative criteria by which Propeller approaches its Pitch NOLA competitions and Accelerator Fellowship applications.

Whether or not to house this kind of incubator within, or in collaboration with, Propeller is a point of conversation. While programming of this sort could be a natural extension of the existing scope and mission of Propeller, there are considerable differences that would be important to address. The first of these is around the concept of scale and risk. When working with people whose priorities are more about securing a sense of economic stability in their neighborhoods, different kinds of mentorship and support systems are necessary. This may mean a shift away from entrepreneurial, lean start up models and more towards smaller scale projects that would address economic inequity and opportunity for those most impacted. It may also require support institutions going to bat for projects that might not seem, on paper, to be the most viable financial investments.

Solidarity Economy Festival

As I discussed in Section Five, art – music, film, poetry, performance – has the power to shift mindsets and cultural understanding. For example, instead of reaching out to those cultural practitioners who have already drunk “the social justice, art as social change, kool-aid” what would it look like to curate a festival that illustrates the principles of cooperation and solidarity, without being heavy-handed? In the prefigurative spirit, I am intrigued by the idea of “lifting up as we climb up” being applied to how a festival is conceived, framed, and executed. Inclusivity would necessarily be at its very core, with the direct involvement of folks from communities driven by necessity to seek out new possibilities of gathering and communing. Is it possible to design a cultural gathering that is for all the people, by all the people, and where the money

exchange generated by its economic activity recirculates into the city's neighborhoods with the goals of greater equity, resourcefulness, sustainability and self-determination? Who will build it and who will come? There is no one person to answer those questions; instead let many raise these questions (and more) on our way to lifting up the historic legacy of mutual aid and solidarity here in New Orleans.

Final thoughts

This is not to say that only individuals and communities tied to this legacy have a role to play. Towards that end I hope that this paper has spoken directly to the city's social innovation community. My goal in writing to this audience is to posit the solidarity economy as a useful framing to promote greater equity and diverse participation in the city's vision for addressing its economic challenges and opportunities for development. I am excited to share the opportunities for transformational change that become available when we address the question of community economic development from an ethical place of solidarity. At the same time I also hope to spark conversations about how 'social innovation' as a concept and as a community can move towards its potential of building alliances of mutual aid and economic democracy for a greater number of our city's residents and workers. I can envision a day soon in which the identity of 'social innovator' or 'change maker' is one freely chosen by community activists who have honed their assets/gifts and channeled their passion in ways that inspire others towards also envisioning and implementing new futures.

Appendix A: Diverse Economies Matrix

See attached.

Appendix B: Definitions of Social Innovation

Here are some of the definitions in the literature on social innovation which have been compiled at socialinnovationresearch.wordpress.com/definitions/definitions-list:

- A novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals (Phills et al, 2008).
- We define social innovations as new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs and create new relationships or collaborations. In other words, they are innovations that are both good for society and enhance society's capacity to act (Murray, Caulier-Grice, & Mulgan, 2010, p. 3).
- We use the term 'social innovation' to refer to new ideas (products, services and models) developed to fulfill unmet social needs. Many are supported by the public sector, others by community groups and voluntary organizations. Social innovation is not restricted to any one sector or field (Bacon, Faizullah, Mulgan & Woodcraft, 2008).
- Innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need and that are predominantly developed and diffused through organizations whose primary purposes are social (Mulgan, Tucker, Ali & Sanders, 2007).
- The generation and implementation of new ideas about how people should organize interpersonal activities, or social interactions, to meet one or more common goals. (Mumford, 2002). New ideas about social systems and social interactions, while rare, can have a tremendous impact on our lives and world (Marcy & Mumford, 2007).

- We use the term 'social innovation' to refer to new ideas (products, services and models) developed to fulfil unmet social needs. Many are supported by the public sector, others by community groups and voluntary organizations. Social innovation is not restricted to any one sector or field. (Bacon, Faizullah, Mulgan & Woodcraft, 2008).
- Social innovation is an initiative, product or process or program that profoundly changes the basic routines, resource and authority flows or beliefs of any social system. (Westley, 2008).
- Social innovation is not just about improving the innovative capacity of social organizations. Rather, it is about innovations in our capacity to organize social and financial resources to achieve large-scale social impact. (Eric Young cited by Pearson, 2007).
- Three core dimensions: the satisfaction of human needs (content dimension); changes in social relations especially with regard to governance (process dimension); and an increase in the socio-political capability and access to resources (empowerment dimension). (Gerometta, Haussermann & Longo, 2005).
- A social innovation as a significant, creative and sustainable shift in the way that a given society dealt with a profound and previously intractable problem such as poverty, disease, violence, or environmental deterioration. (Nilsson, 2003)
- Social innovation refers to new ideas that resolve existing social, cultural, economic and environmental challenges for the benefit of people and planet. A true social innovation is system-changing – it permanently alters the perception, behaviours and structures that previously gave rise to those challenges...Even more simply, a social innovation is an idea that works for the public good (Centre for Social Innovation, Toronto).

- ‘Social innovation’ is a term that almost everyone likes, but nobody is quite sure what it means. Some academics would like to abandon the notion of social innovation altogether, arguing that it adds nothing to what we know about innovation and is too vague to be useful (Pol & Ville, p. 881).
- Perhaps it [social innovation] is one of those concepts that can only be framed and used as an analytical tool as well as one can but not exhaustively defined. It goes without saying that the concept of social innovation provides not only a seductively topical, but also a positively wholesome counterweight to more technologically orientated literature. The problem, however, is that when one presses harder to pin down the idea, its inherent appeal and the search for conceptual clarity and precision is tested by theoretical complexity, ambiguity and frustrating conceptual flexibility (Sotarauta, 2009, p.623).
- Social innovation is about tapping into the ingenuity of charities, associations and social entrepreneurs to find new ways of meeting social needs, which are not adequately met by the market or the public sector. It can help bring about the behavioural changes needed to tackle the major societal challenges, such as climate change. Social innovations empower people and create new social relationships and models of collaboration. They are thus innovative in themselves and good for society’s capacity to innovate (European Commission Innovation Union, 2010).
- Social innovation is about innovating creative, market-based solutions to social problems that result in high growth, profitable business opportunities (Saul, 2011).

Appendix C: J.K. Gibson Graham’s Diverse Economies Tables

J.K. Gibson Graham created the following table to illustrate the way that enterprises are “multiply inserted into the diverse economy” (Gibson Graham, 2006, p. 74). The table is particularly helpful in showing the way that, say, a food business enterprise might employ a range of market and non-market transactions, deploy different kinds of labor, and enact distinct class processes of production, appropriation, and distribution.

As a New Orleans-based example, I have chosen to look at the VEGGI Farmers Cooperative, a community member owned and operated farmer’s cooperative based out of New Orleans East, Louisiana.

Table 1:

TRANSACTIONS	LABOR	ENTERPRISE
Market Direct sales to restaurants Direct sales to grocery stores	Wage Staff at MQVCDC (non-profit)	Capitalist Working farm;
Alternative Market Box share orders Vietnamese Farmers Market (sold at discounted price) Barter with other producers Orders through Good Eggs (a local food aggregator)	Alternative Paid Farmer growers (who share the profits from the cooperative market sales)	Alternative Capitalist Promoting ideas around aquaponics to Vietnamese and Cambodian growers
Non Market Donations of produce to youth and community partners Farmers taking produce home to families Foundation grant support	Unpaid Volunteers; Youth from the food justice collective;	Noncapitalist Food justice activism; School garden initiative; Learning center

This kind of diagram can also apply to the individual actor within a diverse economy. As Gibson Graham explains, “any one actor participates in many kinds of economic relations in a diverse economy, no one of which can necessarily be designated as primary or essential” (Gibson

Graham, 2006, p. 75). Alternatively this could be called a mapping of an individual's myriad economic identities. Take, for example, one of the youth Crew Leaders who works at Grow Dat Youth Farm, a five year-old enterprise that uses urban agriculture as the pathway to learning about youth leadership development.⁵⁴

Table 2:

TRANSACTIONS	LABOR	ENTERPRISE
<p>Market Consumer of goods (phone, school books);</p>	<p>Wage Retail job on weekends (10 hours/week); School work-study position giving tours of campus (5 hours/week)</p>	<p>Capitalist Employee at retail company</p>
<p>Alternative Market Getting text books through school's book buy-back program Employee discount on clothes from retail shop;</p>	<p>Alternative Paid <i>Non-hourly wage</i> Grow Dat crew member stipend (12 hours);</p>	<p>Alternative Capitalist <i>Nonprofit</i> Involvement in a nonprofit social enterprise; Work study position helps recruit new students;</p>
<p>Non Market Bringing weekly veggie box home to family; Borrowing books from the library;</p>	<p>Unpaid <i>Family Care</i> Help taking care of nieces and nephews; <i>Community support</i> Throwing DJ house parties for friends;</p>	<p>Noncapitalist <i>Communal</i> Give friends ride to school and Grow Dat since she is the only one with a car;</p>

⁵⁴ This table represents an amalgamation of individuals currently employed at Grow Dat, based on workshops I facilitated in the fall of 2014, winter 2015.

Appendix D: Worker-owned and cooperative businesses in New Orleans

(Note: * means minority-owned):

<p><u>Food</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VEGGI Farmers Coop (producer, Vietnamese)* • Latino Farmers Cooperative (producer)* • Pelican Cooperative (producer) • New Orleans Food Coop (consumer) 	<p><u>Culture</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rhythm Conspiracy* (producer and worker-owned) • Mardi Gras Indian Cooperative* (worker-owned) • Dutch Alley Artists Co-op (worker-owned)
<p><u>Financial Institutions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ASI Credit Union • Greater New Orleans Federal Credit Union • Hope Credit Union • Xplore Credit Union • NODA Federal Credit Union • Tulane Loyola Credit Union • Fleur de Lis Federal Credit Union 	<p><u>Misc. (Energy, Technology and lifestyle)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C4 Tech and Design (worker owned) • Lagniappe Lifestyle Service Cooperative (worker owned cleaning and food service delivery) * <p>NOTE: There are 11 energy cooperatives operating in Louisiana but none in Orleans, Jefferson, or St. Bernard Parishes. In part this is because energy coops historically were located in rural communities, but largely because the electrical utility giant, Entergy, has been based in New Orleans since 1925 (http://entergy.com/about_entergy/history2.aspx)</p>

Appendix E: SWOT Analysis of New Orleans Food System

<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Weaknesses</u>
<p><i>Creation/ Production</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A year-round growing season, with abundant yields possible at family, community and industrial levels; • Ample rainwater and ground water reserves⁵⁵; • Relatively loose zoning guidelines and enforcement have up to this point allowed for urban animal husbandry, especially chicken raising, to flourish as a backyard phenomenon; • Louisiana has rich, though stressed, commercial fishing and shrimping industries, supplying over 40% of the U.S. consumption. Other fish products include crayfish, oysters, and catfish; <p><i>Distribution: Marketing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong local and regional branding of New Orleans and Southern Louisiana products; 	<p><i>Creation/ Production</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The lack of large-scale coordination to open up more of the city’s 10,000+ vacant properties; • The soil needed to create raised beds is cost-prohibitive for some communities and there is no incentive for local businesses/institutions and families to develop soil though composting; <p><i>Distribution: Marketing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of grocery stores and farmers markets have increased considerably since 2006, but there are still large portions of the city where public transport and/or walking access to these outlets are limited⁵⁹;

55 The Greater New Orleans Water Collaborative is comprised of individuals, organizations, and communities working to address critical water issues and shape urban water management policies throughout New Orleans.

⁵⁹ The USDA defines what's considered a food desert and which areas will be helped by this initiative: To qualify as a “low-access community,” at least 500 people and/or at least 33 percent of the census tract's population must reside more than one mile from a supermarket or large grocery store. Examples include the construction of the ReFresh Center in Mid City, which brought a Whole Foods into a largely low-to-middle income neighborhood. Or alternatively, the Jack and Jake’s Public Market which claims Central City as a food desert, even though it is a mere 4 blocks from a full-sized Rouse’s Market. While in the years immediately following Hurricane Katrina, many parts of the city could have been considered a food desert, it’s dense urban foot print means that today only one neighborhood – the Lower 9th Ward – can actually claim the official status as a food desert. (Rose, et. al. 2009.)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An indigenous cuisine that draws heavily the yield of local farmers, fishermen and hunters; • Celebrity chefs like John Besh and Susan Spicer who have helped introduce farm (or sea)-to-table to a New Orleans audience; • Tourism economy creates a substantial consumer audience beyond local residents; <p><i>Distribution: Transportation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to major shipping channels including the Mississippi River and Gulf of Mexico, as well as rail transport for the export of agricultural products; • Close proximity to rural agriculture producing chief export products including sugar cane, rice, soybeans, corn, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, peaches, strawberries and melons (about 9% of Louisiana agricultural revenues are generated by cattle and calves)⁵⁶; <p><i>Consumption</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The city is a major destination for • tourism generating \$5.5 billion in annual revenues in 2012.⁵⁷ Food tourism represents a huge portion of those 	
--	--

⁵⁶ Taken from www.netstate.com/economy/la_economu.htm (Accessed March 14, 2014).

⁵⁷ Statistic found <http://www.wvlv.com/news/Last-years-tourism-numbers-record-breaking-for-New-Orleans-144297845.html> (Accessed March 17, 2014).

<p>revenues; there are currently over 1,400 restaurants in the city, with world class restaurants poised to create a food culture shift through the promotion of local food consumption and food waste reduction;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy School Food Collaborative is a School Food Authority that partners with independent charter schools as a consultant to serve 18,000 youth (41% of 43,000 school-aged youth attending 38 of the 90 charter schools in New Orleans) healthy lunches every school day. 5% is locally sourced;⁵⁸ <p><i>Change Agents</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong local leadership within certain food-insecure communities (Lower Ninth Ward, Mid City, Holly Grove neighborhoods); • Multi-ethnic communities and the mix of long-time Southern residents and an influx of outside ideas make for a diversity of food growing and preparing expertise, as well as potential for place-specific innovation grounded in local knowledge; • 2 hour proximity to both Louisiana State University and Southern University 	
---	--

⁵⁸ The Collaborative’s Director James Graham confirmed these numbers in a personal communication, and mentioned that they are also the recipients of a \$45,000 USDA planning grant, which will explore ways to increase the amount of local purchasing.

<p>A&M, both large land grant and agriculture research universities;</p>	
<p><u>Opportunities</u> <i>Creation/Production</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-Katrina New Orleans has tens of thousands of blighted properties, many of which are owned by the City and do not have concrete plans for development; some could be converted to permanent urban agriculture use; • Recirculating Farms Coalition recently added policy staff to its team, which won (May 2015) a recent victory at the state-level to pass the Urban Agriculture incentive bill; <p><i>Distribution/Transportation:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall high food costs due to relative isolation from other major urban markets drive up non-local food costs in grocery stores; <p><i>Consumption:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A major new LSU hospital complex is currently under construction in the Mid-City neighborhood. The hospital is working with the city and the New Orleans Business Alliance (NOLABA) to develop closer local purchasing relationships as part of its Economic Opportunity Strategy, run out of the Mayor’s Office. This partnership has brought on the Democracy Collaborative, the nationally recognized 	<p><u>Threats</u> <i>Creation/Production</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redevelopment policies that stand to undermine efforts in creative land use, animal husbandry and food-based cottage industry projects; • Both local and national funding for local food systems work has dropped significantly in the past five years as new trends have supplanted funders’ priorities; • Levels of lead and other heavy metal; contaminants, as well as reliable soil options that continue to challenge urban food growing efforts; <p><i>Consumption</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The challenges of changing food culture: New Orleans’ dishes are high in fat and high-fructose corn syrup that exacerbate already high-rates of childhood and adult obesity, diabetes, and other food related illnesses; • New Orleans local food advocates have been known to incorrectly apply the term “food desert” to certain neighborhoods in New Orleans to generate support for their projects.

consulting group that helped conceptualize and develop anchor institution relationships with the Evergreen Cooperative in Cleveland, as a consultant for this initiative;

- New Orleans is the Festival Capital of the world and boasts one of the most active festival calendars of any city (at last count there were 50 official festivals listed on the New Orleans main tourism website - neworleansonline.com) many of which are food-driven events (more could be done to showcase these festivals as drivers of sustainable tourism initiatives);

Change Agents

- Substantial populations of under or unemployed seeking employment opportunities (this includes individuals recently released from the prison system, youth in need of part-time employment, and the elderly – all prime populations for or “green” workforce development);
- City’s pledge to direct more funding for local food production efforts, and demystify how people can go about accessing the underutilized land in the city

Appendix F: Five Forms of Capital: New Orleans Food Sector Assets

Forms of Capital	Examples and Types of Assets	Examples in New Orleans Food System	Metrics to determine
<p>Human –</p> <p>The capacities and skills of people who live in a community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living Wage labor • Semi-Skilled labor • Skilled labor • Technical Assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth; Former Felons; the elderly • AmeriCorps Volunteers • Farmers (urban and rural); Farmer Market Managers; • Apprenticeship programs • Propeller Fellows Program • JOBS1 Work force development program, New Corps, x# CDCs and history of resourcefulness and self-reliance, Food Policy Council, Economic Opportunity Strategy (a project out of the Mayor’s Office) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · # and/or % of each employed/unemployed within a given area/commute distance from a food innovation · # and/or % of each within job categories in each supply chain segment w/in given area · Wage profile: average daily/hourly wages by job category · Number (and possibly quality) of technical assistance providers · Number who would benefit from SBA technical assistance
<p>Social -</p> <p>Rules, relationships, regulatory climate, and networks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Community-based food organizations <input type="checkbox"/> Neighborhood Food Networks <input type="checkbox"/> Food Access Programs <input type="checkbox"/> Food Safety Regulations <input type="checkbox"/> Procurement Protocols <input type="checkbox"/> Distribution Networks <input type="checkbox"/> Land Use and Zoning Code <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperatives <input type="checkbox"/> Food Policy Programs <input type="checkbox"/> Workforce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> CSED, Parkway Partners, Crescent City Farmers Markets; Nola Green Roots; Grow Dat Youth Farm; Hollygrove Farm and Market (HGFM); New Orleans Farm and Food Network <input type="checkbox"/> Nola Green Roots (Community Garden Network); Backyard Gardeners Network (lower 9th Ward) <input type="checkbox"/> SNAP/WIC/Senior Programs at Markets; Tulane <input type="checkbox"/> Department of Health and Hospitals (www.eatsafe.la.gov) <input type="checkbox"/> Procurement and Technical Center of Louisiana (in Lafayette) <input type="checkbox"/> Jake and Jakes (local food hub); Louisiana Fresh, Sysco, Schools (Aramark, Sodexo, Revolution Foods) <input type="checkbox"/> New Orleans Food Co-op; Louisiana Association of Cooperatives; Federation Southern Cooperatives <input type="checkbox"/> Food Policy Advisory Council; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of each within a given area as appropriate · In the case of rules, e.g., food safety, number and types of violations · Number and/or percentage of population with access to healthy foods

Financial – Monetary resources	Development <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural Preservation Programs	<input type="checkbox"/> Louisiana Workforce Commission; Jobs1; Propeller; <input type="checkbox"/> Louisiana Association of Cooperatives; Federation of Southern Cooperatives	
	· Venture capital · Equity/patient capital · Angel investors · Property tax exemption · Property tax revenues · Grants	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Government Grants</i> : Community Block Grants; <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Private Foundation Grants</i> : Greater New Orleans Foundation Environmental Fund; Kellogg Foundation <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Misc. Other</i> - Propeller Accelerator Fellows Program and Pitch NOLA funding Note: Other forms of financial capital, including equity, credit, and local investing are notable for their absence)	· Number and amount of each available during a given period · Amount of funding needed · Amount of revenues generated · Amount/proportion of local dollars generated/multiplier effect
Physical – Manufactured items or built infrastructure	· Community kitchens · Urban farms · Food banks · Farmers markets · Processing facilities · Supermarkets · Small food stores · Restaurants · Schools · Colleges and universities	· New Orleans Community Kitchen (no site, street service) · Holly Grove Farm; Grow Dat Youth Farm, Good Food Farm; Viet Village Urban Farm · Second Harvest Food Bank; Community Plates · 11 farmers markets operating in the City · NOFFN’s Edible Enterprises (Norco, LA); Jack and Jakes (Central City – future) <input type="checkbox"/> Rouses (3); Circle Grocery (1); Whole Foods (2); Winn Dixie (1); Walmart (2); <input type="checkbox"/> Ideal Market (Spanish food – 2); Asian Grocery (West Bank); Sterling Fresh Food; Mardi Gras Zone <input type="checkbox"/> 1,400 current restaurants in the city (according to nomenu.com/) <input type="checkbox"/> 40+ Schools with gardens, including Edible School Yards <input type="checkbox"/> 12 in New Orleans, plus both LSU and Southern University and A&M are land-grant schools	Number of each within a given locale/community · Retail Environment Food Index (#fast food + #convenience stores)/(#supermarkets + #produce stores + #farmers markets) (compare communities with and without good access)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Vacant facilities · Transportation infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Number of former schools and churches, though property speculation has become more rampant in recent years <input type="checkbox"/> Port of New Orleans is 4th busiest shipping port in the country⁶⁰; Six Class 1 Railroads; Bus and streetcar system is run through Regional Transit Authority; Airport is 20 miles from New Orleans; I-10, a major highway runs through downtown New Orleans 	
Natural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Vacant unimproved land · Soil health and tilth · Water for irrigation · Pollinators and their habitat · Preserved agricultural land · Green spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> As of March 2012, there are an estimated 35,700 blighted homes and empty lots in New Orleans; <input type="checkbox"/> Heavy toxicity in soil; sources for compost and planting soil include EcoUrban, a local gardening supply store <input type="checkbox"/> Ample rainfall; city water is heavily treated; bayous, river, Lake Pontchartrain <input type="checkbox"/> None within immediate area, except for the floating gardens in New Orleans East <input type="checkbox"/> Lafitte Greenway; City Park; Audubon Park; neutral ground <input type="checkbox"/> Crescent City Community Land Trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Amount of and/or access to healthy natural assets

⁶⁰ According to tonnage. Sourced from: http://www.rita.dot.gov/bts/sites/rita.dot.gov.bts/files/publications/national_transportation_statistics/html/table_01_57.html

Appendix G: Asset/gap mapping of the local food system

Part of the Food System	Social Innovation Category	Cornerstone and Potential Assets	Gaps and Concerns
Production/Consumption	Farm to Institution	Assets: Louisiana Farm to School Alliance (just launched in 2014; first conference in May 2015); Edible Schoolyard New Orleans/First Line Schools Potential assets: Federation of Southern Cooperatives (supply side); New hospital complex in Mid City;	Gaps: No coordinated way for restaurant chefs to access locally-grown fresh produce at large quantities; high liability insurance costs (\$5 Million) make it difficult for smaller margin local farmers and producer cooperatives to gain access to larger markets; Aramark
Distribution: Sourcing	Community Supported Agriculture	Assets: In New Orleans city limits: Grow Dat Youth Farm (50 CSA shares); Veggi Farmers Cooperative; Nearby Farms: Covey Rise Farm CSA (conventionally grown)	Gaps: More farms to meet the demand for CSA; marketing
Distribution: Sourcing	Farmers Markets	Assets: 10+ weekly and/or monthly markets <i>Crescent City Farmers Markets</i> (weekly in three locations); <i>Vietnamese Farmers Market</i> (weekly, New Orleans East); <i>Hollygrove Farmers Market</i> (weekly, Hollygrove); <i>Sankofa</i> (weekly seasonal, Upper 9 th Ward); <i>Harrison</i> (monthly, Mid City) <i>Louis Armstrong Park</i> (weekly seasonal, French Quarter/Treme); <i>French Market</i> (weekly seasonal, French Quarter); <i>Freret</i> (monthly, Uptown); <i>St. Roch Market</i> (new indoor market, opened Spring 2015 in Marigny/St. Roch neighborhoods); <i>Jack and Jakes Public Market</i> (new indoor market, set to open Summer 2015 in Central City)	Gaps: Certain neighborhoods only have sporadic access to markets; affordability of some markets;
Distribution: Transportation	Food Hubs	Asset: Jack and Jakes; Good Eggs local and value-added online ordering; Hollygrove Market (Hollygrove acts as a retail store and produce box distributor that aggregates products from a variety of local growers)	Gaps: City-underwritten, rather than sole-enterprise hubs Concern: Principal consumer base being marketed to is largely white, affluent, and tourists, despite claims of being a “community food hub”
Post-Consumption	Food Waste	Asset: The Composting Network; NOLA Green Roots	Gap: Critical mass of waste and institutional education around composting; policies to provide incentives
Distribution: Distribution: Marketing	IT/Social Media/Tech	Assets: New Orleans Farm and Food Network; Green Roots; Good Work Network; Louisiana Small Business Development Center; Localvore Challenge	Gaps: Who is accessing;
Distribution: Sourcing	Food Business Incubators	Asset: New Orleans Farm and Food Network has just opened the Farm and Food Works Kitchen @Edible Enterprises, a food business incubator in Norco, LA (NOFFN is a strong organization that has track record of community involvement and inclusive practices)	Gap: Only one incubator in southern Louisiana and it is 25 miles outside of city, which requires car to get out there
Distribution: Sourcing	Mobile Markets	Asset: Hollygrove Food Box & Delivery, Good Eggs, Mr. Okra Truck;	Gaps: Connecting buyers to consolidated base of products; Scale; other than Mr. Okra model, not actually neighborhood food distribution
Production	Urban Agriculture	Assets: Holly Grove Farm; Grow Dat Youth Farm, Good Food Farm; Sprout NOLA; Veggi Farmers Cooperative; Parkway Partners; Nola Green Roots (Community Garden Network); Backyard Gardeners Network (Lower 9 th Ward)	Gaps: Zoning policies to protect animal husbandry, New Orleans beekeeping association for best practices

Appendix H: Diverse Economies Iceberg



Appendix I: Project Names and Descriptions

(This is a partial list of New Orleans local food initiatives discussed in this paper.)

Backyard Gardens Network - is a Lower 9th Ward based nonprofit organization whose mission is community building, neighborhood revitalization and cultural preservation through urban gardening. BGN currently manages two community gardens in the Lower 9th Ward, the Laurentine Ernst Community Garden and the Guerrilla Garden, and are spearheading the development of the Ernst Garden Resource Center. **backyardgardenersnetwork.org**

Community Plates – The New Orleans chapter of Community Plates, a national organization was launched in 2013. The organization transfers fresh, usable food that would have otherwise been thrown away from restaurants, markets and other food industry sources to food-insecure families throughout the U.S. **communityplates.org**

Cookbook Project – A New Orleans based organization that works internationally to train educators and empower youth to be catalysts for healthier communities through food literacy and cooking education. **thecookbookproject.org**

Crescent City Farmers Markets - is the thrice-weekly public face of marketumbrella.org, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, nongovernmental organization. It operates markets in the Central Business District, Uptown's Tulane Square, and the American Can Co. in Mid City. Founded in 1995 as a part of the Twomey Center for Peace Through Justice at Loyola University New Orleans, the Market is an outgrowth and reflection of marketumbrella.org's core mission to cultivate the field of public markets for public good. Learning, sharing and growing, **marketumbrella.org** cultivates community markets that utilize local resources to bolster authentic local traditions.
crescentcityfarmersmarket.org

Edible Enterprises – is a food business incubator located in Norco, LA and run by New Orleans Farm and Food Network. Their mission is to enable culinary entrepreneurs to develop and successfully market specialty food products, creating jobs and positively impacting the economic development of the Greater New Orleans regions. **edibleenterprises.org**

Edible School Yard NOLA – “Founded in 2006, Edible Schoolyard New Orleans (ESYNOLA) changes the way children eat, learn, and live at five FirstLine public charter schools in New Orleans. Our mission is to improve the long-term well being of our students, families, and school community, by integrating hands-on organic gardening and seasonal cooking into the school curriculum, culture, and cafeteria programs.” **edibleschoolyard.org**

Good Eggs – is a national online local food market with locations in New Orleans, the Bay Area, Los Angeles, and New York. The vision is to combine the goodness of the farmers market with the convenience of online grocery. Participants order online from the best local farmers and foodmakers and choose from the freshest harvest, just-baked breads, sustainable meats and fish. **goodeggs.com**

Good Food Farm – Founded in 2011 and situated on several lots at 1608 Dumaine St., near the Claiborne Avenue overpass, Good Food farm sells fresh produce to both restaurants and individuals. While primarily focused on restaurant sales, the company is also working to deepen relationships with other food growers to begin dialogue about community food distribution systems. [facebook.com/GoodFoodNOLA](https://www.facebook.com/GoodFoodNOLA)

Grow Dat Youth Farm - The Mission of the Grow Dat Youth Farm is to nurture a diverse group of young leaders through the meaningful work of growing food. On their farm located inside City Park, the largest park in New Orleans, the youth and staff work collaboratively to produce healthy food for local residents and to inspire youth and adults to create personal, social and environmental change in their own communities. The group sells produce at a market stand and CSA. growdatyouthfarm.org

Hollygrove Farm and Market - exists to increase access of fresh, local produce to residents of New Orleans through a weekly produce market that sources produce from over fifty farms in Louisiana and Mississippi, on-site urban farm, and community garden space. hollygrovemarket.com

Jack and Jake's - describes itself as is a social and environmental impact company and regional food hub. Jack and Jake's was founded in New Orleans, Louisiana in 2010 and works to connect “local producers with those who need access to fresh healthy foods most.” They currently serve as a supply chain connector between regional food producers and some of the larger institutional food service providers in New Orleans. The company has also been working since 2010 to open a physical Food Hub and distribution center in Central City, planned for Spring 2015. jackandjakes.com

Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools – “The Rethinkers are a group of students dreaming big about the changes they want in their schools and taking action to make those dreams a reality. The idea is simple: students are experts on their school experiences and deserve a voice in education reform.” therethinkers.com

Lower 9th Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development (CSED) – Founded in December 2006, CSED is a 501(c)3 grassroots organization devoted to restoring New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward as a safe, environmentally just and economically vibrant community – and one of the first to become carbon-neutral in North America. CSED’s primary emphasis on community resiliency includes: Food Security, Coastal Sustainability, and Built Environment. blog.sustainthenine.org

Mr. Okra – A local celebrity who now has a documentary and a pocket toy made about him. Drives around the city in his truck loaded with produce singing out the name of his vegetables and fruits (unfortunately the produce has become more expensive and it not locally sourced.)

New Orleans Farm and Food Network (NOFFN) – began in New Orleans as a volunteer organization in 2002 to create a network of local and regional activists, community

stakeholders and non-profits to address issues of food security and equitable access to healthy, sustainable and culturally appropriate food. NOFFN has focused on working with historically underserved neighborhoods that have significantly limited fresh food access. It has launched a variety of initiatives, including the Living Lots NOLA (a searchable website that turns city data into information about particular pieces of land in the city), FarmCity Toolbox (a collection of tools to support the development of both sustainable community projects and market farms and addressing the four major obstacles – land issues, farm financing, market development, and mentorship), and most recently, the Edible Enterprises food business incubator. It also serves as a fiscal sponsor for a number of other food and urban agriculture related projects around the city, including the Backyard Gardeners Network and the Community Kitchen. noffn.org

New Orleans Food Cooperative – is a consumer owned cooperative located in the Healing Center on St. Claude Avenue in the Marigny neighborhood. It started in 2002 as a buying club, evolving through a variety of iterations until opening its storefront location in 2011. nolafood.coop

NOLA Community Kitchen Collective – “Community kitchen aims to do many things. Our mission is to bring together folks who love to grow, gather, cook, and serve food in order to lessen food waste and hunger while supporting those most marginalized by capitalism and the industrial food system. At its simplest, we will distribute fresh food to neighborhoods and serve homemade meals in places that suffer from food insecurity; at its most complex, we hope to bring cooks, farmers, radical organizers, & neighbors to the table to eat and talk about the issues that affect the roots of our communities, specifically regarding racism, poverty, and violence.” They offer produce distributions and hot meals in outdoor locations on a weekly basis and offer solidarity catering services. commiekitsch.org

NOLA Green Roots – NOLA Green Roots is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that facilitates garden training for hundreds of participants. By developing community gardens, the organization teaches youth, low-income residents, and senior citizens how to grow fresh fruits and vegetables at a low cost. Their community gardens provide access to fresh produce and plants as well as lessons on satisfying labor needs, improving neighborhoods, building a sense of community, and connecting to the environment. They also operate The Compost Network, a compost business that collects food waste from partner restaurants and converts it into quality compost at various Green Roots garden sites. nolagreenroots.com

Our School of Blair Grocery – “We are creating a resource-rich, safe space for youth empowerment and sustainable community development. We envision a community of action where empowered youth engage in reflective practice with others to actualize effective, replicable and scalable environmental justice-based local solutions to global problems.” OSBG is based in the Lower 9th ward and, despite charismatic leadership and being a major innovator in the post-Katrina efforts to rebuild that neighborhood, it has struggled both financially and in terms of staff turnover. The organization is also a Growing Power Regional Training Center. schoolatblairgrocery.blogspot.com

Parkway Partners – Started in 1982, Parkway Partners is a non-profit organization that establishes community gardens, plants trees across New Orleans, hosts an annual Plant Sale, distributes free seeds, and much more. parkwaypartnersnola.org

Propeller: A Force for Social Innovation – is a New Orleans-based nonprofit organization that helps launch social and environmental ventures to address local challenges. The organization hosts the PitchNOLA competition and, each year, runs the Accelerator Fellowship program. gopropeller.org

Recirculating Farms Coalition – is a collaborative group of farmers, educators, non-profit organizations and many others committed to building local sources of healthy, accessible food. Through research, education and advocacy, the Coalition works together to support the development of eco-efficient farms that use clean recycled water as the basis to grow food. recirculatingfarms.org

ReFresh Project – is an innovative fresh food hub developed by Broad Community Connections, a Main Street organization devoted to revitalizing Broad Street by promoting the development of its diverse neighborhoods. The site includes the country's first medical teaching kitchen, a non-profit café (Liberty's Kitchen) that trains at-risk youth, a Whole Foods grocery store, teaching farm, and a child advocacy center, all housed under one roof. www.broadcommunityconnections.org/projects/refresh

Sprout NOLA – stands for Sustainable Produce Reaching Our Urban Table. This organization runs the ReFresh community teaching farm located in Mid-City New Orleans on the site of the Broad Street ReFresh project. The ReFresh Community Farm includes several on-site programs: Volunteer for Veggies, urban growing apprenticeships, and gardening classes for adults, families, and children. These programs all utilize environmentally sustainable growing practices. The farm works closely with community partners to educate New Orleans about how to use fresh produce to improve health outcomes and combat diet-related illness. www.sproutnola.org

VEGGI Farmers Cooperative – currently has twelve growers from the Vietnamese community of New Orleans East who naturally grow produce without the use of chemical pesticides, employing both traditional in-ground farming as well as aquaponics, which then are sold to local restaurants, grocery stores, farmers markets and through a weekly box share. More recently the organization, which operates out of the Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Corporation, has begun partnering with Kids ReThink New Orleans to form a youth-leadership initiative called the Food Justice Collective.

MQVN CDC's overall strategy is to integrate business development and job placement to promote three inter-related pathways to higher incomes: creation of a new green micro-enterprise owned and operated by a low-income individual; expansion of existing small businesses to create employment for low-income families; and job placement with expanding local green businesses.

Annotated Bibliography

Berg Powers, C. and Allaman, C. (December, 2012). *How Participatory Action Research Can Promote Social Change and Help Youth Development.* The Kinder & Braver World Project: Research Series (Boyd, D., Palfrey, J., and Sacco, D. Editors).

In this research report, Berg and Allaman use examples of youth organizing groups in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York City have used YPAR methodologies to realize youth-conceived and executed initiatives around issues that matter the most to them, including accessible public transit options, restructuring large schools to better meet the needs of their students, and publishing the results of a survey of LGBTQ teens around priority policy changes in support of queer and questioning youth in NYC. In addition to defining key terms and laying out, in a coherent and straight forward fashion, the benefits of YPAR on the organizing efforts of these groups, the case studies show that a successful YPAR initiative must be taken up as a long-term project with full and committed investment by the organizations and coalitions involved.

| **Block, P. (2008).** *Community: the structure of belonging.* San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

This concise and well-organized book is a part-theoretical, part-practical guide for “those who care for the well-being of their community” (xi). It's purpose is to define ways that its readers can go about structuring the experience of belonging in order to build strong and connected communities. More than reflecting Block's own innovative thinking as a consultant and speaker on issues about civic engagement, the book is a synthesis of many best practices from the fields of community development and group facilitation.

There are a number of insightful take-aways embedded in these pages; Block advocates for small group conversations to amplify diverse voices, redefines leadership to be more about convening than leading, and that the work of community is to present possibilities rather than seek solutions. Though I was able to connect much of Block's thinking to other authors and theorists, I also found myself filtering those insights with a high degree of skepticism. In part, I am always suspicious when anyone presents a “tried and true” model for building something as amorphous as “community.” And when that “anyone” is a white, well-educated, male who never once references race in a book that goes deep into creating spaces of inclusion and invitation, restorative justice, and youth leadership development, my skepticism only increases.

Block's insistence on leaning into possibility is potentially dangerous as a strategy in that it undermines the fact that deep damage has been done especially when trying to create bridges across communities where one side has experienced discrimination or lack of access (for instance the current events unfolding in Ferguson around systematic violence and excessive policing of people of color). Without addressing this past, people will discount or not trust the process; While the goal is not to stay in

the past, restorative justice entails admitting past errors and asking for forgiveness so that fragmentation can give way to community reconciliation and true belonging.

Design Council (UK). 2006. *RED Paper 2: Transformation Design*. London, UK. Burns, C., Cottam, H., Vanstone, C., and Winhall, J.

This white paper was put out by RED – a team of multidisciplinary thinkers, designers and policy makers that function as a 'do' tank run through the U.K. Design Council – to share case studies and the philosophical framing of what the team calls 'transformation design'. For the authors, transformation design demonstrates six characteristics that shift from traditional design and towards participatory, democratic processes. This shift presents real challenges to the authority of professional designers as well as a clear articulation of who the client is in these scenarios. Despite these challenges, I found great synergy between the concept of transformation design and the process I have been calling “community-envisioned and enacted social innovation.” Both share a frame that privileges the ideas of those who are most impacted by the “design” issue at hand, thus leading to a reorientation of power. I used this source to explore how the practices of rapid prototyping and making things visible could be applied to a process, say, of young people designing strategies to shift public consciousness around solidarity within the food system.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. (M.B. Ramos, Trans.). New York: The Seabury Press.

Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the oppressed* is one of those hallmark texts for social change activists and progressive educators. Much of what I have read about the historic precedents of cooperative and solidarity economics speaks to the essential role of popular education in raising collective consciousness and spurring experimentation and innovation. Each chapter introduces the reader to core concepts that are the foundation of Freirean thought: oppression and liberation; the “banking” system of education; praxis; authentic leadership; and dialogics, anti-dialogics, and cultural action. These concepts resonated strongly with the challenges inherent in developing authentic and appropriate learning experiences for and with youth in New Orleans.

I was particularly taken by his “theory of anti-dialogical action,” in which Freire articulates four ways that leadership can go awry: conquest, divide and rule over the people, manipulation, and cultural invasion. These practices he juxtaposes against those of dialogical action, namely cooperation, unity, organization, and cultural synthesis. Of these dichotomies, I was most intrigued by his distinction between cultural invasion and cultural synthesis and couldn't help but relate it to the distinction between social enterprise and user-input driven social innovation. For example, in cultural invasion, people propose action based on their own values and ideology in which “their starting point is their own world”; in social enterprise, the individual entrepreneur comes to community with the innovative idea already pre-packaged and ready for implementation. In contrast people who practice cultural synthesis or promote social innovation “do not come to *teach* or to *transmit* or to *give*

anything, but rather to learn, with the people, about the people's world" (181). Curiosity and humility win out over ego and a desire for results.

Gibson Graham, J. K. (2006). *A postcapitalist politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

A postcapitalist politics provides intellectual force and ethical practices to help profoundly rethink our economies. The existence of the authors' collaboration, two academics living on two different continents adopting a pen name for their co-envisioned, co-authored efforts at articulating a more open and inclusive language and theory of diverse economies, is remarkable. What is even more inspiring is their joyful resilience against the monolithic force of capitalism, presenting instead a politics of possibility.

I am not one who is particularly drawn to the discourse of theory; however I appreciate how J.K. Gibson Graham operate from a place of praxis, or learning through action, in a way that grounds their theoretical expositions in real world complexities. I also felt a true affinity for the interdisciplinary approach that they bring to their work: linguistics meet economics meet queer and feminist theory meet cultural analysis meets poststructuralism meets action-based research.

Not only did I draw on many of their key terms – capitalocentrism, weak theory, being-in-common, and identity performance – but Gibson Graham's writing more generally helped me adopt a less cynical outlook regarding the possibilities of our society moving away from its current failed economic system. Though, at times while reading this book, I found myself frustrated by Gibson Graham's continual practice of walking the slippery, uncertain path of upholding weak theory, I can understand their desire to hold this line as a reminder that we ought always to question what we hold as truth.

Highlander Research and Education Center. (2014). *Transforming the economy from the ground up*. New Market, TN: Marian Urquilla (Commissioned by the Praxis Project).

One of my critiques of the U.S. Solidarity Economy Network is that much of its foundational framing was proposed by a relatively small handful of individuals who, though brilliant thinkers and practitioners, tend to be academically oriented and largely from the North East. For that reason, I was particularly excited to come across this report, commissioned by the Praxis Project, a social justice think-tank run by people of color, and written by staff from the Highlander Research and Education Center, the stalwart popular education center in the Appalachian South. Highlander's approach grounds its conceptual overview in living examples of the solidarity economy in action – including the local food system in Detroit, MI where these efforts are being led by communities of color.

This report also shows how forces of globalization and speculation have impacted poor communities in the U.S. and abroad and attempted to pit one struggling community against another. My investigation into how to strengthen New Orleans' emergent solidarity economy initiatives draws heavily on their challenge for

communities to a) build spaces and programs for political and popular education that helps envision a economic possibilities while critiquing the current state of affairs; b) continue efforts to resist and organize against economic development initiatives that do not serve the best interests of those who are most impacted by these programs and policies; c) develop and advocate for progressive policies that, on a legal and practical level, support innovation in economic development and infrastructure; and d) develop models and enterprises on all scales and weave them into a network of solidarity.

Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2011). *Collective Impact*. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2011, 36-41.

According to the authors, collective impact involves actors from different sectors coming together and committing to a shared agenda for addressing a specific social problem. They also discuss necessary shifts in current philanthropic philosophy to move in the nonprofit sector in the direction of collective impact. These include funders being willing to make long-term investments without predetermining the outcomes, as well as embracing four “best practices” for encouraging collective impact: taking responsibility for assembling the elements of a solution; creating a movement for change; including solutions from outside the nonprofit sector; and using actionable knowledge to influence behavior and improve performance” (p.41).

I also appreciate the authors’ awareness that making room for collective impact means moving away from individual agendas and nonprofit survival and back to the basics of movement building. This is in fact a return to the origins of social movements in this country and around the globe that have suffered under decades of nonprofit proliferation.

Johnson, M. (2014). “Another world emerging? Well, maybe.” *Grassroots Economic Organizing Newsletter*. Retrieved from: <http://www.geo.coop/story/another-world-emerging-well-maybe>

Johnson is a regular contributor to the online publication, GEO, where he writes about what he calls the cooperative/solidarity economics. This article stood out to me because of his pragmatic approach to thinking through what needs to be in place in order for the this kind of alternative economic space to flourish. And while many other writers look at infrastructural changes, Johnson prefers to look at what would need to happen at a cultural level to mobilize people and develop relational interconnectivity. So, in addition to highlighting the four core elements to building the local/regional infrastructure for the solidarity economy, he also lays out – using the metaphors of the human body and natural biodiversity – key dimensions to growing a movement culture of belief, of empowerment, and of thinking cooperatively.

Nembhard, J. G. (2014). *Collective courage: A history of African American cooperative economic thought and practice*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Early in my research, I wondered whether the language and framing used by U.S. solidarity economy practitioners might isolate certain groups from feeling like the framework spoke to their needs and struggles. Nembhard's book dispelled some of that concern as she details the history of African Americans' cooperative economic thought and practice in the United States. Not only do these stories help me better connect the philosophical roots of African American mutual aid societies in New Orleans to their 18th and 19th century proliferation across the U.S., but repositions the political work of many 20th century Black intellectual and civil rights leaders, such as W.B. DuBois and Fannie Lou Hamer, as a first step towards social justice that necessarily included Black economic independence.

Importantly Nembhard amply articulates that amongst African American communities, the motivation for cooperative economic development came from a commitment to collective action born out of oppression, racial violence, and discrimination. As a strategy of resistance and survival, African American cooperative development differs starkly from the anti-capitalist stance of many contemporary, majority white, centers of solidarity economy activity. Until this difference in motivations is appropriately addressed and given space to inform the solidarity economy network in the U.S., I worry that the strength and effectiveness of its efforts will be seriously undermined.

Miller, E. (2010). Solidarity economy: Key concepts and issues. *Solidarity economy I: Building alternatives for people and planet. (eds. Kawano, E., Masterson, T. and Teller-Ellsberg, J.) Amherst, MA: Center for Popular Economics.*

This was one of the first pieces I read on the solidarity economy, after seeing Miller's diagram on the SolidarityNYC website. Miller developed the diagram to visualize the interconnected flows that move between the spheres of activity and together comprise a diverse economy. Miller has emerged as a prominent figure in the U.S. solidarity economy community, dancing between the realms of academia and activism. I feel indebted to Miller's writing for introducing me to his mentors and other key writers about diverse economic frameworks, including the human geographer team of J.K. Gibson Graham, Brazilian activist Marcos Arruda, and former head of the Center for Popular Economics, Emily Kawano.

This chapter not only lays out the history of the solidarity economy, but gives a concise overview of its values and principles and raises key questions about how to grow its viability through strong networks and ongoing education and skill-sharing. I was particularly struck by what Miller calls circuits of solidarity exchange that "integrate economic alternatives into social movements and social movements into economic alternatives" (p.8). This concept resonated because it takes economics out of the removed realm of abstraction and renders it nothing less than a cultural strategy.

Miller's writing also reinforced for me how diverse economies manifest differently on the ground depending on the peculiarities of place. Political, industrial, and cultural pasts, not to mention factors that fall outside of what most people would consider economic forces – i.e. social and physical geography, indigenous knowledge

and collective shared experience – all play an important role in determining how one community's version of a solidarity economy looks as compared to another.

Olma, S. (August 18, 2014). Rethinking social innovation between invention and imitation. *Institute of network cultures*. Retrieved from <http://networkcultures.org/mycreativity/2014/08/18/rethinking-social-innovation-between-invention-and-imitation/>

Though coming from a design perspective, Olma is able to articulate so much of my discomfort with the use of the term 'social innovation': its conflation with social entrepreneurship and technology, as well as its disconnect from social activism. This article helped provide the language I needed to make the argument for why the plurality and heterogeneity of practices that fall within the solidarity economy framework can be seen as socially innovative.

In particular I was taken by the argument that an innovative society is characterized by the heterogeneity of its social practices or what he called “the multiplicity of tiny inventive imitations that at some point lead to a temporarily stabilized event that we then denote as innovation.”

Olma's article also reminded me of the importance of getting outside of the U.S. conversation about social innovation (and solidarity economies for that matter) – we can miss so much when we get stuck in the neoliberal dominated mindset of what is possible or the parameters in which we operate.

Portes, A.. (1998). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, 1-24.

This article proved helpful in orienting me to the conceptual development of social capital and its application across a variety of disciplines since its first introduction within the field of sociology. Portes not only details the pioneering work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and economist Glen Loury, but also shows how the term has grown in popularity, despite its untested qualities. His demonstration of the negative aspects of social capital were a helpful challenge to the overall positive light through which I was originally processing it as a framework for understanding how social capital impacts the spread of something like the solidarity economy.

Reinsborough, P. and Canning, D. (2010). *RE:imagining change how to use story-based strategy to win campaigns, build movements, and change the world*. Oakland, CA: PM Press.

I found *RE:imagining change* to be an accessible and highly practical manual for social change activists. This compact guide takes the reader through a step-by-step process of how to analyze and wage counter campaigns against the dominant control narratives broadcast by mainstream media and the information streams of the power elite. Since the authors are primarily focused around activist campaign strategies, it

required more work for me to determine how to apply the book's key concepts to something like the solidarity economy that finds strength in its diversity of messaging. I am also excited to continue thinking about how sectors, rather than issue-based alliances, strategize about storytelling.

The art of constructing a strong narrative, Reinsborough and Canning argue, is one of the principle modes of communicating important messages through a culture, offering a way to “build relationships, unite constituencies, name problems, and mobilize people”(12). Acknowledging that whomever controls the stories a community tells also controls its conventional wisdom, the authors of the book set out to shift the relationships of control and power from the hands and deep wallets of the economic and social elite and into the toolboxes of the communities who stand the most to lose by these power plays.

Shaffer, R., Deller, S., & Marcouiller, D. (2004). Chapter 1: Defining community economic development and Chapter 17: Looking to the future. In *Community economics: Linking theory and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 2-19; 316-329). Ames, Iowa: Blackwell Pub.

Though dense and full of theory rooted in capital market logic, I found this textbook to be very insightful in terms of defining the core terms of C.E.D. and distinguishing itself from straight community development. The authors stress that theory and analytics, despite their overly simplistic and flawed nature, are necessary tools in order to explain and anticipate patterns in our economies. I realized in reading these chapters that, within the wide spectrum of approaches and foci that occur within the field of community economic development, I am most drawn toward the sociological approach with a focus on the labor market.

Tang, E. (2011). A gulf unites us: The Vietnamese Americans of Black New Orleans East. *American Quarterly*, 63(1), 117-149.

The article analyzes the relationships and histories of the Vietnamese American and African American communities living in New Orleans East, one of the first neighborhoods to rebuild in the months after Hurricane Katrina. Despite the mainstream perception that these communities often co-exist as antagonistic neighbors in many parts of the U.S., Tang shows how in post-Katrina New Orleans, these groups practiced solidarity and mutual aid to rebuild not only their homes and businesses, but also their sense of identity as a community. This article was key to presenting an under told story about racial solidarity in New Orleans and led me to reach out to the current organizers of the Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Corporation in New Orleans East.