

Solidarity Los Angeles Project

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Solidarity economy is a framework for a new economic system—a transformation of capitalism—that considers equity in all dimensions and the rights of Mother Earth. The concept was first articulated by the alter-globalization movement in 1997 which rejected the reduction of economic relationships to the logic of competition and the so-called natural laws of the market. A statement by a gathering of grassroots organizations in Lima, Peru declared that, instead, the solidarity economy incorporates “cooperation, collective sharing and action, while putting the human being at the center of the economic and social development.”¹

The first step in developing a solidarity economy is to acknowledge the myriad practices that already occur in contradiction to capitalism.² Mapping is construed as a *creative* activity, as opposed to a passive means for documenting existing reality.³ The very act of mapping makes certain human activities *real* by making them *visible*. The social relationships that comprise the economy can be visualized as an iceberg, where only the tip is visible to the naked eye.⁴ However, dive deeper and a plethora of relationships, types of exchanges, and livelihoods thrive. In the case of neoliberalism, the current phase of capitalism, what is visible are wage labor, privatization and the erosion of the welfare state, and the distribution of goods and services in a market.⁵

The Solidarity Los Angeles project intends to produce a countermap of the diverse economy in the region. Similar efforts have taken place in New York City, Philadelphia, and Worcester, Massachusetts, but no study has documented the scale and complexity of the solidarity economy such that which exists in Los Angeles, especially in low-income communities of color.⁶ The county spans close to 700 square miles and is the home to over 10 million—half of the residents are nonwhite and more than half speak a language other than English.⁷ We know, anecdotally, that many in the region survive through the informal economy and rely on culturally-rooted practices imported to the U.S. For example, 50,000 sidewalk vendors sell food and merchandise in defiance of the law in the street, especially in the neighborhoods of Boyle Heights and South Los Angeles.⁸ The vendors contribute to a \$504 million shadow economy in the region, providing neighbors with fresh and healthy foods and maintaining public safety and cleanliness on city streets.

Our project will adapt the solidarity economy framework to the existing commerce found amongst the region’s multiracial and immigrant communities. We start with a working definition of the solidarity economy by the US Solidarity Economy Network, vetted by the Solidarity LA working group and a community advisory board.⁹ The working group had its first meeting of 30 participants including cooperative lawyers, worker cooperatives, housing cooperatives, land trusts, tenant’s union, union cooperative council, and ecovillage.¹⁰ The community advisory board includes leaders from regional cooperatives, cooperative developers, land trusts, housing cooperatives, and participating budgeting initiatives.

¹ Lima Declaration, July 1997, <https://ussen.org/portfolio/lima-declaration-1997/> (accessed 5/30/17).

² Craig Borowiak, et al., 2017, “Navigating the Fault Lines: Race and Class in Philadelphia’s Solidarity Economy,” *Antipode*, Vol. 50, Issue 3, 1-27.

³ Maliha Safri, et al., 2016, “Putting the Solidarity Economy on the Map,” *Journal of Design Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1.

⁴ J.K. Gibson-Graham, 2006, *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 70.

⁵ Emily Kawano, April 2018, “Solidarity Economy workshop,” Thrive conference (Santa Ana, CA).

⁶ Borowiak, “Navigating the Fault Lines,” *Antipode*.

⁷ American Community Survey, 2016, 5-year estimates for Los Angeles County.

⁸ Yvonne Yen Liu et al., 2015, *Sidewalk Stimulus: Economic and Geographic Impact of Los Angeles Street Vendors*, Economic Roundtable, <https://economicrt.org/publication/sidewalk-stimulus/> (accessed 5/30/17).

⁹ “Solidarity Economy Typology, Definition and Boundaries,” <http://solidarityeconomy.us/definition/> (accessed 5/30/18).

¹⁰ Solidarity Los Angeles Running Notes, <http://tiny.cc/solidarityla> (accessed 5/30/18).

The project aims to produce the following:

1. A mapping platform
2. A working framework for the solidarity economy in Los Angeles
3. A database of solidarity economy institutions and practitioners
4. An oral history of solidarity economy practices
5. A mapping toolkit to engage communities in solidarity economy mapping

We intend to do this in the following phases:

1. *Define the solidarity economy framework* – A working group will adapt the definition by the US Solidarity Economy Network to fit the diverse economy in Los Angeles. This will be a working framework subject to modification based on our mapping workshops.
2. *Create the mapping platform* – We partner with Data Commons Cooperative to adapt their Stone Soup platform for our map. This is the infrastructure for other solidarity economy maps, including the U.S. map (solidarityeconomy.us) and Find.coop directory.
3. *Survey the field for existing practices* – The working group will draft a survey to assess the depth and breadth of solidarity economy activities, both in the region’s past and present. The survey will be deployed both in person by a surveyor as well as online, promoted through social media. The results of the survey will be published on our website, as well as inform elements of the map.
4. *Datathons* -- We will host at least three datathons to analyze survey results and locate existing databases of solidarity economy, such as credit union directories. We will outreach to the data science, mapmaking, and research justice communities for participants.
5. *Interview members of the community advisory board* – We will ask members representing key sectors in the solidarity economy for feedback on the framework, the survey and its results, and the mapping platform and toolkit. We will target our outputs to their constituents.
6. *Draft the mapping toolkit* – The mapping toolkit will walk communities through hosting a mapping workshop to define solidarity economy, identify existing practices, and add their places to the mapping platform. We aim to make the toolkit accessible in languages spoken by communities in Los Angeles.
7. *Deploy the mapping toolkit in, at least, five site-specific workshops throughout Los Angeles* – We hope to site these workshops in the five municipal regions: Central, South, Northeast, Eastside, San Fernando Valley, and Westside.

Our partners include the Data Commons Cooperative and Color Coded. The Data Commons Cooperative is a movement-building organization, owned and controlled by cooperative development centers, federations, solidarity economy groups, and others, who want to maintain robust, accurate, useful platforms for sharing information.¹¹ The cooperative gathers information and creates tools that make it easy for members to access each other’s data, and broadcast information to the public. Color Coded is a transformative space that centers historically-excluded people in the co-teaching, co-creation, and co-ownership of new technologies.¹² Their work supports and amplifies groups and individuals who are uplifting and sustaining communities of color—in Los Angeles and beyond.

The legacy of the project will be the mapping platform which we plan to maintain, as well as the mapping toolkit which we will make available on our website. We will seek ongoing funding to maintain both the platform and to schedule successive mapping workshops currently underrepresented in diverse economy maps—including South Los Angeles, San Gabriel Valley, and the High Desert area (including Lancaster and Palmdale).¹³

¹¹ Data Commons Cooperative, <http://datacommons.coop/> (accessed 5/30/18).

¹² Color Coded, <https://colorcoded.la/> (accessed 5/30/18).

¹³ Shareable, “Share Pasadena and Los Angeles Map,” <https://www.shareable.net/community-maps> (accessed 5/30/17).