

THE | 2021 STATE OF US

Powerful Communities
& Economic Democracy

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EVENT DOCUMENT

MUNICIPALISM: A CONFERENCE

APRIL & MAY 2021

REAL
IDEAS

NEW
ECONOMICS
FOUNDATION

power to
change | business in
community
hands

CO-OPERATIVES UK
COOP

CLES

PSEN

stone
house
voice

PLYMOUTH
CULTURE



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE STATE OF US PRESENTED BY THE REAL IDEAS ORGANISATION AND THE NEW ECONOMICS FOUNDATION

The discourse around ideas of “economic democracy”, “community power”, and “new-municipalism” in the UK understandably still tend to sit largely within our institutions - within academic papers, think-tank publications and the occasional webinar. Whilst some of these ideas emerged from progressive institutions, it would be fair to say that most originated in, or were inspired by, community practice - and it is within these communities they are made real. The State of Us sought to address this imbalance and bring the debate and conversations closer with those manifesting these ideas and practices. When looking for great examples of community-led approaches to democracy, power and new-municipalism in action, we didn't have to look far. Indeed, of our 12 speakers, half were from Plymouth, and the rest were mainly from the UK. We were then delighted to be joined in the final session by colleagues from South Africa, Spain and the US as a conscious move to show that local action can act in international solidarity. Our 12 speakers shared the current work of their organisations in creating community democracy and power, as well as some of their thoughts, hopes and vision for the future.

The State of Work brought together union, cooperative and social enterprise leaders and explored how we create power and democracy within and beyond the workplace.

The session heard perspectives from those fighting for equity within the workplace and those creating positive alternatives and the infrastructures necessary to support cross-collaboration. They told us that where systems, structures and policies are essential, they can also be the problem. It was often the values and ethics of the workplace and organisational purpose that made the difference. We also saw the value and need to bring these fellow travellers together if we're to create viable, *dual power* movements of scale. Real Ideas in Plymouth use the power of

ideas and linked to wider activity, tailored support to create meaningful work for young people who haven't benefited from our linear education system. Their experience of 'inclusive growth' in the City also highlighted the limitations of using GDP to measure local economic wealth when only 20% of people benefit from better wages and better conditions, where for most people, nothing changes. The combined examples of the new unions organising migrant and precarious workers and the long-established tradition of co-op building from the IWGB and CASE made for a powerful story of self-determination through working in the community. The IWGB had incredible wins against big employers and has high regard for how sustaining it is to work in the community and build power with others facing the same issues of inequity. Building that power through the name and concept of a union has allowed for a wider sharing of experience, support for education, growth of the movement and has furthered direct democratic systems of decision making and meaningful involvement.

SELF-DETERMINATION

Dorothy Francis then spoke powerfully of how she founded a co-op as a way to own her own labour, creating self-determination throughout her working life by organising co-operatively. Both with her colleagues at CASE and with those who set up co-ops under her guidance - citing the example of Shephed Carers, set up by two women that went on to become the biggest employer in the area.

A study of the NEF concept of Worker Centres wrapped up the talks. Emily Scurrah shared a vision of a space for atomised workers to enjoy company and solidarity. A place for training, skills, and political education and the need, post-pandemic, to recognise the social value of work and for workplace identity for the

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EDUCATION AS A CRITICAL BASIS FOR PEOPLE POWER

self-employed and precariously employed. A place to organise collectively against the structural inequity of the current economy.

The session underlined the importance of education as a critical basis for people power and how these organisations also provide for purpose and meaning in peoples' lives. They ensure broad representation and create community, laying the conditions for wider organisation, community power and local democracy.

The State of Space and Places confronted an area of life where inequalities are often felt most keenly – deciding what happens in our public spaces, our high streets, neighbourhoods and on common land and green spaces. As such, it is often a place where we experience democracy, or the lack thereof, close up.

DISPARITY

Acknowledging the huge disparity and inequality of land and asset ownership, the session provided four examples of organisations working both *within, beyond and against the state* to give communities the power to have a more democratic and fairer say what happens in the spaces and places around them. Butetown Matters, in the context of the gentrification of Tiger Bay (Cardiff's historic dock area) and largely compelled to work against the state, highlighted the unequal limited rights of community voice within the planning system and pointed to some practical improvements, including the power of building knowledge about the planning system and traditional development that rarely works for local places. Save Latin Village took this further, sharing their journey of fighting to save the Seven Sisters market in Tottenham. A story which both highlighted the almost unassailable combined power of local authorities and developers working together, but also the power communities can have when organised and determined - leading a legal campaign that centred on human rights that ultimately (in the course of writing this document) defeated the developers. In Plymouth, we found two examples of communities shaping the spaces around them. Nudge Community Builders, working almost completely beyond the state, are finding ways to raise money from their communities to buy buildings along the city's Union Street to move them into local ownership. Not only

creating new spaces and services for local people, but creating inclusive, deeper relationships, highlighting the value and power of, often unrecognised and undervalued, everyday democracy.

Working within and pushing the edges of current local state structures, the Soapbox Theatre shows what can be done when local authorities and communities work together. Having realised the renewal of a disused WWII Mustard Gas decontamination building in the corner of a local park as a children's theatre, the partnership has grown beyond the confines of the building, creating an art garden, amphitheatre and growing sets of community connections and conversations – highlighting the role of public spaces and parks as places of contact, exchange, and democracy.

The State of Resilience (Making and Production) brought together people who are working on projects that, at first glance, might not be about climate change but are all making people think differently about how they engage with the earth and its materials. The importance of the role of action and culture working hand in hand was a key feature of each talk.

To set the scene, we heard about the Fab City Global movement, which started in Barcelona in 2014 when the Mayor challenged the city to make everything they consume within 40 years by 2054. Plymouth is one of 38 cities to take up this challenge, all working to return manufacturing to the heart of communities, keeping materials circulating locally but information spreading globally through *trans-local organising*.

The critical role of culture and creativity for social, economic, and environmental change is the basis of the work of Plymouth Culture. This resonated with the previous talk - combining the art of the possible with policy and practical change. The power of creativity was a golden thread, not just the individual action of artists or cultural organisations, but how creativity drives environmental and social action at both a global level and local level - particularly in Plymouth as the city's social economy continues to gear towards the green agenda.

May Project Gardens and Plymouth Scrapstore CIC are both locally community businesses that reconnect people with the environment through creativity and play. The Garden of a council house in Merton provides a safe space for all to enjoy spending time together in a way that allows expression

of self and shared education - the example of the hip-hop garden project showed the beauty of bringing together young people to make music and cook together, using produce grown in the garden. The story of the Scrapstore was one of longevity based around community and creativity - the legacy of a regeneration project has flourished and now repurposes and reuses scrap materials for activities that develop imagination and build community and shared purpose.

The State of Us plenary session demonstrated to us the impacts of what can be achieved when much of the above is brought together at scale, creating more tangible and recognisable forms of power. At the more formative, smaller scale, though set within the vast history of South African struggle, Johannesburg's Makers Valley Partnership bring together practices of community organising, creativity and social entrepreneurship. To such an impactful extent, in the face of the COVID 19 crisis and a practical absence of government, they were in turn mistaken for a governmental/political organisation, attracting undue attention from the police.

ENTERPRISE

Again, within the context of absences of government, or indeed actively hostile government, the continuing remarkable example of Cooperation Jackson (Mississippi) built on the above themes of education, cooperative enterprise, organising, unions and new approaches to finance. While further demonstrating the essential role and power of communities in the face of disaster and how vibrant community democracy can drive wider democratic renewal, Cooperation Jackson also carried the warning that meeting the needs of communities can at times be exploited by elements of government to renege on their obligations.

Where Cooperation Jackson's work played a pivotal role in the election of the city's first black Mayor and an active part of that administration, the unfolding story of Barcelona en Comú charts another journey from community power to political power. Having reached a point of frustration with the institutions of local government, community activists and cooperatives were left with only one alternative - to become government. For many, Barcelona en Comú provides the archetype of new municipalism - a confluence of diverse community

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO DEMOCRACY

social and economic activity into a new common political platform, able to win popular support and electoral power, beyond the permission and influence of existing political party structures. In coalition from 2014, Barcelona en Comú remain in power, headed by co-founder Ada Colau as city Mayor. Their example further underlines how municipal level politics is better able to connect people to democracy and enable society to address fundamental pressing and complex issues such as inequalities and climate change. Though the journey from activism to government and from campaign to administration is never an easy one, Barcelona en Comú's story continues to unfold, innovating to meet the needs of a modern global city. This creativity is particularly apparent in the areas of e-democracy and the *feminisation of politics*. Where the increasingly go-to tech platform decidem.barcelona seeks to bridge the gap between people and government, maintaining citizen engagement with the systems power, the concept of the feminising of politics strives to ensure practical and genuine inclusion at all levels and is widely seen as a central pillar of new municipalism. These innovations also have implications for a further and final commonly held principle of new-municipalism - *confronting the far right* and extremism. At the centre of the work of all our speakers is the importance of relationships, community connections and solidarity, actively challenging the atomisation of society and endemic social isolation, that is so often the prerequisite fertile ground for populist misinformation, conspiracy theory and extremism.

DEMOCRACY

Returning to the United Kingdom, Liverpool University's Matthew Thompson has written widely on municipalist movements and ideas and situated economic democracy, community power and municipalism in both its global historical and its geographical contemporary context returning us to Plymouth.

Drawing a line from the Paris Commune of 1781, through the works of Murray Bookchin and related current ideas of community wealth building and the "Preston Model", Matthew's work has brought a level of order to this otherwise sprawling and ever evolving movement

and body of work - framing Barcelona as "platform" municipalism, Preston and more "managed" municipalism and the more "autonomous" municipalism of Jackson. Where Plymouth exhibits elements of all three of these types; it is this autonomous style, characterised and centred around community enterprise, that is most apparent in Plymouth. Evidenced by our presenters, partners, and curators, with ongoing brilliant support from community business champion Power to Change, Plymouth's reputation as a place to innovate, collaborate and lead continues to grow.

ACCOUNTABLE

These community businesses, social enterprises and cooperatives are local accountable organisations that not only have a representative role in their home communities but also a level of economic independence and power - a necessary foundation for any wider autonomy. It is upon these building blocks of socially and environmentally focused enterprise and associated citizen action, that we solve problems and create opportunities, we distribute power and wealth and renew and grow the foundations of a fairer, more prosperous and sustainable society. The State of Us, has shown that this action and activity is broad, diverse, and complex. It is often tricky, the challenges are many, and while moments and movements blossom and wilt along the way, more and more sustain, creating new learning, inspiration, and broader shoulders for others to stand on and reach still further. Evermore vital in volatile and uncertain times.

Amidst such a far-reaching, dynamic and complex body of practice, it is not easy to draw out a set of key headline messages - there are so many. However, in our time-poor, slogan-driven days, it is nevertheless a worthy endeavour. So here are just five of ours:

- **Community** power is often most genuine, effective, and powerful when it acts to build itself from the community up. More a case of "takepowerment", than given empowerment.
- **Culture** is critical; everything is downstream from here. The relationships, social norms and expectations within communities have the power to shape everything else - for better and worse.
- **Creativity** runs through it all. For all our speakers, this was implicit if not explicit within their practice and success

IMPACT AT SCALE IS ACHIEVABLE

– the ability to understand problems, envisage a better future and collectively find imaginative, enterprising, and real solutions is apparent in all this practice.

- **Economy**, the process through which we seek to meet our needs, is also the space in which a community's power and wider democracy are substantially realised or removed. The distinct economic power and democratic ownership of cooperatives, social enterprises, and community businesses have a particular and vital role to play.

- **Success** and impact at scale are achievable. Starting with community relationships, be it Nudge Community Builders, the May Garden Project or

Makers Valley Partnership, real power at the municipal level and wider democratic renewal change can be achieved. Self-evident by the examples of Latin Village, Barcelona en Comú and Cooperation Jackson.

The following document frames the original thinking and aims behind the State of Us conference – to shed further light on this practice – and provides a more detailed transcription of the speakers' presentations, with links to the video recordings. We hope you enjoy it as much as we enjoyed curating the conference and listening to these inspiring stories.

[Frances Northrop](#) and [Ed Whitelaw](#)

SPEAKERS

The State of Work

LINDSEY HALL



Lindsey is co-founder and CEO of Real Ideas, leading and managing the organisation to run its own social enterprise ventures and enable others, particularly young people, to set up and run their own

socially entrepreneurial activities, solving problems and building skills.

Her track record in the public and private sectors as a creative social entrepreneur, thinker and leader has seen her set up and develop products and services across the creative, learning and education sectors. Most recently this has included transforming a former market hall building in Devonport, Plymouth into an immersive technology centre with the largest immersive dome in Europe. From building award-winning programmes in the UK to driving ground-breaking initiatives internationally, Lindsey has the experience and skills at management, board and executive level to steer social business ideas towards success; making money and making a difference at the same time.

Lindsey is a NESTA Cultural Leadership fellow, an INSEAD graduate, a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, Trustee of Kernow Education Arts Partnership and Plymouth Culture, member of Plymouth Growth Board and one of the WISE100 social enterprise leaders.

HENRY LOPEZ



Henry is the General Secretary of The IWGB - a union that represents and supports some of the most marginalised workers in Britain.

The union focuses on outsourcing, the gig economy

and other areas where precarity, low pay and exploitation are the norm. Henry has been closely involved with the union since the early days and previously worked as an outsourced porter at the University of London, where he has been involved in high profile campaigns. Henry has years of experience in organising, listening to the experiences of workers in precarious positions and advising them on what avenues are open to them.

DOROTHY FRANCIS



Dorothy Francis is an Entrepreneur-in-Residence at the University of Leicester, has worked within the field of co-operatives and social enterprise for 35 years, and is passionate about how social businesses

change lives and communities for the better.

Dorothy is the CEO of the Co-operative and Social Enterprise Agency (CASE) and is a leader, trainer, mentor and adviser. She has over 30 years' experience in advising cooperatives and social enterprises to establish and grow and specialises in social enterprise legal structures, working practices and management. Dorothy is committed to promoting business to women, especially women of colour and women from newly arrived communities and has twice received Business Woman of the Year awards.

EMILY SCURRAH



Emily is a qualitative researcher at the New Economics Foundation, specialising in work and pay; feminist and heterodox economics; and intersectional methodologies. Past research has included

studies into the insecure workforce and the impact that shorter working hours would have on gender inequality; and she is currently exploring routes to a just transition into a green economy in partnership with trade unions. Emily is a workplace shop steward and is a trade union activist.

The State of Places and Spaces

NIRUSHAN SUDARSAN



Nirushan Sudarsan works with Meanwhile Butetown, a group which explores empty spaces in their area and how they can be brought into community led ownership and sustainable management to benefit the

community. He is a Cardiff University Law and Politics student, passionate about social action and is part of Butetown Matters, which aims to tell the stories and work on issues that matter in the local community.

VICKY ALVAREZ



Vicky Alvarez is a Colombian trader at Pueblito Paisa in Seven Sisters Market, above Seven Sisters tube station at Wards Corner. This was once North London's classiest department store, but since

the 1980's it has had a new life, as a thriving market and collection of shops, restaurants and small service businesses mainly run by Latin American traders like Victoria. This is the heart of London's Latin American Community. But all this is now under threat and marked for redevelopment by Grainger PLC which plans to build chain stores and luxury flats (but no social housing).

Over the past few years Victoria, alongside other traders and community members have been campaigning, raising money and awareness, and fighting legal battles to stop this from happening and to preserve the community and livelihoods they have created at the Latin Village.

HANNAH SLOGGETT

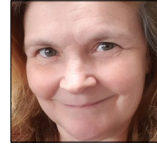


Hannah Sloggett is Co-Director and Founder of Nudge Community Builders. Nudge is a community benefit society bringing empty buildings back into use in fun and interesting ways for lasting community

benefit on Union Street in Plymouth. Before this, Hannah was Neighbourhood Planning Manager at Plymouth City Council.

She is nationally recognised for the creative community engagement she managed for the Plymouth & SW Devon Joint Local Plan and supporting communities with the planning process, implementing citywide crowdfunding and experimenting with data in the city. Previously, she led on audience development programmes at Plymouth City Museum, the Ragged School Museum and worked at the Science Museum in London.

JACQUELINE SLADE



Jacqueline and Iain Slade are the co-founders of Stiltskin Arts & Theatre CIC and The Soapbox Children's Theatre. They founded Stiltskin 21 years ago as a street theatre company, moving into creating theatre

and arts projects for mainly primary schools.

In December 2014 Stiltskin took on the lease of the former WW2 Mustard Gas Decontamination Unit with the vision to transform a semi-derelict building into the Soapbox Children's Theatre where children, young people and their families can experience theatre and cultural activity all year round.

The theatre is based within Devonport, one of the most deprived areas within the city and the country. Through developing the building, they have enhanced a forgotten corner of the park, making the space attractive and safe for their local community. They have brought people into the area from across the South West supporting the local infrastructure and offer job opportunities for local people and emerging artists and volunteering/work experience for school, college and university students.

The State of Resilience

HANNAH HARRIS



Hannah Harris is the CEO of Plymouth Culture, a sector development agency supporting the growth of the creative and cultural industries in Plymouth.

Hannah specialises in strategic planning, partnership

development and external funding within the creative sector and previously worked as the Director of Development for Plymouth College of Art.

MONA BANI



Mona is co-director of award-winning grassroots organisation May Project Gardens, who work with marginalised urban communities to address

poverty, disempowerment and access to resources and influences. She leads their work with young refugees and asylum seekers, and co-founded their media channel Untelevised, which explores possibilities for social change, where she also hosts their podcast series. She has a decade's experience in social policy and third sector development including as a Youth Policy Adviser to the Cabinet Office and author of policy reports for Demos; Strategic Consultant to large charities, local authorities and funders like National Lottery and Help Refugees; as well as much frontline experience, including time in the refugee camp in Calais. She's herself the child of political refugees from Iran and grew up in Copenhagen before migrating to London as a teenager.

SPEAKERS

SUSAN MOORES



Susan Moores has always been drawn to people, and what makes them tick – she always knew that she wanted to work with and be among the collective human endeavour, rather than the individual

experience. After studying sociology and social policy, Susan trained in youth and community work, and has been around that 'field of work' ever since. Having worked in the South West and nationally as a youth worker, in community development and as a trainer, Susan has provided support to many community-based organisations through all sorts of policy, personnel and purpose changes.

"I have worked in what used to be called 'voluntary sector infrastructure' - where in the early 90's I supported local food projects and initiatives that are still growing today. One of the interesting 'green questions' then was 'do you take money from an oil producer for local community growing projects?' I still wonder whether there is an answer, I certainly heard several at the time."

For the last 10 years I have been part of a storytelling collective that is keeping alive the spoken tradition of listening well to the teller, and the wisdom gained from being in the circle around the fire; and for that decade I have been an active Director of what was formally known as Plymouth Play CIC and is now (from April this year) Plymouth Scrapstore CIC."

JANE HEMBROW



With a background in retail, it was after having her two children that Jane Hembrow embarked on her next career path. While volunteering at both parent & toddler and playgroup, she was offered a

place on a foundation course in Early Years, Childcare and Children's Play. Still passionate about supporting children, young people and their families – Jane now finds herself volunteering at the scrapstore that she helped to set up.

"Back in the early 90's I found myself with the most amazing job at Plymouth City Council as a Play Officer working on a regeneration project that was helping to bring women back into the workforce - needing not only the jobs but also the childcare and holiday clubs that would enable them to return to work. It was here that I helped to found and set up Plymouth Play Association - offering playwork training as a means to future employment, playday events, play scheme grants, a toy and resource library, and of course the scrapstore and resource centre.

From that point, I continued a career in Play at local, regional and national levels, and since retiring I am volunteering with the Scrapstore more regularly, it's a magnet!"

TOMAS DIEZ



Tomas Diez is a Venezuelan Urbanist specialized in digital fabrication and its implications on the future cities and society. He is the co-founder and director of Fab Lab Barcelona at the Institute for Advanced

Architecture of Catalonia (IAAC), and is a founding partner of the Fab City Global Initiative. He is also the director of the recently launched Master in Design for Emergent Futures at IAAC.

Tomas has been nominated by The Guardian and Nesta as one of the top 10 digital social innovators to watch in 2013, and has been awarded by the Catalan ICT association as the entrepreneur of the year in 2014. His research interests relate to the use of digital fabrication tools to transform reality, and how the use of new technologies can change the way people consume, produce and relate with each other in cities.

The Plenary Session

KALI AKUNO



Kali served as the Director of Special Projects and External Funding in the Mayoral Administration of the late Chokwe Lumumba of Jackson, MS. His focus in this role was supporting cooperative

development, the introduction of eco-friendly and carbon reduction methods of operation, and the promotion of human rights and international relations for the city.

Kali also served as the Co-Director of the US Human Rights Network, the Executive Director of the Peoples' Hurricane Relief Fund (PHRF) based in New Orleans, Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina. And was a co-founder of the School of Social Justice and Community Development (SSJCD), a public school serving the academic needs of low-income African American and Latino communities in Oakland, California.

THOBILE CHITTENDEN



Thobile is a Community Builder and Purpose Pioneer with a passionate interest in Social & Creative Entrepreneurship, as well as Non-Profit Organisations. Currently CEO of Makers

Valley Partnership, a community organisation in the east of Johannesburg CBD and a Director at The Change Collective Africa which focuses on Purpose Projects, she is also a Board Member of an inner-city school in Johannesburg called City Kidz. Thobile has over 10 years' experience in Youth marketing, managing educational and behavioural change programmes from pre-school to tertiary learners, in a network of over 3000 institutions. More recently, she has been involved in the running of various Creative Organisations, such as Room 13 South Africa and Reimagination's MADD Labs, all inspiring "Artivists" in the making.

MATTHEW THOMPSON



Matt is a critical urban geographer based in London with interests in cooperative alternatives to capitalism, the social and solidarity economy, collaborative housing and the politics of urban regeneration.

He currently works as a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Liverpool's Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place. He's written about municipalism in various open access publications, including 'What's so new about New Municipalism?' and 'Re-grounding the city with Polanyi: From urban entrepreneurialism to entrepreneurial municipalism'; and is the author of *Reconstructing Public Housing: Liverpool's hidden history of collective alternatives*. In 2020, Matt was invited onto the Liverpool City Region Land Commission and, in 2021, became a member of the Minim Municipalism Observatory, the international network and database for municipalist movements.

ELENA TARIFA



Mother, feminist, journalist, expert in gender and communication, former social activist by the Spanish Federation of Journalists Unions and different women organizations, Elena joined

Barcelona en Comú by 2015 shortly before the local elections which brought them to rule the City Council. District Counsellor by Barcelona City Council since 2016, Elena has been engaged as an activist in the organisation in the Feminist area and by the International Committee - which she has been co-coordinating since 2019. It is from here they are contributing to the fostering of an international municipalist network as a trigger to social and political transformation, from local to global action.



INTRODUCTION

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The State of Us draws inspiration from municipalist movements worldwide and, focused on Plymouth, UK, asks how we can build resilient communities and achieve greater economic democracy. Throughout history, people and communities have strived, fought, and sacrificed for self-determination, for enough freedom, power, and choice to create meaningful futures.

Recent events demonstrate citizens need agency and control, and when they gain this, they produce more benefits for society.

We need to revitalise our high streets, the public realm, and green spaces. We want better health and well-being, have more productive and meaningful work, protect our democracy, avoid a climate disaster, and meet our basic needs. To do this, we need active citizens and robust communities.

There are many ways to do this, but the road is not easy. Within these pages, Lindsay Hall discusses some of the contradictions encountered when working within the current system; Henry Lopez describes victory when working outside of the system. Dorothy Francis shows the importance of ethics and principles when confronting power, and Emily Scurrah talks about raising expectations and standards.

The levers of power are being taken from us daily even though we seek to create Empowering Places. Constant attack erodes democracy, corporate interests dominate the digital space and mass media, and Covid-19 has not just exposed societies' stark inequalities but has amplified and accelerated them.

In The State of Spaces and Places, Nirushan Sudarsan suggests changes to the planning system, Vicky Alvarez shows why you should never give up on your demands, and Hannah Sloggett describes breathing life into dying high streets. Jacqueline Slade shapes a generation through play.

Agency to determine our futures is an equality issue, with almost a quarter of the UK's domestic wealth now reportedly owned by the wealthiest 1%. The economic system is skewed, favouring, and giving vast power to a small elite, while citizens and communities are becoming generationally more impoverished and increasingly powerless.

The conference asks what role do community-focused, economic actors have in building healthy communities? What is the best practice? Who are our allies, and who shares our values? And how can we organise it better? What does democracy look like in everyday areas of our economy, such as work, public spaces, and the goods we consume? How do communities actively create power within and beyond authority?

Environmental sustainability is essential in the process but can often be side-lined; Hannah Harris discusses how creativity is vital in the State of Resilience session. Mona Bani discusses a small-scale project that connects music to nature, and Susan Moores and Jane Hembrow link creativity to sustainability; Tomas Diez proposes a global technological solution.

New ways of building strong communities and economic democracy are emerging worldwide. First, Kali Akuno speaks of the centuries of traditions and models around black cooperatives and black efforts in mutual aid that underpin Cooperation Jackson. Next, Elena Tarifa describes Barcelona en Comú, where citizens are retaking their city, and Thobile Crittenden reports from inner-city Johannesburg, where creative entrepreneurship makes a difference. Lastly, Matthew Thompson provides the historical context.

The urgent question is: when building on a foundation of self-managing enterprise, how can places like Plymouth further foster social, environmental and community resilience, and how can we build healthy communities with a more democratic economy?



THE STATE OF WORK

The concept of livelihoods is one which we need to revisit as work becomes more precarious and the workforce more fragmented. The State of Our Work explores the changing nature of work and show the solutions forged through new business models and enterprises, collective organising and localised support for the self-employed. Below are the edited versions of some of the visions, solutions, accomplishments and personal journeys of individuals who have contributed to the debate and which demonstrate the various forms of municipalism

TUESDAY, APRIL 20, 2021

Link to an edited YouTube version of the full State of Our Work session can be found here:
<https://youtu.be/wWOH4iAdCYE>



LINDSEY HALL

Chief Executive
Real Ideas Organisation

Link to Lindsey's presentation:
https://youtu.be/BF_vhgDKYe8

CONTRADICTIONS AND DILEMMAS

“A small group of us founded the Real Ideas Organisation 14 years ago to work with people to turn their great ideas into reality.

We wanted independence and to do the things we thought were important. To genuinely start from problems that need solving, having ideas to solve them, and then doing something about them. We aimed to control the structures and the way that power works in communities to help communities.

In one way, it is a hugely privileged position. Essentially what it meant was you end up with people who have probably grown up with similar experiences, who have certain levels of educational attainment, and have the flexibility to be able to join in and take risks.

Starting things is brilliant, but we also have to think that there are lots of people who are dealing with the basics, and therefore, maybe don't have quite have the luxury to wander off into the world in the way we did.

We wanted to operate in that messy space beyond organisations. We were interested in ideas, and ideas are lovely because you can describe them in a beautifully pure way and be absolute about them. But they stay ideas unless you can apply them. So, the 'real' bit has always been significant to us because we do want to make things change.

Some of the communities we work with experience multiple deprivations, particularly Devonport, which is in the bottom 10 per cent of indices of multiple deprivations. We still have people who pitch their tents outside our buildings because they don't have anywhere else to live. It's a place where people are dealing with a lot of issues, and we're want to be there.

What we've learned is that we are constantly operating with contradictions and dilemmas, which for me is one of the interesting things about trying to work differently. It's because, in the end, it all comes down to who has the power to make decisions, who has the power to choose what they engage with, and who has the power to influence others who have an impact on them. We sit between individual's real experiences and the structures that define the way that work works. One of the things we do is work with many young people, particularly young people for whom the education system hasn't worked.

Our education system is linear. If you go through and succeed at each junction, then it works relatively well for you; it's not that difficult to get a job, and probably a job that you might even enjoy and be well rewarded.

However, if you are part of the 20% that

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CONTRADICTIONS AND DILEMMAS

education fails, then you're popped out of this scenario. A young person is suddenly in a space where they find they don't know what the next step is; they often don't have the power to make the choices. And sometimes they are powerless just because they don't know what's possible.

They don't know who to talk to; they might not have the networks or the connections to make any of it happen. They may simply not have the basics, such as anywhere to live or money. Suddenly they find themselves in a completely different world, where work, or access to it, means something else.

We've always been interested in this, not just for those young people, but how we can start to change things, so we shift the bits that don't work, and we work in that middle space between the real and the ideas.

We've got a lot of things wrong. We spend time talking about the things that work, but I also think we should spend time talking about the things that don't work and the contradictions and the dilemmas.

We do lots of great work with individual young people, and we've got some brilliant stories. We also have young people for whom our offer doesn't work for a range of reasons. We should become more comfortable with saying there is no single way to work for everything or everyone.

There need to be multiple and diverse ways to enable people to find routes and pathways linked to their interests, aptitude, and passion. Sure, you can go on a scheme which will train you to do something, pop you out the other end and with a bit of luck, it'll connect with the job that needs doing, and you can earn some money, and that's fine. However, for most of us, we want work to be more than that, and we want work to connect with who we are.

One of the things that we all need to learn is how to find the things that relate to our interests, that we're reasonably good at, have some aptitude, have a passion for it, and that gets us up in the morning.

What we try to do at Real Ideas is unlock people and allow them to see the qualities within themselves and recognise those qualities in others. Then to harness that as we move forward into this messy space that exists between lovely clean ideas and a very structured, defined 'real' world. So how do we glue those factors together to make them work? We spend a lot of time thinking about how we organise ourselves to prevent the hierarchies and the barriers and weird silos that often mean work isn't a great place to be.

We have spent a lot of time developing a flat management structure, which is a challenge for an organisation that has

grown from just a handful of people to employing more than 100. It's complicated to run without some structures, and that returns us to the dilemma that we do need structures, but we don't want them to inhibit passion and energy.

Responsible freedom is the phrase we currently use to describe how we bind things together. We want everyone to work in the flexible way they need, but we also need everyone to think about each other and make choices that account, not only for their personal needs but those around them.

The challenge is how we apply this philosophy to the places where we all work, beyond social enterprises and explicitly purpose-driven enterprises.

One example is some interesting work that we've been doing for around three years in Plymouth, exploring the question of why we only measure a thriving economy by GDP growth. It is accepted that if the economy has more jobs and better-paid jobs, then that is a thriving economy, and it's going in the right direction. It may look as though wealth is coming into a place, but when you dig under the surface, you find it is only at the top, and maybe 20% of people benefit from better wages and better conditions. But for the bottom 20%, nothing has changed. And this has been the situation in Plymouth, as in the rest of the country, for a long time.

We've been working with the Plymouth Growth Board, made up of the public, private and third sector, to determine how wealth could be more equally spread and to challenge businesses to find ways for people to be better paid and better treated. We've spent three years going in circles, inching along. People have been supportive, but the moment you say let's make it real, things slow down because behaviours and power need to shift.

Last summer, in some ways, because of Covid, civic power shifted, and suddenly, we went from a theoretical 'this is a good idea' to 'We'll have a Charter, yes, we'll all buy into it'.

As a result, Plymouth City Council has launched the Resurgam Charter, a commitment from Plymouth's businesses to create a fairer and greener city as we recover from the impacts of the pandemic. It's at the heart of the city's inclusive growth strategy that has some bold commitments from big private companies, as well as the public and the third sector. It is good news, but I also know that we will find many contradictions and the dilemmas but at least we're heading in the right direction." ●



HENRY LOPEZ

**General Secretary
The Independent Workers' Union
of Great Britain**

*Link to Henry's presentation:
<https://youtu.be/hCGYtiVVdAE>*

SUPPORTING MIGRANT WORKERS

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Henry Lopez arrived in England from Ecuador more than 20 years ago and today leads a union for previously ignored migrant workers.

He began working at the University of London as a porter in 2010 and began organising immediately because the work conditions were so poor.

Today, Henry is General Secretary of the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain. This organisation has made significant progress unionising precarious and vulnerable workers by building power and a sense of community in the workplace.

The IWGB recruits from previously neglected, non-English-speaking immigrant workers and champions the rights of the lowest paid in the most precarious jobs, the young and those outsourced to private companies and in the gig economy.

Initially, it faced barriers, including the lack of traditional union support, no government help and language issues but won through to score remarkable victories against web-based global companies who operated self-employment models such as Uber.

When Henry began working as a porter at the University of London in 2010 when the job was outsourced.

He says: "We started organising because in some cases we were not paid for two months. We had a lot of problems in terms of working conditions. We were badly treated and badly paid. There wasn't the opportunity to have a conversation about what was happening or demanding better treatment."

Henry had no experience of trade unions before taking part in wildcat strikes at the University at the beginning of the campaign that was ultimately successful. The University eventually brought the jobs back in-house, workers were taken off zero-hours contracts and given sick and holiday pay.

He says: "Through the years, I have

learned that if we organise and decide to work as a community, and in solidarity, we can achieve great things.

"Creating a community is something that we did at the University of London through our campaigns. We got the support of academics, and students, workers, and public support. The solidarity we received from people was very useful for our campaigns.

"And since then, we've been going and going forward and have been able to achieve great things as a union."

As the union grew, it was essential to introduce democratic leadership. Henry says: "Engaging members in their struggles is important, as well as providing them with a space to discuss the problems. Educational areas where workers can improve their skills and knowledge are also important. All this makes people feel part of this community, so they will work in solidarity to achieve success.

What has also been vital for us is democratic participation, not just being members of the union but taking democratic decisions as a union. It is our workers who are going to lead our trade union and keep organising our workplaces.

"Since we been functioning as a union, we have been able to achieve many, many successes, such as improving the conditions and wages in workplaces, but also too by taking employers to court winning big campaigns."

The IWGB is now expanding its protection to cover precarious groups such as gig economy workers and cover couriers, private hire drivers, foster carers, game workers, cycling instructors, yoga teachers, and nannies. It has 12 branches, and all the members have a common thread – the experience of marginalisation and exploitation.

Henry says: "We have created in our union, something that seemed impossible before— turning a union that was

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SUPPORTING MIGRANT WORKERS

mainly for cleaners into a union that now represents workers from different industries and backgrounds such as cleaners from Latin America, private hire drivers who come from Asian minorities, Foster carers who are mainly white British, security guards from African origin and many others who despite having different jobs and coming from different backgrounds are fighting together for the same goal – improve their conditions in their industry and fight against exploitation.

As a union, we are punching beyond our weight.

“Our mission for the future is to unionise all precarious workers. We have realised through this pandemic that the unions have been essential for supporting the workers.”

In addition to campaigns, the IWGB’s Legal Department is also highly active, providing representation to members on a range of employment matters such as disciplinary processes, grievances, private hire licensing, and employment tribunals. ●

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DOROTHY FRANCIS

**Co-director
The CASE Cooperative**

*Link to Dorothy’s presentation:
<https://youtu.be/zMIM7XI86yw>*

ETHICS, VALUES & PRINCIPLES

When 18 years old, Dorothy Francis quit her job as a telephonist in the General Post Office, a role that could have been a position for life.

The GPO was the telecommunications arm of the then nationalised Royal Mail, and in the early 1980s, people thought it was a fine place to work.

Dorothy says: “I’m a black girl from a council estate, and I went to a comprehensive school. My father was a co-worker, my mother a cleaner. They were impressed by the white-collar job, I went to work in skirts and blouses and high heels rather than overalls and boiler suits like them.

“Eileen, who trained me, started at 15 and retired at 60. It was that type of institution, good pay, lots of perks. I’d landed on my feet, hadn’t I?”

“However, I wasn’t happy. Something was not right. I just felt there had to be a different way to work. It wasn’t a horrible job. But I just knew it wasn’t the way I wanted to work for the rest of my life.”

Dorothy had already experienced how challenging the work environment could be for a young black girl.

“In 1975, I went for a Saturday job in a chippy, and the owner told me that he couldn’t afford to employ me because his customers would not take chips from a

darkie, ‘no offence, love’, he added.”

And with no experience of politics or community activism Dorothy thought she didn’t have the words to resolve what she wanted.

She says: “I wanted to feel involved, useful, productive, valued. I wanted to know that I was contributing. I was not just a small cog in a large machine. I wanted my needs to be serviced by work rather than me serving work. I wanted political democracy. I wanted my employment to recognise me as an individual, not just as a unit of production. I also wanted to play a part in changing the world.”

After studying at university, Warwick University accepted her on an MA course to become a community social worker. But this didn’t come about because two friends invited her to join them in starting a cooperative bookshop. “I said: ‘What’s a cooperative?’ And they explained it to me. It was like a light went on in my head.

“I never took up the place at university, and I never did become a social worker. Because the values and principles of cooperation instantly resonated with me, the idea of democracy, that one person, one member, one vote, of equality, of having equal rights and benefits, of being treated justly, with fairness, because of

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ETHICS, VALUES & PRINCIPLES

the principle of equity, of solidarity of members supporting each other, and other cooperatives and community. Those all resonated with me.

“What resonated with me was all of this is built on ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility, and caring for others. It was about people, not just economics.

“I can say that I was lucky to stumble on it at just 22 because it changed the course of my life. I’ve worked within the corporate and social business sector ever since. But why did I have to find out by accident?

“Why was this not taught at school? I was taught about capitalism and how the state expected me to be a good and compliant worker but never talked about ownership, democratic workplaces or controlling my work and life.”

In 1993 two friends, Pauline, and Sarah, were made redundant, and Dorothy helped them set up a social enterprise, Shepshed Carers, based near Loughborough, Leicestershire. Typically, the women at first believed they were unqualified to set up a business. Within five years, the enterprise employed 150 people to become the single biggest employer in the district.

The company was nominated for a national social enterprise award but failed to win it, and some were naturally disappointed, but Sarah said to Dorothy: “We are already winners and have been for years; we became winners the day you believed in us.”

Dorothy says: “she went on to say that it’s not just us as founder members who have won by creating our employment

for all the member workers and Shepshed Carers who have good employment. And the people we care for have won by having better care. And their families and loved ones have won, and local employers retain skills because employees don’t need to give up their jobs to look after their loved ones.

And the local economy is a winner because we’re local people, and we spend our money on the local High Street. And overall, we’re winners because of what we’ve done for the reputation of care work.

“And we are all winners because you believed in us and allowed us to be winners. You showed us how we could have ownership of our working lives, how we could build resilience as a community, how we could develop economic and community control.

“You made us into community focussed people who have had a huge economic impact on our community. You showed us how to defy authority to create community power and build community inclusion, representation, and participation.

“And Sarah said I aided and abetted two thick working class women from Shepshed to change the world, albeit a small part of Leicestershire but still in the world. I believe that is a clear description of municipalism. Pauline and Sarah wouldn’t have called it municipalism. To them. It was about a structure that works. It was about ethics, values, principles, community control and empowerment. It was what was right. It was the only way to do it. You could say that the only way was ethics!” •



EMILY SCURRAH

Researcher
New Economics Foundation

Link to Emily's presentation:
<https://youtu.be/9aspG-Z6ag4>

RAISING EXPECTATIONS & DEMANDS

We have lived through a crisis of work since the late 1970s, and several factors underlie this.

The wage share of the economy has declined from its 1975 peak of 76% to a historic low of 67% today, which directly impacted national income, and a fall in

union density may account for this.

Another factor has been a rise in casualised, precarious labour, where workers are denied fundamental rights such as sick pay and holiday pay and take the risk and necessary overheads. Nearly

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one in 10 workers engage in platform work, defined by the TUC as a wide range of jobs found via a website or apps like Uber or Deliveroo and accessed using laptops, smartphones, or other internet-connected devices.

This trend raises the risk of workers denied statutory rights, the persistence of gendered and racialised injustice in the workplace, and a dereliction of duty of care, which is a phrase we don't use very much anymore.

We also have an impending challenge in the transition to a green economy. And history tells us that technological change isn't necessarily good news for workers unless they are at the forefront directing it. And, of course, Covid has made it all worse.

When my colleague and I set out to research the challenges faced by self-employed and precarious workers, we thought about the demands workers should expect from an employer.

At the very least, they include a decent living wage, sick pay holiday allowance and pay remunerated, parental leave pension script scheme, agreed hours, and kind of recognised professional standards, legal contract, rights, union representation, and the ability to withhold labour.

Employers are increasing not guaranteeing these in the workplace or denying fundamental material rights, or not adequately enforcing them.

There are also cultural and social factors, such as compliance with/homogeneity of principles and value, regulation of language and dress, workers having some autonomy in the workplace and protection against punitive control and scrutiny over time.

I think we have forgotten about these demands; our standards have become so dialled down.

Simultaneous to the dialling down of working conditions, we have the twin challenges of the pandemic, and its impact on the workforce, and the green transition.

The rise of poor quality, insecure work, and failure for the workplace to meet proper standards has preceded the current crisis we face post lockdown.

The anticipated unemployment crisis could weaken workers' ability to improve their pay and conditions as job losses threaten workers' bargaining power unless we raise clear and shared demands about our working lives - including collectivising as employed, insecure and unemployed workers.

The climate emergency is intensifying,

and urgent action is required to decarbonise our economy. An outcome of the crisis could threaten to compound the unemployment crisis unless workers get organised and similarly issue coherent, shared demands.

I've recently read a series of essays by Arundhati Roy, a novelist but more recently an essayist, and she talks about the pandemic as being a portal. We need to acknowledge the significant amounts of death and grief and the mental health crisis it has caused, but Roy describes it as a portal for seizing an opportunity to change the world and how we work.

Several things specific to the world of work have emerged from the pandemic that would be advantageous to workers that I think we should seize.

One is the opportunity to reassess the social value of work, and we now have the term key workers to show there is undisputed value.

Secondly, ahead of the unemployment crisis that we're facing, we can work on the redistribution of employment.

The New Economics Foundation, where Frances Northrop and I work, has argued for a shorter working week or a shorter working day for decades.

So instead of some people being overworked and others underemployed, there would be redistribution and a reduction in everyone's working hours as a result. It would mean that less of our lives would be taken up by work, and we would be free to spend time doing the things that we love, have greater leisure time, and have more time to dedicate to caring work.

Thirdly, there is the negative impact of the crisis in the light of the government's recent investigation into institutional racism.

We have seen the massive disproportionate impact on BAME communities. The link to social factors needs to be addressed, especially the high proportion of BAME healthcare staff who have been lost during the pandemic.

When we researched the self-employed workforce in 2019 and thought about the various crises we face, we devised a model based on historical and global examples that we call Worker Centres. It's a Utopian vision of a physical area for unions to work from and organise a linked community and collective space; a possible form of municipalism.

It would be a space for atomised workers to enjoy company and solidarity and a place for training, skills, and political education. It would be a repurposing of

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RAISING EXPECTATIONS & DEMANDS

civic space that would include support for accessing social security, navigating the tax system, and accessing benefits and housing support, specially geared for migrants. It would have a co-working space and resources, including computers and office supplies.

Essentially, it would allow collectivising and challenging the injustices faced across the workforce.

Several global organisations are an inspiration to building such a model—one

is the Self-employed Women's Association in India, part cooperative, part union and organises women to achieve full employment. Suitable employment should extend beyond the workplace boundaries and include social security, childcare, and housing.

It is about raising our expectations and demands as workers and educating each other on what our needs of the workplace should be—and not settling for anything less. ●

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THE STATE OF SPACES AND PLACES

The unequal distribution of ownership and access to land and property is one of the critical areas of structural inequality and exploitation in the UK. With a particular focus on local, migrant and worker-owned businesses, The State of Places and Spaces explores how citizen-led community and social enterprise counter this and the role local institutions can play as partners.

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Link to an edited YouTube version of the full State of Our Spaces and Places session can be found here: <https://youtu.be/UL1Ny0vvIAE>



NIRUSHAN SUDARSAN

**Law and Politics student
Cardiff University**

Link to Nirushan's presentation: <https://youtu.be/y3xhhi80lyA>

A VOICE IN PLANNING DECISIONS

Butetown is a district of south Cardiff that still faces many challenges around discrimination, inequality, and unemployment. Perhaps more commonly known as Tiger Bay, this area was one of the UK's first multicultural communities. People from more than 50 countries settled there by the early 20th century working in the docks and allied industries. Despite the Welsh capital experiencing 30 years of growth, generations-old patterns of poverty and inequality in Butetown still exist; almost a third of residents suffer deprivation, with a high percentage of children living in low-income households. Community associations want a balance between regeneration and the keeping of community institutions that have meaning to residents. The idea is to explore how empty spaces can be brought into community-led ownership and managed sustainably.

These ideas recently focused on an unsuccessful fight to save the Paddle Steamer community café from being demolished and replaced by a block of 28 social housing flats.

Cardiff council gave the go-ahead for the controversial plans and refused to relocate the café on the ground floor of the development despite the Paddle steamer supporting the local area with food parcels during Ramadan and, more recently, the Covid-19 pandemic. Nirushan Sudarsan says the struggle has

been for communities to have a voice in the planning process, but they are gradually winning the battle in the long term. Often planning applications are sprung on local communities, who have little time to react.

He says: "Not only can communities face deprivation in terms of jobs and economics, but environmental deprivation as well with low quality and a total lack of appropriate housing. There are job losses across key sectors like in the hospital, hospitality, and manufacturing sectors. And there is also the destruction of our cultural heritage and historic buildings."

An issue is that when communities get to know of a controversial planning application, the plans are usually well-advanced or become known about towards the end of the consultation process and are difficult to change.

"All we asked at that stage was that we built a relationship with the council so that next time they do something, we're at there from the beginning phase of their planning.

"We have had positive responses from certain councillors and the council, but we still have a long way to go. In terms of tackling this and what we want to see is communities challenging power and developers.

"Communities should have an authentic voice in the planning process, be able

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A VOICE IN PLANNING DECISIONS

to make community objections, and be able to construct legally valid reasons for rejecting developments. What we've seen is that when we put forward an objection, it is tossed aside.

"What we want is to have the same right as developers and to have the same meaningful voice when it comes to protecting spaces. We need the opportunity we need to make sure the process is impartial as it can be."

The community groups want to introduce good practice in planning applications, such as having at least six weeks at least to submit a view about applications. Sometimes they get only a few days and don't have enough time to read and digest

them and make comments.

And they recommend communities have access to advisors and help and support those protecting spaces and making sure their views are incorporated into recommendations.

"What we're saying is that any Petitioner who wants to protect their space has that same rights as the planning and developer community.

"We are willing to work together and play our part in a code of conduct where we see Cardiff becoming a global capital city, but one in we don't want to lose our historic institutions. We can do this by giving communities a real voice in planning matters." •



VICKY ALVAREZ

Colombian trader at the Latin Village: Pueblito Paisa Community activist.

Link to Vicky's presentation:
<https://youtu.be/hmcbgJgriyQ>

EMPOWERING THE COMMUNITY

Pueblito Paisa, known as Latin Village, is in Seven Sisters, Tottenham, and for decades has provided a thriving marketplace for working class ethnic minority immigrant communities and businesses.

The market is on the ground floor of the former Wards Corner Department Store that closed its imposing Edwardian premises in 1972. Over the years, Colombians, Caribbean, and African people built the Seven Sisters Indoor Market into a community where they run small businesses and, equally important, a much-valued residents' hub.

Since 2005, the community has been fighting Haringey Council and property developer Granger, which wants to redevelop the site and build luxury flats that no one in the neighbourhood could afford.

The United Nations described the place as a "dynamic cultural space" and declared the redevelopment plans violated the human rights of Latin Village's diverse communities. The traders put it more bluntly, saying it is 'social cleansing'. At the same time as opposing the plan, the community developed its own, which got

a third round of planning permission last year. The volunteers set up a community interest company to self-manage, charge affordable rents, build new community spaces, and reinvest surplus to make the 43 businesses and 150-plus jobs sustainable.

The plan reflected and built on the unique architecture to suit the multi-generational, multi-cultural and multi-purpose nature of the space— the representation of the balcony as a south American market was to recreate a home from home.

Vicky says: "When I started in the market, the idea was to try to recreate something that reminded us of the villages in Colombia. The market allowed our children to learn from our experience of being there and never getting disconnected from their culture, which is very important as a migrant.

This environment has helped us maintain the roots to the past, the present and the future."

"You have no idea how typical the inequality has been for the Latino community because people only recognise us for doing cleaning and demanding jobs. So, to start fighting, you first have to



EMPOWERING THE COMMUNITY

say to yourself, I do have rights, and I do contribute to the economy.

“It was hard because the first barrier is language, and the second barrier was perhaps us because as immigrants, we live in a bubble; there is a feeling that we’re grateful for being here; it’s a kind of stigma.

“It was very complicated to empower the community, especially because this market was more about women and single moms. “To build the solidarity, we formed a coalition with the market traders and different traders from outside the market and the whole neighbourhood to produce a community plan.

The council has made the community’s life miserable, and it’s been entirely unnecessary for the past 16 years. The only thing the council has represented is the developer. But we’re here to stay.”

The campaigners raised enough money to force a judicial review of the council’s compulsory purchase order in the High Court but lost the case.

The market has been closed for 14 months, becoming more dilapidated by the week.

Vicky says: “In many ways what has happened destroyed our community, but in some ways, it has strengthened it. It has made us want to fight even harder.”

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POSTSCRIPT: A LONG HARD-FOUGHT VICTORY

In August, 20121, Grainger plc withdrew their controversial plans to demolish Wards building and Seven sisters Indoor Market and develop the site.

This marked the success of the fifteen-year campaign by residents and market tenants against the development, who contested the scheme would lead to the gentrification of the area and the displacement of existing communities.

The Leader of Haringey Council, Peray Ahmet, said: “Whilst TfL’s Hardship Fund payments to traders was a welcome intervention, we also need to understand their proposals and time-frames for continuing this much needed financial support.

“The longer-term renewal of the site is also critical. Having met with the West Green Road/Seven Sisters Development Trust, we are supportive of the Trust’s Community Plan to bring the existing historic building back to life for the next generation, with Seven Sisters market, popularly known as the Latin Village, at its heart, and we are looking forward to seeing the next iteration of the plans. As TfL are the owners of the market, we urge them to work with the Trust to co-produce a solution for the long-term future of the market.”

“Developing a new vision for this area is key, and alongside the traders and community of Seven Sisters will do all we can to help TfL make this a reality. A market at Wards Corner has been and will be a very important part of the rich cultural fabric which makes Tottenham such a special part of our great city.”

West Green Road/Seven Sisters

Development Trust, Carlos Burgos, said:

“Grainger’s withdrawal finally ends a terrible period of suffering and neglect, marking the beginning of a new chapter for Seven Sisters Market and Wards Corner. Rooted in 15 years of local organising, the Wards Corner Community Plan is a viable scheme to restore a heritage building, listed community asset and celebrated market, which will revive the high street and town centre for the benefit of the community.

“We welcome Haringey Council’s support for the Plan and look forward to working with traders, the wider community, the Council and Transport for London to deliver this urgent project as soon as possible.

“We also call for the Mayor of London’s financial hardship scheme for traders to be extended until a temporary or permanent market is available.” ●



HANNAH SLOGGETT

Co-Director and Founder of Nudge Community Builders

Link to Hannah's presentation:
<https://youtu.be/pXzheqmEA9I>

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BREATHING LIFE INTO BUILDINGS

Nudge Community Builders is an organisation that revitalises derelict buildings for community use. Operating in Union Street, Plymouth, the two co-directors Hannah Sloggett and Wendy Hart are now planning to breathe life back into their fourth derelict site. The idea of the project began 11 years ago with the first Union Street Party, a now annual event when police reroute the traffic so the community can gather and have some fun through art, music, food, and activities.

Hannah says: "We wanted to find a way to bring people together to recognise the strengths in our community and to celebrate an area where a lot of people love living, but it's judged negatively by a lot of people. We wanted to shift perceptions. "It led on to lots of questions about why 25 per cent of the buildings along Union street were standing empty. And people kept on saying, 'Why don't they do something about it?' And we thought; actually, we could do something about this gradually over time."

The first building that Nudge brought back to life was Union Corner, a crumbling corner block that had been derelict for 25 years.

"We cut our teeth on this, and we learned lots of lessons that you see that play through with our other buildings. The space inside is for anyone who wants to try something different, but most recently, it's been a vital space for people to come and get food and clothes and urgent support during the Covid pandemic."

The experience enabled Nudge to publicly unpack the complex issues of why landlords allowed buildings to stand empty. "We gave ourselves permission, and we talk about this a lot, and we are massive advocates of other people giving themselves permission to start to make a change in their local area."

An early problem was people who were risk-averse to community involvement putting up barriers. Still, Nudge pushed

back against the insistence of doing things in traditional ways. And they established a conversation around valuing such projects in terms of local impact rather than high-specification developments.

"It was one of the significant moments where we started to kind of grab hold of what was happening on the street, so we had a Crowdfunder for Union Corner because we needed to demolish a shop that was part of the property.

"We had the world and his wife queuing up to tell us how complicated the removal of this shop was going to be to the point where we were thinking of giving everyone their money back. But we regrouped and got help, and we demolished the shop one Sunday morning very safely and in about 45 minutes. It was a real mental shift for us."

Nudge rents Union Corner, so in 2017, they moved up a gear and bought with a mixture of loans The Clipper, a former 24-hour pub on Union Street. "It was a scary moment for us. We both quit our jobs and said: we're going to do this. We did a share offer and got 165 investors. It was challenging but also essential that we changed to a community benefits society. Collective ownership was at the heart of what we were doing, and it's still my favourite thing when people walk through the door and say, oh, I own a bit of this—real sense of ownership."

With a café and marketplace for small businesses, The Clipper repeated and built on the lessons of Union Corner. "We don't do a lot of formal consultation, but we're always listening to the conversations and the things that people say and revisiting them in different ways. As well as kind of looking for bigger economic impact in terms of securing the buildings, it's also essential that we start to shift how the spaces in the street feel."

In December 2019, Nudge took on a bigger challenge when it took on The Plot, a large empty retail and storage building.

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BREATHING LIFE INTO BUILDINGS

Hannah says: “We had the confidence to go in and not worry too much about the condition, but think about what’s possible, what gets people in or gets people involved.

“We’ve filled the space with greenhouses and sheds as an allotment space to get your business growing. At the back, we’ve got the food court, which is supporting female BAME entrepreneurs, so it is bringing a whole kind of new sort of opportunity for our community to experience as well.

“One of the things that we’ve picked up is that quite often when you talk about ownership and the economy and things like that, it all gets serious quite quickly. We like to weave in a lot of joy and colour into what we do.

“We try to find ways to draw those dots from the significant economic issues that play out into our community, down to what could make a real difference right

now or next year.

And then last year, in the middle of the third lockdown, Nudge announced their fourth and most significant venture yet—they co-bought an abandoned cinema on Union Street, The Millennium.

“We’re starting to realise that because of the complex things that are holding these buildings empty, we have to operate as a private developer but with ethics, but also exploring different models and being open to that. So, this building we’ve bought 50-50 with a private investor.

“It brings a whole load of different skills to the table and supports us to make something that’s viable.

“I think there’s a real responsibility for community organisations doing this kind of thing to create the steps for other people that are coming up behind you or alongside you—sharing how you overcame the barriers and creating routes for other people to come in.” ●



JACQUELINE SLADE

**Co-founder of Stiltskin Arts & Theatre CIC
and The Soapbox Children’s Theatre**

*Link to Jacqueline’s presentation:
<https://youtu.be/eO8vzvNqsrk>*

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH PLAY

Soapbox Theatre transformed a forgotten area of a Victorian park in Plymouth and made it into a vibrant place of creativity for young people.

Married couple Jacqueline and Iain Slade began working on small commissions before finding a dilapidated second world war mustard gas decommissioning shelter, which they turned into a popular space. Jacqueline says: “We started as a street theatre company 21 years ago with a commission from Plymouth City Council, and that started us on our journey. We wanted to bring theatre to the community to interrupt people’s everyday lives.

“People would be walking down the street and suddenly meet some strange characters who introduced themselves and chatted about bizarre things. It was just about people engaging with the arts in very different places—enriching and enlivening areas.

“In 2002, we had our first child, which

made us start to work more in our local area. So rather than touring around different festivals, we began to concentrate on working in schools and working on giant theatre and art projects.

“We engaged a lot of schoolchildren in theatre projects and did a lot of residences in schools, all in Plymouth. We had 100 children on a local beach doing a massive theatre show using giant puppets for one project. And then we became artistic directors for some huge parades, such as the Lord Mayor’s Day. We were the artistic directors for the children side of it, so we worked with as many as 300 children for each parade. The young people made giant puppets, and then the primary school children made their costumes and masks, and we brought everybody together. It’s a massive celebration of our community.

“Everything we created was about the heritage of Plymouth, so children

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TRANSFORMATION THROUGH PLAY

understood it and were part of the celebration.”

The turning point of their practice happened in 2014 when they discovered the unusual windowless building in a neglected corner of Devonport Park. Devon county council planned to demolish it in the 1980s, but somehow it escaped the bulldozer.

“When we walked in, we immediately recognised we could do something quite exciting and started to think about how we could engage the community with the building, especially children. We imagined how we could use the space as a large workshop area and space where children could engage in drama activities.

“We were given the building on lease by the Council and had to go through a lot of legal jargon that we had no idea what it meant. We had no idea what they were talking about, but we wanted just to get on and do it, so we did.

“We had our first crowdfunding campaign, and this is when we realised that we were onto something. People understood our vision. We were overwhelmed by how people reacted. We managed to raise our £7,000 goal within two weeks.

The funding provided a carpet so children could use the floor and some cosmetic work, but the building didn't have running water or toilet facilities. Jacqueline said it was just like camping, having to carry in water every day. “We took washing up home for four years, so our house was full of washing up and water cans and all sorts of things, but being as tenacious as we are, we just kept going.” They had a Portaloo chained to the building, but it was vandalised. They again turned to the community, and people responded by raising £800 for a replacement.

With the help of social enterprise investment funds, Soapbox transformed the building into a fully functional, unique theatrical space for workshops, performances, and family raves.

Covid interrupted progress when the theatre had to close last year. “We had to come up with a new idea of how to use our space, so we worked with the Council to licence the outside area.”

And they came up with the ingenious idea of installing Covid-safe tipis so families could attend a show enabling touring companies who the pandemic had devastated were able to perform in front of audiences.

The latest project is to transform a nearby space that had been the haunt of drug users into a community art garden. “There is this beautiful little copse of very old

trees that we wanted to celebrate. The Council has permitted us to use this space. “It's a space that means a lot because we're in Devonport, and it's one of the deprived communities in Plymouth. It's a space where people who don't have a garden can come and feel safe. We're putting something back into the community by providing the space. It's making sure there is pride in the community.

“One way to empower our community is to listen to children and young people who spend time within our community areas. Young people especially - walk to school, hang out in areas and use outdoor spaces and services such as transport, as they do not drive around. Therefore, their opinion would be valuable to find out how they observe their locality.

“Children and young people will be the guardians of our future communities and have the right to have a say in what happens in them. That is why we have a Youth Board, which can decide, produce and deliver projects for their peers, including an Alternative Prom, comedy clubs and working on the art garden.

“If children and young people experience creativity and culture from an early age, it supports their creative thinking and encourages them to seek out culture throughout their lives; if engaged in it early on they will hopefully take action later on in life.” ●



THE STATE OF RESILIENCE

Environmental sustainability is often side-lined for the illusion of economic growth, or set in-conflict with more social outcomes. This session explores how we can ensure sustainability is at the heart of the struggle for autonomy and how community enterprises and initiatives are making this happen.

TUESDAY, MAY 4, 2021

Link to an edited YouTube version of the full State of Our Resilience session can be found here:
<https://youtu.be/OkHcMbBvkz4>



HANNAH HARRIS

**CEO
Plymouth Culture**

Link to Hannah's presentation:
<https://youtu.be/UmCQy65w46E>

CREATIVITY KEY TO SUSTAINABILITY

The Plymouth Culture Plan has three components at its core—community, environment, and inclusive economy, all interwoven by culture and creativity. Culture and creativity are the forces to empower community engagement, tackle the climate emergency and be the economic drivers to grow and sustain a diverse ecology of individuals and organisations.

Critical strategies for making Plymouth a resilient city are celebrating the landscape and connecting culture to the climate crisis; a diverse cultural democracy is also essential to give young voices to drive social change.

Hannah Harris says: “This isn’t a sector strategy about how the creative and cultural industries operate, but how culture and creativity are used, sited, and developed within the city and across our communities by way of empowering change.

“It’s a comprehensive overview of what we mean by culture, and as a result, we have headline drivers that guide the strategy and the implementation plan; these are community, environment and inclusive economy.

“When we look at the environment as a key driver, there are three focal points.

“First is that as artists, creative practitioners, and cultural organisations, we are often early adopters, so you will have seen many organisations putting

out climate emergency declarations on the understanding that they need to do something to drive that agenda.

“Then we scaled up and looked at how the creative sector should have green credentials. Our large events, festivals and spectacles that we bring to the city and produce within the city, everything we’re putting into the public domain in arts and culture should commit to a low or net impact.

“And third, there is the focus on the power of creativity. So, this is not just the individual action of artists or cultural organisations, but it’s how creativity drives social action at a local and global level. There’s something just compelling about the way arts and culture can engage people; it can challenge people, it can open conversation on really very, very difficult topics in a way that allows people to talk and question and hopefully act.

“These themes are what our culture plan is about; it’s not just about policy and strategy, it’s about how we use culture and the creativity of everyone to drive positive change and to feel empowered to do so.” Coventry City’s Cultural Trust recently received funding for a green future programme. They asked why the climate emergency wouldn’t be part of a year of culture because they are just so intrinsically linked.

Hannah says: “It might be the only way

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CREATIVITY KEY TO SUSTAINABILITY

that we get proper citizen engagement. Policy and papers are fine, but it's about making people aware and empowering them to make the change that's going to be the most important transformation." Running parallel to the Plymouth Culture Plan is developing the concept of the Fab City and the idea of the circular economy with an ambitious target of producing everything the city consumes by 2054. Hannah says: "The environment and climate emergency are not separate conversations, they're one of the same, and that applies to both policy and citizen level. So, we reduce waste, we empower local activity to happen, we keep that circular motion happening, but we are still connected globally. "The important thing here is that it's a movement and not a policy or a programme. It allows localities to interpret and build on what they have, but

with some core principles. She says Plymouth is ready for the challenge. Existing within the city are fantastic organisations and individual projects and artists which, when layered onto a city with social enterprise status, encourages a different kind of socially active community. "I think something around Fab City embodies the fact that this needs to happen at every level within a city. The culture plan also tries to take that stance; it's about the individual action of organisations or citizens and at the policy strategy level. "For me, culture is very much the driving force and connector behind these conversations, and to take forward the ideas and imagine what those products and services might look like that will help resolve some of these global challenges that we have." ●



MONA BANI

**Co-Director
The May Project Garden**

*Link to Mona's presentation:
<https://youtu.be/JS9LIWff3Yc>*

CONNECTING WITH NATURE

The May Project Garden is an innovative scheme to reconnect marginalised groups with nature for personal, social and economic transformation. Based in Morden, South London, the project uses the universal connecting tools of nature, food, and creative arts so everyone can take part despite their circumstances. What they describe as a permaculture design community garden was set up at the back of the council house of co-founder Ian Solomon-Kawall and still exists there today. Project co-director Mona Bani, who leads the work with young refugees and asylum seekers, says: "We're trying to raise the money and the awareness to buy this a community asset, but it is still a space we do not own. We've been there for about 15 years, and the first nine years of that was unincorporated and informal. "It was a grassroots entity developed by the people who were benefiting from it, so there wasn't this idea of creating programmes and initiatives that you then

retrospectively need to try and put lots of effort into doing outreach. The people that were running it and benefiting from it created it. "Our tag line is reconnecting people with nature for personal social and economic transformation. We try to give people in urban environments a more personal connection to the cause, so they feel something emotional about it, leading to collective social behaviour and economic transformation for the people involved. "We work mostly with what you might call kind of marginalised communities in the city, and that includes a lot of young refugees and asylum seekers who are generally unaccompanied minors. They often come from places that are a lot more rural and perhaps are more in touch with environmentalism in a way that we might not be." A feature of the project is the Hip Hop Garden youth programme which won a Team London award for 'greening and

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CONNECTING WITH NATURE

cleaning’ in 2015. The idea is that hip hop transcends language and cultural backgrounds, so it is an excellent way of communicating.

Mona says: “It looks to fuse popular urban youth culture, with the environmental movement to make it interesting, exciting and accessible to young people.

“It’s a way to bring them along that doesn’t criticise their way of life and tries to find a sense of synergy between the lifestyles that they lead without judging them for that, and without having a go at them for being on smartphones or wanting to buy new trainers.

“It’s to enable them to see that they could bring some of the creativity, innovation and the ideas generation of something like hip hop into the environmental sector.

“It builds on personal relationship building and community building in a genuine sense of that word, but obviously to have any kind of significant impact, we work in partnerships. We work to spread the methodology and work with projects that are doing the same thing.

The May Project Gardens collaborated with the creative media company Filmanthropy to develop a media channel—untelevised.co.uk—as an innovative way to reach young people using their language.

The platform carries social, democratic and economic content made easy to listen to or watch. For example, there is a podcast on democratic housing, a TV series on definitions of words such as

grassroots explained in short, meaningful clips, and longer reads on socialism and democracy, all framed by excellent graphics and production values.

Mona, who co-founded the channel, says: “It is to bridge the gap between the people that create media and tell the narratives with the grassroots projects and stories that need telling. And we use multimedia to engage people with our work, tell stories that challenge the mainstream media narrative and advocate for marginalised communities we work with.” Before joining the May Project Garden, Mona worked in social policy and the Cabinet Office youth policy team, which used multimedia to translate strategy and approach down to the grassroots.

“But how do we also translate findings from the grassroots up into the kind of policy sphere where it needs to be? We’re trying and do this with the funders we work with and trying to influence them to fund differently. A lot of grassroots projects perceive themselves as competing for funds. We recently applied to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation sustainable futures fund, and they said to us that they tended to work with larger organisations. “We said that we work with young people that come from all over the world, so our knowledge and our reach are kind of by default, international, and they did make an exception for us. They funded a small grassroots project for the first time, so this is the way that we are trying to move now.”



SUSAN MOORES &

JANE HEMBROW

Plymouth Scrapstore CIC

Link to Susan’s and Jane’s presentation:
<https://youtu.be/pk7nHPI81TE>

WHERE PEOPLE MEET THE PLANET

The early traces of Plymouth Scrapstore CIC emerged 27 years ago as an exit strategy for a government-funded regeneration project to help women back into work through play and childcare initiatives. The founders didn’t expect it to last long.

However, after nearly three decades, it has transformed into a viable trading company. It saves annually around 6,000’

bags for life’ of discarded useful material from recycling and landfill to spread what the organisation describes as ‘loveliness’ in their community.

Director Susan Moores thinks that arts and creativity might well be the route for citizen engagement with the climate emergency; it’s a place where the planet and people can meet.

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WHERE PEOPLE MEET PLANET

She says: “Scrapstore is the type of community-based activity that we can all grasp. It relates to the big themes of environment, low carbon, and resilience.”

Jane Hembrow, a co-founder, says: “Over the last 27 years, we’ve developed from being an association rely on grants to become a trading community interest company based in the heart of a community offering affordable, accessible creative and playful resources, employment, and volunteering opportunities. We have unknowingly created aspects of a circular economy with people who share our values.

“We know that early childhood experiences and encounters of any kind have a profound effect on future outcomes, none more so than creative and cultural encounters.

“Here in Plymouth, we want our cultural offer to integrate with our schools and education providers so that every young person has access to art, culture and creativity in the curriculum. Additionally, we want creativity to be embedded in all subjects so that we can develop creative thinkers, or job problem solvers and resilient future leaders.”

Two recent events galvanised the organisation into positive action and on towards sustainability.

In 2019 they were selected to join the Community Business Trade Up programme run by the School for Social Entrepreneurs at Dartington, near Totnes. They discovered like-minded allies on the programme and came through the rigorous and testing questioning by economic review panels that they knew the trustees might not accept.

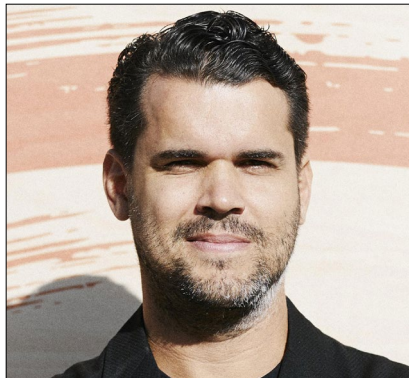
Then, secondly, came the pandemic, and suddenly the suggestions from the Trade Up review meetings seemed like good ideas. Throughout the pandemic, the Scrapstore team made up more than 5,000 creative play bags and distributed them to families in the services and broader city communities.

Jane says: “We have worked hard to embrace change. And now, at least for a while, we will open our doors and welcome our customers back in. We will trade and collaborate, always keeping our eyes open for opportunities. Why did things work for us this time? Well, we like to think it’s because we said Yes to things that we would have usually turned our backs on, just by approaching it from a different angle.

“We realised where our value is; we priced ourselves fairly, we work together and collaborate, we realised we didn’t have anything to lose, so we upped our risk-taking and decided it was all or nothing.” Currently, the Scrapstore provides 2000 hours of volunteering and 1600 hours of paid work each year and works hard to publicise its activities, posting regularly on social media and networks with at least three organisations every week.

Susan adds that the organisation is about to complete the final piece of the jigsaw by measuring their activity in terms of what they call their five Rs—refuse, reduce, reuse, repurpose and recycle.

“We are going to measure exactly how much waste we divert or reduce from landfill, rolling raising awareness and education around reuse and recycle, and we would like to attempt to measure our part in the circular economy.” ●



TOMAS DIEZ

Co-founder and director of Fab Lab Barcelona

Link to Tomas’s presentation:
<https://youtu.be/ObXQ4QW0VvE>

LOCAL THINKING GLOBAL ACTION

In 2014, the mayor of Barcelona challenged cities to produce everything they consume by 2054.

The clock is ticking, and there’s a little more than 33 years to achieve this desirable goal, given that 70 per cent of us

will live in large cities by then.

Humankind faces a dilemma because nature evolves much less quickly than current technological change causing a deep crisis in both resources and climate.

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LOCAL THINKING GLOBAL ACTION

Rapid urbanisation presents an obvious challenge but a system-changing opportunity as well.

Fab City Global is one solution; it is an initiative enabling a shift away from the industrial paradigm of 'product-in trash-out' by allowing the return of manufacture to cities supported by a 'data-in data-out' urban model.

It comprises 38 cities described as a Collective governed by a Foundation that is working to make locally productive, globally connected cities and citizens. The core of the idea is Glocalism—to keep materials circulating locally but information spreading globally.

Central is the principle that a concept designed in Chile, the most southernmost nation in the network, can be manufactured in northern Europe.

Tomas, who established the Barcelona Fab Lab in 2007, says: "We believe sustainability and liveability depend on collective action and co-designed solutions which benefit the planet and the future of humanity.

"From the local to the global, we work across multiple layers of practice and deployment, scaling the Fab Lab approach to a city and systems level.

"There is a pressing need to re-imagine cities and how they operate to respond to the ecological and social challenges of our time. Cities hold the potential for the reinvention of the current linear economy paradigm to a Circular Economy, and the Fab City Prototypes project aims to accelerate this paradigm change, allowing consumers to become actors of the design, prototyping and production processes at the local scale while sharing knowledge globally.

"I believe we are now in a very critical moment of convergence. More recently, the global pandemic has changed everything, just almost at once, so we need to be more resilient because things are changing faster at the same time. Technologies are converging, as well.

There is a small tsunami coming, which is the biotechnology revolution. That will probably turn humans into Gods, being able to manipulate life.

"We build on the premise that individual change is essential to catalyse a collective transition towards more sustainable lifestyles. In this regard, citizens need to engage in self-transformation — which can be enabled through new product cultures and new cultures of design and production.

"For example, you can share a file of how a thing is made, and the thing can be

replicated in the other side of the world without having to put it in a shipping container."

Fab City global hopes the project will establish the necessary urban frameworks and beacons to guide policymakers to scale the results to metropolitan and bioregional levels and foster partnerships between industry and local authorities. This would link micro-enterprise and citizen-led spaces with corporate and government sectors to create an ideal test ground to develop and implement an inclusive and impactful Circular Economy.

Tomas says: "The ambition is to pave the way for locally productive and globally connected cities that foster social cohesion and well-being."

The Fab City 10 principles are:

ECOLOGICAL: We take an integrated approach to environmental stewardship, working towards a zero-emission future while preserving biodiversity, rebalancing the nutrient cycle, and sustaining natural resources.

INCLUSIVE: We promote equitable and inclusive policy co-design by developing a Commons Approach, regardless of age, gender, income levels and capabilities.

GLOCALISM: We encourage global knowledge sharing between cities and territories to provide access to tools and solutions that could be adapted to local cultures and needs.

PARTICIPATORY: We engage with all stakeholders in decision-making processes and empower citizens to take ownership of innovation and change-making.

LOCALLY PRODUCTIVE: We support the efficient and shared use of all available local resources in a circular economy approach to build a productive and vibrant city.

ECONOMIC GROWTH & EMPLOYMENT: We support sustainable urban economic growth by investing in building the skills, infrastructure and policy frameworks needed for the 21st century, thanks to a thorough consideration of social and environmental externalities and the implementation of the polluter pays principle.

PEOPLE-CENTRED: We prioritise people and culture over technology so that the city can become a living and resilient ecosystem. Autonomous vehicles, digital tools, artificial intelligence and robotic machines must be placed at the service of the people's well-being and expectations.

HOLISTIC: We address urban issues in all

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LOCAL THINKING GLOBAL ACTION

their dimension and interdependencies to build sustainable, resilient and inclusive cities for everyone.

OPEN SOURCE PHILOSOPHY: We foster a Digital Commons Approach that adheres to open source principles and values open data to stimulate innovation and develop shared solutions between cities and territories.

EXPERIMENTAL: To meet the principles

just outlined, we actively support the research, experimentation and deployment of innovation, which includes but is not limited to low impact supply chains; distributed production; renewable energy and smart grids; sustainable food and urban agriculture; recycling and reuse of materials, sustainable resource management for energy, food and materials. ●

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THE STATE OF US THE PLENARY SESSION

What can we learn and where can we take municipalism next? Examples of some international projects, and looking back with a historical review to help us move forward in the future.

TUESDAY, MAY 18, 2021

Link to an edited YouTube version of the State of Us Plenary Session can be found here:
<https://youtu.be/QemtE8qEqnA>



KALI AKUNO

**Co-founder and Co-director of
Cooperation Jackson**

Link to Speaker's presentation:
<https://youtu.be/6Kb-Ibp7W4U>

BUILDING A SELF-SUFFICIENT FUTURE

Cooperation Jackson is a solidarity economy in Jackson, Mississippi, comprised of cooperatives and worker-owned, democratically self-managed enterprises.

Its long-term goal is to develop four interconnected and interdependent institutions: a federation of local worker cooperatives, a cooperative incubator, a cooperative education and training centre, and a cooperative bank or financial institution.

The organisation believes that organising and empowering the under and unemployed sectors of the working class, particularly from Black and Latino communities, to build worker-owned cooperatives will be a catalyst for the democratisation of the US economy and society overall.

Cooperation Jackson co-founder and co-director Kali Akuno says the organisation draws on centuries of traditions and models around black cooperatives and black efforts in mutual aid.

Katrina, a category five hurricane that hit the Southern states in 2005, causing more than 1,800 deaths and \$1125 billion in damage, accelerated the need for community action.

Kali says: "We were built in part to respond to the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and the lessons that we had learned in Mississippi and Louisiana

about the government's lack of a response. There was a very intentional benign neglect towards so many communities and particularly towards black, Vietnamese and indigenous people, and Latinos and migrant workers in those areas."

And the threats continue. In February, a polar vortex that engulfed the Gulf Coast devastated Jackson. Thousands of the city's residents experienced power outages, freezing temperatures, and water deprivation during the freeze. Even now, many live without running water or adequate water pressure because of the city's outdated infrastructure.

They face the challenges of climate change and the consolidation of the right-wing despite Trump's demise combined with an ultra-conservative State government that blocks federal funding. The State's governor is taking the lead on denying federal benefits, so people can't get unemployment benefit, and there's no childcare for many, including women who want to re-enter the workforce. And in addition, there is Covid. Kali says: "We tried to design a programme that would build the community's capacity to serve as many of its material, and social needs as possible, while at the same time not letting the government off the hook for its obligations and responsibilities.

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BUILDING A SELF-SUFFICIENT FUTURE

But we also learnt from Katrina that we don't want to be dependent on the government because it could very easily, as demonstrated then, choose to overlook its responsibilities, look the other way, and just enable suffering.

"It was about building up our productive institutions, to deal with food and housing and in some with transportation and healthcare. These became kind of front and centre of building our model."

The task at hand is dealing with the new post-Covid reality. In one sense, it is responding to the emergencies they forecast 15 years ago by accelerating the building of a model of community development and economic democracy from the grassroots up.

"How do we do so in a way that we ensure that what remains in the common space, and is not something that's privately appropriated, or state-controlled and regulated as to then reinforce all the existing dynamics and inequalities?"

"So, for us, we're talking about building an autonomous infrastructure. One of the key pieces that we've been working on, as hard and as diligently as we can over the past two months, is building up our capacity by creating a Community Land Trust, one of the key institutions.

"It is the cornerstone institution of cooperation, building our capacity to have our water storage and our energy utility in the form of a solar farm on it, and we've already made some significant headway.

"Just in the past two months of mobilising the community and drawing resources directly from the community, we've built up this capacity. So, in many respects, we think this is a new vision of the future and a new set of practices that we're going to have to adopt.

"Given the political dynamics, we don't see the crumbling infrastructure that exists within the United States, being repaired through the kind of standard political process, anytime soon.

"This is a challenge within itself, but it also presents more opportunity because, as a result, we see more people having to become engaged in direct governance questions in their community."

The rising number of people engaging in the community over the last 15 years reflects this interest.

"There was a high level of community engagement pre-Covid, but this has gone up in the past two months, mainly through our people's assemblies and things of that nature. The challenge is now how to translate this into a set of common institutions that everybody can buy into and sustain in the long haul.

"We all know that in times of crisis, folks need immediate help, but we also need to address the systemic issues that have been ignored for decades. These are the kind of creative tensions that we are aware of and trying to get ahead of to the best of our ability.

"We're looking forward to the challenge because I think, in our case, I would be remiss in saying that we have some significant concerns about the future, not only in Mississippi but the United States because of the growing strength of the right. One would think that after what happened on January six that Trump and many of the forces that support him would have become weaker politically when in fact, they're becoming more consolidated and stronger.

"This is a major counterpoint that we have to organise for in the face of what the right historically in the United States has been willing to commit tremendous acts of violence, particularly against black and Latino indigenous people.

"We believe this could move many of the critical poor white communities which often live very adjacent to us, move them in some dynamic ways that take them out of the influence of many of these right-wing forces." ●



ELENA TARIFA

**District Counsellor
Barcelona en Comú**

*Link to Speaker's presentation:
<https://youtu.be/EoAxo5EADMs>*

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POWER FOR THE COMMON GOOD

Barcelona en Comú (Barcelona in Common) began in June 2014 when neighbourhood activists and cooperative movements joined with political activists to reclaim the city for its citizens. Previously, there had been a political crisis when traditional institutions had failed, and the many citizen movements had organised and proposed people-led solutions.

Elena Tarifa says: “We took the social networks, we took the streets, but we found that change was blocked from above by the institutions, so, the moment had arrived to take back the institutions and put them at the service of the common good.

“We decided to win back the city to their citizens, through Barcelona en Comú, a citizen platform led by activists and ordinary people.”

The new political platform developed two themes.

The first was a confluence, a way to explain the bottom-up method of merging ideas by putting the community and the common good first.

The second was about local geography and fighting from the areas they knew best—the local streets and neighbourhoods.

This strategy created the Barcelona in Common platform, everyone with the same goal and the same common view.

“Cities have always been a place of encounter, of exchanges of ideas, of innovation, and when necessary, of revolution. Cities are where democracy was born, and they are and will be where we can start to recover power.

“There was also pragmatism and our desire to win: we thought we had a better chance of winning with a bottom-up approach in our city.”

This bottom-up approach is what Barcelona calls new municipalism.

Elena says: “Municipal level politics is the easier way for ordinary people to impact on shaping politics every day and everywhere. It has more significant

potential in deepening democracy and feminising politics than the State level action.

“States have not been able to address current problems like climate change, migration, and the refugee crisis. Municipalism allows us to act beyond the traditional theoretical and binary debates; we can discuss complex issues. It is time to walk together towards concrete goals and solutions for people’s everyday problems, such as housing, tourism, and city mobility.

“At the local level, it is easier to create mechanisms of participation for our diverse population to include migrants, women, and elders. And join other people with similar motivation to change things; at the same time, we promote autonomy and participation, as we can open debates in the city.”

The project implemented innovation in citizenship participation, such as holding meetings in public squares, and the mayor answers neighbourhood enquiries once every two weeks. After the pandemic, she will visit two neighbourhoods every week without being announced.

However, there’s been a setback to the new participatory municipal and district plan (online and face-to-face participation).

The High Court of Justice has ruled against it, as it allowed the possibility of popular citizen initiatives—the first one was to municipalise the city’s water supply.

Elena says: “We have what we call e-democracy through the use of the online platform decidim.barcelona, an open-source, traceable platform, which we have shared with other municipalities, and that allowed us to build our electoral program collaboratively.

“It has primarily been a tool for citizenship to decide on local policies.

For instance, both individual citizens and organisations could introduce proposals for the Municipal Action Plan and then vote for them. We now have the first Participatory Budget process, where 30

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POWER FOR THE COMMON GOOD

million euros of the city investment can be directly decided by Barcelona citizens; there are 200 final projects, 20 for each district to be finally voted this June. So, for us, winning back the city is about more than winning the local elections; it means putting a new transparent and participatory model of local government, which is under citizen control, into practice. It also means implementing fair, redistributive and sustainable policies to respond to the economic and political crisis.”

Feminism has underpinned many of the changes. For example, the executive and administrative teams are collective and gender-balanced, and the team that governs the city is 60-per-cent female. Elena says: “We believe that all voices should be heard, and so we need to develop more horizontal and democratic ways of organising our meetings. These include shorter speaking times, making sure it is not always the same people who speak and ensuring that all decisions are taken collectively.

“So, for instance, men speak longer, so we give the floor alternatively to women and encourage their participation.”

There has also been the redefining of who is an expert: many of the people who participate in neighbourhood assemblies understand the daily reality of their communities and have knowledge that is extremely important to those in elected office and who want to design public policies that work.

The most challenging task faced has been a genuine sharing of responsibilities, political and personal, between men and women.

“Domestic tasks and caring roles are distributed unequally between women and men, with most of them falling to women. We try to avoid scheduling meetings at the end of the working day and create spaces where children can also be present and invest organisational funds in play areas and child-friendly zones. We also need to take advantage of the opportunities offered by tools for digital participation.”

Equitable policies include the planning of the transport network in the city to account for the different ways in which men and women move around; streets for the people, and not for the car; a recognition that care work is essential to both life and the generation of wealth in society; this shift in perspective implies modifying public budgets to provide a collective response to the care needs; creating a free municipal babysitting service at the most vulnerable

neighbourhoods; doubling attention to gender violence victims; offering specific labour counselling to more than 6,000 women in precarious situations; reducing by 35% the number of homeless women creating specific centres for them; more than 50 initiatives to promote women in the technological sector and helping transgender people through a specific job counselling service.

Elena says: “From the beginning, those of us who participated in Barcelona en Comú were sure that the democratic rebellion in Barcelona wouldn’t just be a local phenomenon. We wanted Barcelona to be the trigger for a citizen revolution in Catalonia, Spain, Europe and beyond. “All over the world, we find ourselves in the frame of an economic and a representation crisis, where we are all facing similar challenges as the fight against the extreme-right populists. “We think we can already begin by changing things from below, from the local level, so we see municipalism as a real tool of change for Europe and the world.”

<https://fearlesscities.com/en>





THOBILE CHITTENDEN

CEO
Makers Valley Partnership

Link to Speaker's presentation:
<https://youtu.be/EOyYMMulQV0>

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MAKING THE MOMENTUM

Makers Valley Partnership (MVP) is an established non-profit organisation supporting the making and change-making activities in an inner-city neighbourhood of Johannesburg, S.A. The five-kilometre square area hosts much creative entrepreneurship in the area; artists, cultural practitioners, artisans, urban gardeners, carpenters, shoemakers, metal and woodworkers, clothing designers and others, live and work in the Valley.

The people who live and work there are diverse in ethnicity and religion. Most residents are poor, and many unemployed. Visible urban decay and associated social skills contrast with pockets of vibrant business development in formal and informal sectors. Lack of access to employment is most prevalent among the youth, hence the vision to support the rising tide of entrepreneurship in the Valley.

Thobile says: "1994 was a historical year in South Africa because it was the first time black and African people could vote. There was a promise of transformation and hope. But 27 years later, it's not the case, and there's a sense of disappointment, frustration and real anger.

"There's a sense of 'why we are waiting?' Why are we relying on the government to provide change that they've promised over these 27 years, and it hasn't come to fruition."

As well as disappointment, the MVP grapples daily with the vast inequalities in South African society and the high crime rate.

"The anger is because the government that came into power and promised the world to us as majority black and African people are the very same people to steal from us to take what we were promised into their own hands and their own hands and their own pockets.

"What is also disappointing is that when COVID-19 came, it was an opportunity for our government to put in new policies.

It was an opportunity for change to strengthen Social Security. Unfortunately, instead of that, an investigation into 10.5 billion Rands of fraud and corruption is underway."

Despite the macro response to Covid being disappointing, MVP saw the pandemic as a chance to strengthen grassroots engagement. Thobile says that just as the government showed its true negative self in the face of Covid, so did the community— it mobilised itself in a positive collective act of togetherness.

"It has put a real spanner into the works of our country, which is disappointing because, in our community, we've seen COVID bring us together and spark creativity and innovation."

Pre-Covid, MVP members had undertaken exchange programmes, including visiting Plymouth, to seek examples of how they might organise. "We were looking at what we could replicate and strengthen what we were doing in our community, always believing that creating social entrepreneurship is a driving force for our community and Johannesburg.

Their mandate was to create a well-being economy through social and creative entrepreneurship development.

"We created this ourselves; it's not a government thing. We mobilised the community by asking; how can we create a vision? We've been impoverished for way too long. We were not going to wait for anyone to come and save the day."

South Africa's massive youth population has a severe unemployment problem - around 46% - which encourages young people to leave the underserved districts to search for better opportunities. Some volunteer with an NGO, which is how most non-profits in South Africa work. Thobile says: "With our model of social entrepreneurship, we say, hey, you've got excellent ideas for societal issues that you have experienced in this community. Why don't you join us to incubate your idea

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MAKING THE MOMENTUM

that will address that need you have faced and passionate about?

“We can say, you have the idea, the vision, the experience, you are on the ground, we can help you create this enterprise, which will not only address the social issue, but also be sustainable, give you an income to live and in the community, and there’s no reason for you to leave. We reduce the cycle of poverty.”

MVP had not long been operating when Covid struck, but it gave them the chance to bring the community together.

Despite police interference, they surveyed 2,000 households to discover their needs and ask how they had been affected by the pandemic. They understood they needed to be more self-reliant and resilient in the face of their problems. Regeneration became a keyword, and they hit on the idea of urban farming.

Urban farming is something black Africans would be expected to be doing, but western habits and consumerism had seen it die out. Its reintroduction brought the community together. The elderly became helpful because of their knowledge, and it led to a chain of innovations during the pandemic.

They set up a soup kitchen during the pandemic, which attracted large queues and unwelcome police intervention. But that one kitchen has now been decentralised into six locations, each run by Kitchen Champions—previously unemployed mothers. Others have been

trained and use the pots and pans to create a mobile kitchen for weddings, funerals and markets. Surplus and waste food are used in a mini biogas digester, which makes the fuel to use in cooking. “It’s been amazing to see people who were unemployed find use for themselves, but also find a use for their community. What we’re doing with the community kitchens is just thinking about how we can also create a circular economy. We are always looking at little solutions around that, but also because the solutions are close at hand, and it’s educating our community at the same time.”

The next project focused on recycling which is an unknown concept to many black South Africans. After a two-week pilot, a couple in their 20s will run the project that has a chance to earn revenue. A flyer campaign in the Valley, printed in 11 languages, encouraged 350 people to recycle every week, enough to open a community Swap Shop of recycled goods. Thobile says: “We’ve come to think of solutions together because we have this range of diverse minds, young and old, various ethnicities and religions, all coming together, because of the thing that has impacted us all equally. What we’ve started to see is this momentum build, and kind of a ripple effect of more people wanting to get involved more people understanding this concept of, hey I can do something and not just sit at home.”

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MATTHEW THOMPSON

**Critical Urban Geographer
University of Liverpool**

Link to Speaker’s presentation:
https://youtu.be/u62Yv_FiF1o

THE CONTEXT OF MUNICIPALISM

To give context to the State of Us 2021 conference, Matthew Thompson reviewed the early literature on municipalism and referenced how early ideas had influenced some of the presented projects.

“The novelty of new municipalism resides in a newly-politicised and radical-reformist orientation towards the (local) state, in imagining new institutional formations that embody urban rather than state logics – be

that through challenging traditional party politics with digitally-mediated citizen platforms; channelling economic development through non-state urban networks of anchor institutions and co-ops; or building autonomous federations of urban assemblies in place of the state. These represent three new municipalist trajectories.” (Matthew Thompson, 2020) *

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THE CONTEXT OF MUNICIPALISM

The historical and ideological roots of municipalism, referenced by Murray Bookchin and his daughter Debbie, are influential in the movement today in Spain. His idea was around drawing on historical examples of assemblies, cooperatives and communes, for instance, the Paris Commune in 1871, the revolutionary space where people of Paris took Paris away from the French state for several weeks.

Bookchin draws out an idea of citizenship as different to national state citizenship, so the citizenship involved in municipalism is what he calls libertarian municipalism; other names include communalism and democratic confederalism.

The idea of citizenship bound up with cities rather than urbanisation is because cities are centres of activity. They enable encounter and assembly to allow people to come together and deliberate, work off each other and organise. This idea is the politics of proximity, which is at the centre of what we might call socialism or communalism.

Now we have people's assemblies and cooperatives in this space. These together lay the foundation for different kinds of policy alternatives that eventually replace the nation-state and capitalism. These are the sort of far-reaching radical theories picked up in recent years around the rise of fascism.

These conditions lead to a distinctive strategic approach (dual power), like Cooperation Jackson. A secondary pole of power to the nation-state is built outside of the nation-state to supersede it. You expand the commons, build alternative autonomous institutions like cooperatives and people's assemblies that push for a kind of pre-figurative alternative that is feminist, anti-racist and ecologically sustainable and moves towards a post-capitalism or solidarity economy. It is something that can emerge out of the shell of the old.

At the same time, the first approach is supported by another, which is about engaging with the state, leveraging concessions, taking hold of local political institutions, and mobilising social movements, as we see in the case of Barcelona, which is a real exemplar. The next stage is to re-imagine and transform that state from the inside through guerrilla occupation or insurgency and use the power that you gain to cultivate autonomous power. Cooperation Jackson embodies this process quite beautifully.

In slide 4, Matthew analyses the three forms of municipalism — managed,

platform and autonomous — that he wrote about in an article published in March 2020 *. Each has its distinctive roots—ethos, process, politics, and outcomes.

Cooperation Jackson is an autonomous style of municipalism. Spanish examples are what he argues to be platform municipalism because they rely on citizen platforms that are different to state. They also use technological and digital media for decision making. I've also tried to compare these two kinds of more quintessential municipalism with a third, which I describe as managed municipalism, which is around the community wealth building movement that's emerged in the US and the UK in the last few years, very much around the Preston model. It is tied up with outcomes around economic democracy through procurement and worker and co-ops. The three models (or poles) of municipalism can be in, against and beyond the state.

Is municipalism political or economic democracy? It's both summed up in Cooperation Jackson's slogan the democratisation society and the socialisation of production.

Debbie Bookchin is much involved in Spain, and she says: "New municipalism is not just about implementing progressive policies but about returning power to ordinary people."

There is an idea of collective theory building, so we're not just relying on off the shelf models from elsewhere; we're doing this together. So, the big question for me is can we design this stuff from the top-down, with progressive technocratic cities or others like us, people involved in coops, people engaged in community organising?

Municipalism has been tried before in London in the 1980s. It was prototypical municipalism, so they were anti-racist, anti-imperialist, anti-sexist and quite anti-capitalist, and they supported a lot of cooperatives and community organising in London. They embodied many of the principles we take for granted today. They were influenced by the Greater London Council and the Labour government, and the book *In and Against the State*. This is where this phrase comes from. It was written in 1979 by a collective that included John McDonnell, the former Shadow Chancellor and laid the groundwork for a kind of insurgency or guerrilla tactics in the bureaucracies of the state and tried to transform it from within.

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We see these ideas resounding through the decades and taking hold in places like Preston.

The National Organisation for Local Economies (CLES), the think tank driving forward what is going on in Preston today, was very much responsible for those original ideas around procurement flows and diverting some of the procurement of anchor institutions to work on costs and social enterprises, generating the sort of municipalist action that is from the top down. The ideas from CLES and the New Economics Foundation (NEF) came out of the earlier waves in the 1980s, so they're coming back around full circle.

The 2021 elections were dire for Labour nationally, but in those areas that have experimented with the Preston model of community wealth building, the vote share increased, so it wasn't all doom and gloom.

I want to argue that they don't necessarily go far enough with community wealth building as part of that management tradition; there's a gap somewhere within this sort of this strategic approach.

The Marxist sociologist Henri Lefebvre said to change life, we must first change space - creating space for the struggle for dual power. Margaret Kohn wrote of the lived space constructed in the late 19th century around the Italian province of Emilia Romagna that led to some of the most powerful cooperative sectors in the world.

There was space for coops and mutual aid societies to have offices and workshops. They also contained theatres and bars, spaces from counselling, seminar rooms and lecture rooms. Spaces effectively for collective joy and public education; the kind of material spaces that generate the solidarities and mutual learning; and the strategic thinking required to build a movement. I think that's what's lacking today.

Space for people to meet and discuss revolutionary ideas was crucial to the French Revolution and the revolutionary work carried out in Emilia Romagna, where they introduced universal non-specialised education.

Education is a big part of these movements; we need to think about how we should do this; to start changing hearts and minds more broadly and across the public and not just within our kind of activist spaces.

There are currently several different forms of municipalism developing in the UK. The SANE Collective in Glasgow is trying to spark public conversation, leading to

the idea of a people's plans.

Cooperation Towns are springing up partly inspired by Cooperation Jackson, mostly comprised of coops trying to solve food poverty and create and create solidarity around food in urban areas. In Liverpool, Beacon is a platform that promotes working-class unity, grassroots activism, and community action, which is trying to move past the recent toxic politics seen in the city. Middleton Cooperating is one of many organisations trying to do community wealth building from the bottom up.

As for top-down initiatives, there have been calls on Andy Burnham to create a Land Commission, like the one in Liverpool.

In Plymouth, there are several approaches. There has been a cooperative council (it did until recently) pursuing public-common partnerships like Plymouth Energy Partnership and connected with others via the Cooperative Councils Innovation Network. There is a social and solidarity economy and ecosystem in place via Plymouth Social Enterprise Network and Power to Change. Several anchor organisations at work, including the Real Ideas Organisation, Nudge Community Builders and the Millfields Trust. The biggest asset is this very long-standing tradition, a very rich ecosystem of social solidarity economy organising. Plymouth is one of four western port cities, working-class cities where community anchor organisations act as a conduit and hubs between citizens and anchor institutions.

Internationally, there are the Transnational Institute, a research and advocacy institute committed to building a just, democratic and sustainable planet, Cities for Change, coordinated by Amsterdam, is a forum and online project, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation is a transnational alternative policy group and educational institution, centred in Germany, the Urban Political podcast, and the Minim Observatory, an online magazine and database.

* <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0309132520909480>

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