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For what it's worth: regional equity, community organizing, and metropolitan America

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Regional equity has taken off as a field of research and activism in recent years. Within the general field, three important variants have emerged: community development regionalism, in which the main interest is in using regional levers to promote a new form of community revitalization; policy change regionalism, in which the main emphasis is on shifting government rules to better distribute metropolitan resources; and social movement regionalism, in which the focus is on mobilizing communities for collective action at a regional level. Drawing on a series of case studies from across the country, we argue that all these variants have a role but that social movement regionalism may be particularly effective in productively addressing the inevitable tensions and conflicts that emerge in regional equity strategies, including the relationship to business-oriented regionalism, labor–community alliances, and the role of race. We conclude by speculating on the recent efforts of social movement regionalism to scale up, suggesting that this could present an important contribution to a broader and deeper movement for progressive social change in the United States.

Keywords: community-based regionalism; regional equity; social movements; equitable development

Introduction

In November 2002, PolicyLink – a national intermediary focused on issues of community development and community building – worked with a group of funders and other organizations to develop and host a “National Summit” on “Promoting Regional Equity.” Held in Los Angeles, a place traditionally viewed as an anathema to regional collaboration or coordination, the organizers quietly prayed that at least 300 people would gather to discuss the ideas around regional organizing and policy that had been bubbling up around the country. The low expectations were reasonable: many of the people and organizations PolicyLink sought to include in the big tent of “regional equity” thought of themselves as community developers, labor union leaders, smart growth advocates, community organizers, urban planners, faith-based activists, and/or environmental justice proponents – almost anything but equity-oriented regionalists.

What happens if you throw a party and nobody comes? Fortunately, PolicyLink did not have to find out: over 600 individuals showed, swamping the facility that had

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been designated for the conference. Enthusiastic and spirited conversations marked the event – but also struggle, as participants tried to come to grips with whether they really did intersect and how. Most striking was the honest admission by many attendees that tackling the large regional forces that had created the contemporary metropolitan mess was going to require a whole series of new partnerships and capacities.

Fast forward two and a half years to May 2005: “The Second National Summit,” this time in Philadelphia and this time labeled “Advancing Regional Equity.” Over 1300 people showed up, roughly twice the goal set by the event organizers. While there were some notable gaps in geographic representation, especially the South and the Mountain West, participants hailed from all around the country. Once again, debate was vigorous: in one particularly heated session, residents from nearby Camden, New Jersey, decried “regional equity” as an outside imposition that was producing gentrification and shifting resources away from the city to inner ring suburbs, all in the name of making a regional connection.

Fast forward once again nearly three years to March 2008, when “Regional Equity 08: The Third National Summit on Equitable Development, Social Justice and Smart Growth” was held in New Orleans. This time, nearly 2000 participants gathered for an in-depth assessment of strategies and policies to better connect low-income communities to resources and opportunities. In the background lay the wreckage of Katrina, and the scars of poverty it had revealed, and in the air was talk of building a new regional equity movement that could combat the slow-motion unnatural disasters occurring in so many cities, suburbs, and rural areas. Debate was vigorous once again: where was this movement really headed? What was its relationship to national politics? How could it begin to fully incorporate the opportunities opened by climate change initiatives and the promise of green jobs?

Big crowds and vibrant conversations – in the well-known opening words of a protest song of the 1960s, “there’s something happening here . . .” The regional equity perspective has clearly gained traction, supported by growing research on the importance of regions to the evolution of economic, environmental and social inequalities, and prompted by the organizing strategies of numerous community-based, labor, and even business-oriented organizations. So something is happening but, as noted in the equally famous second line of that protest song, “What it is ain’t exactly clear.”

Part of the problem is that perspectives take some time to gain a fixed form. While this is characteristic of any paradigm, there is also a problem peculiar to regional equity thinking. Because many of the early proponents of regional equity have tended to stress collaboration and commonality, including the compatibility of economic growth, environmental protection, and a fairer distribution of resources (see, for example, Pastor, Dreier, Grigsby, & Garza, 2000), they have been able to develop unlikely alliances, such as those between inner-city activists and suburban green-space advocates. But while an “optimal level of fog” might be useful in an early period, being analytically clear about the strands that comprise the regional equity perspective may be helpful as organizations navigate the tensions, tightropes and inevitable conflicts that arise on the ground.

In this article, we draw on a multi-year engagement with, and research on, innovative regional equity strategies from around the country (Pastor, Benner, & Matsuoka, 2009). We argue that the regional equity perspective can be understood to consist of three main variants: *community development regionalism*, in which the

main interest is using regional levers to promote a new form of community revitalization; *policy reform regionalism*, in which the primary emphasis is on shifting government rules to better distribute metropolitan resources; and (3) *social movement regionalism*, in which the principal goal is to build on a sense of grievance in order to mobilize communities for mass collective action at a regional level.

These three variants share much in common, but also have significantly different constituencies, unequal access to resources, and sometimes differing strategies. Furthermore, all three types of regional equity advocates are not operating in a vacuum. They have to interact with a range of other regional initiatives, including business-sponsored public-private collaborations and a more planning-oriented and environmentally-oriented emphasis on smart growth; some of these other frameworks will have equity as a secondary goal at best, and an afterthought at worst. Finally, at least one of these variants – social movement regionalism – is bound to cause conflict: indeed, it is intended to do exactly that.

We do think there is a way to thread together the three variants under one regional equity tent: the community developers work on projects that demonstrate what is possible, the policy reform strategists focus on changing policy to make the possible the norm, and the social movement regionalist build power to shift politics and thus policy. We privilege, however, the social movement element, recognizing that the nitty-gritty of constituency mobilization and regional coalition-building is not merely a method to change tax rules and zoning regulations; we see it (as so do the activists pursuing it) as a way to lay the groundwork, region by region, community by community, for the revitalization of a national progressive movement.

We begin below by elaborating on the three main types of regional equity. Drawing from cases in our longer study (Pastor, Benner, & Matsuoka, 2009), we then turn to an examination of how regional equity advocates are addressing some of the tensions and tightropes of power-building at a regional scale, including tensions between different types of regional equity initiatives, tensions with other regional initiatives – particularly those rooted in business-led initiatives – and tensions related to racial dynamics within regional equity initiatives. Our concluding section discusses ways in which regional equity activists are trying to scale up to state and national levels to impact and shore up progressive politics in America.

Understanding regional equity

There are many ways to slice and dice the emerging regional equity framework. One could look at philosophical or ideological views, drawing distinctions between those rooted in more or less radical approaches to analysis or organizing. One could examine issue areas, clumping together those who take on transportation, those who tackle housing, and those who focus on environmental disparities. One could perform a breakdown of constituent bases, analyzing whether the main supporters for any particular variant of the regional equity perspective stem from labor, community groups, community developers, urban officials, or struggling suburban mayors.

Here, we take a different tack, one related to an analytical frame that we find more compelling: the distinction between projects, policies, and politics. We suggest that community development regionalism has as its focus the use of regional tools to achieve particular *projects* – in this view, regionalism offers a set of new strategies to

achieve the traditional objectives associated with community development corporations (CDCs) and related local efforts. We postulate that policy reform regionalism focuses on changes in *policy* that affect regional distribution of resources – this perspective is often not associated with any particular constituency, and it tends to be more focused on technical issues and collaboration with, and persuasion of, existing policy-makers. Finally, we argue that social movement regionalism is being built by a set of advocates who have seen regionalism as a vehicle for doing *politics* – that is, for building power in the interests of building a broader coalition for social and economic justice.

Community development regionalism

Community developers are among urban America's unsung heroes. They build housing where private developers have failed. They create job-training programs where both skills and opportunities are in short supply. They offer family-support programs where families are often non-traditional and under considerable economic, social, and environmental stress. Where and when they succeed, it seems like a testimony to their will and faith, a miracle of achievement against the toughest odds.

But the dramatic success stories are often cast against a backdrop of policies and practices that drain resources from the communities in which they are based. In *Inside Game, Outside Game*, David Rusk (1999) analyzes the impact of 34 "exemplary" CDCs over the 1970s and 1980s. He found that, on average, poverty rates actually rose faster in the neighborhoods in which these CDCs were operating than they did in the metropolitan areas in which they existed. There were, of course, some successes – and one can also argue that the neighborhoods might have fared worse in the absence of CDC activity. Still, Rusk (1999) suggests that CDCs might usefully shift to the "outside game" – organizing to change rules in regions so as to share tax resources and constrain outward sprawl, and working to deconcentrate the poor by promoting affordable housing in existing suburbs.

Some have argued that Rusk's (1999) frame disparages local capabilities, with critics like Imbroscio (2006) suggesting that the CDCs' failure to move the needle on poverty is mostly due to a shift to market-oriented development and a consequent de-politicization of the community development movement (Imbroscio, 2006). Others have argued that Rusk (1999) is essentially recommending a dispersal strategy – by encouraging the exodus of successful residents, we are sort of "destroying the 'hood' in order to save it." Nonetheless, reaching to the region fit well with a shift in the CDC world in the 1990s from a "bricks and mortar" approach to a focus on "community building" and comprehensive community initiatives (Walsh, 1997). This new emphasis on social fabric and "social capital" was easily extended to a notion that both challenging regional decisions and forming alliances with local and regional leaders could attract new resources and opportunities for distressed communities.

In taking this regional approach, CDCs typically aim to find a regional opportunity gone astray, use organizing to shift an adverse decision, leverage regional resources to promote better development, and generate concrete projects as a result. An excellent example is the Fruitvale Transit Village in a low-income area in Oakland: when the regional transit authority suggested building a parking lot for commuters, a local CDC helped organize residents to push the parking lot away from the station and instead create a mixed-use development that serves the

community. Such leveraging of efforts – taking advantage of a regional investment to promote local development – resonate with the field’s original view that “poor communities need to break the isolation that left them without powerful allies and resources in mainstream society” (Anglin & Montezemolo, 2004, p. 57). But while CDCs may find this brand of regionalism a new way to influence development, it is not clear that such organizations can be the leaders in a broader movement.

After all, CDCs have to maintain productive relations with investors, city officials, foundations, and all the other entities that help them create jobs, housing, and social services; “rocking the boat” to change regional rules can raise challenges for the basic mission of building housing and developing workforce training programs. Moreover, both the power and the accountability of CDCs are inevitably local; straying too far from that base represents a form of mission drift. Thus, in a sense, some CDCs have embraced regionalism as instrumental rather than fundamental, tactical rather than strategic. They have not discovered a whole new form of community development business; they have discovered another and perhaps more effective way to do the same business.

Policy reform regionalism

In trying to understand policy innovation and diffusion, political scientists have identified the concept and role of “policy entrepreneurs.” The basic notion is that, in various issue fields, there exists a series of actors who may work outside the formal government structure, often in independent non-profit intermediaries. They seek to identify problems, build networks with politicians and other decision-makers interested in the problems, provide these decision-makers with appropriate research, strategies, and “frames” for understanding and solving the problem, and through this complex combination, influence policy change in a preferred direction (Mintrom, 1997; Roberts & King, 1991).

The field of regional equity has certainly seen its share of policy entrepreneurs. For example, building on ideas developed while working with Secretary Henry Cisneros at the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Bruce Katz created the Metropolitan Policy Program at the Brookings Institution in Washington in 1996. The Program provides studies ranging from examinations of the growing foreign-born presence in America’s regions to evaluations of the role of convention centers in downtown revivals to considerations of the impacts of sprawl on jobs and inner-city prospects. Its mission is framed around providing policy to support “inclusive, competitive, and sustainable” growth, often sneaking inclusivity in under the banner of restoring competitiveness.

In classic “policy entrepreneur” form, the Brookings Program goes to where key politicians may be open to its ideas and then creates an information base that can engage those policy-makers. In 2003, for example, researchers from the Program began working with newly inaugurated Pennsylvania governor (and former Philadelphia mayor) Ed Rendell to develop a set of new strategies for the state. In its December 2003 release, “Back to Prosperity: A Competitive Agenda for Renewing Pennsylvania,” the Brookings team argued that sprawl was “hollowing out” Pennsylvania and weakening its attractiveness to the younger creative workers that drive economies – and that the remedy consisted of reinvestment back in older cities and suburbs, a move sure to also close the equity gap even as it restored competitiveness and fiscal health. To support the report, the release was

accompanied by a series of presentations throughout the state and a spate of supportive news stories.

This was Policy Entrepreneurship 101: find an already sympathetic public official, craft research and a message that resonates with dominant concerns, and develop a set of relationships with “influentials” who can move the ideas forward. The style of policy entrepreneurship for regional equity is not limited to Brookings. The Surface Transportation Policy Project, for example, has maintained a very small staff and a very long list of coalition members, using both to shift federal transportation dollars in ways that encourage transit-oriented development. Metropolitan mapper Myron Orfield has barnstormed through the country to sell the idea of regional tax-sharing (and now school desegregation); while success in the actual tax arena has been limited, he has helped reframe the way officials see themselves in the regional tapestry. Smart Growth America has enlisted the support of local and state officials in the interest of more compact development, and the Funders’ Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities has, along with PolicyLink, helped bring major philanthropies into conversation with leaders in the regional equity arena.

What are the limits to this approach? The first problem is that at least some of these policy entrepreneurs sidestep hard issues in the interest of a mainstream “framing” that can capture the attention of current policy-makers. Using a competitiveness rationale to support central city revitalization or stressing “smart growth” rules to quietly redirect dollars to distressed neighborhoods amounts to a sort of “stealth equity” – it does not address the ongoing challenges of race and *de facto* segregation. Some therefore worry that these issues will drop off the agenda whenever the going gets tough – or if competitiveness, say, can be restored without reducing concentrated poverty (Pastor, Benner, & Rosner, 2006).

The second limitation is more fundamental. Implicit in the policy entrepreneur approach is the sense that the real task is to bring intelligent analysis to those who need it – well-framed, smart ideas (such as “smart growth” itself) can win the day. Of course, bad ideas are often persistent if they serve particular interests, and the current configuration of outward sprawl and inner-city underdevelopment does have clear winners as well as losers. While policy entrepreneurs in the regional equity field do get engaged in coalition building, they are often focused on “elite persuasion.” The problem is that real change requires the development and building of broad constituencies that can keep decision-makers under pressure – policy entrepreneurs, in short, often lack the troops.

We acknowledge that our lines between policy entrepreneurship and constituency mobilization are too starkly drawn. Myron Orfield, for example, may sell his ideas to municipal decision-makers but he embraces a hard-headed politics that focuses on officials in older and less glamorous suburbs and he has found a vibrant constituency in the faith-based movements that often bring him to talk in church basements and town halls. Brookings may try to bend the ears of policy-makers but it has a cold political calculus of where its efforts will find an audience and where they will not. PolicyLink may bring funders to the table but its Regional Equity summits have also brought together community developers, public officials, and social activists alike. With all these qualifications, our analytical point is straightforward: if policy reforms are to “stick” – particularly reforms that can be controversial – mobilization, popular education, and power-building must be part of the equation.

Social movement regionalism

Indeed, for many in the regional equity field, building power to forge a progressive movement is exactly the heartfelt point of their work. Talk to the leaders of the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, acknowledged pioneers in the world of Community Benefits Agreements, and you will not linger long on the arcane details of zoning restrictions, density bonuses, and first-source hiring – instead, you find yourself quickly engaged in a conversation about what it means to reframe development, refashion coalitions, and rework the power base needed to fundamentally transform the way the economy works. Talk to the organizers of the interfaith Gamaliel Foundation, acknowledged champions of a “fix it first” approach to infrastructure, and you quickly move past the details of regional planning agencies, transit line alignment, and restrictions on low-income housing – instead, you will find yourself immersed in a conversation about the lack of connectivity in American society, and the ways in which working regionally can bring together a nation separated by geography, race and class.

That scale is important in social movement building is increasingly recognized in the academic literature. Wilton and Cranford (2002), for example, argue that “a full understanding of the political potential of social movements requires recognition of their inherently spatial nature.” Jones and MacLeod (2004) distinguish between “regional spaces” and “spaces of regionalism,” suggesting that the former are more economic and objective in their origin while the latter are more a created territory for political mobilization and even cultural expression. Others have argued that the region opens up new forms of organizing and regional democracy (Jonas & Pincetl, 2006), with Iris Young arguing that while the scope of politics should be regional, “[r]egional governance is deeply democratic . . . only if combined with neighborhood and community-based participatory institutions” (Young, 2000, p. 9).

Putting in place these regional institutions is exactly the focus of what we call social movement regionalists. The labor-affiliated think tank, Working Partnerships in San Jose, has worked on the regional scale in terms of analysis and policy: it has issued studies on the region’s key industries, highlighted the need for affordable housing in a high-tech economy, and participated in urban planning efforts aimed at livability. But its hallmark has been training a cadre of interconnected community leaders, through a series of eight-week to 12-week “Leadership Institutes” focused on labor leaders, community organizers, leaders of faith-based communities, public-sector staff and elected officials, and leaders from the small business community and ethnic business associations to develop a common understanding of the economy and analysis of power in the Silicon Valley. Working Partnerships, moreover, is working with central labor councils from Atlanta, San Diego, Miami, and New York in order to reassert labor’s voice in the national debate over our nation’s economic direction.

One of the most explicit versions of the social movement approach is seen in the work of SCOPE in Los Angeles. Founded by Anthony Thigpenn, a former member of the Black Panther Party and a long-time architect of precinct-based organizing and get-out-the-vote campaigns for progressive coalitions, SCOPE is a multi-dimensional social justice organization centered in South Los Angeles. For many of the organizations above, such as Gamaliel, Working Partnerships, and others, the region is important on an *objective* level: it is the scale on which inequalities are created. For SCOPE organizers, the region is perhaps more important on a *subjective* level: it is the scale at which broader patterns of inequality are actually experienced

even if they are created by national policies. As such, adopting a regional perspective is an intermediate step between a more narrow consciousness of community, neighborhood and family, and a broader consciousness of society. And SCOPE, entirely self-conscious that they are movement-building, has even developed a diagram to illustrate their view and distinguish it from traditional community organizing (see Figure 1).

Weir, Rongerude, and Ansell (2007) suggest that this sort of social movement mobilization is actually key to policy change. They argue that the “horizontal collaboration” often associated with regionalism:

... can do little more than promote new ideas and hope for the best. Horizontal collaboration in regions may help build consensus and alliances that can work in more powerful state and federal venues to promote regional capacity ... Whether such efforts are successful depends not only on the horizontal consensus building process but, more critically, on the power relationships – alliances, coalitions, enemies – that prevail in these alternative venues. (Weir et al., 2007, p. 35)

In this view, progressive regionalism involves building multilevel power, not simply engaging in regional processes (Weir & Rongerude, 2007) – and social movement regionalists, who are explicitly focused on challenging powerful entities in the region who may gain from current development patterns, can help to build the necessary constituency power-base to ensure that alternative policies can be created and implemented.

Figure 1. Levels of social consciousness by spatial scale.

While it is clear what social movements might bring to regional equity, what does regional equity bring to social movements? We think there are at least two gains. The first has to do with perspective. In his insightful study of the interfaith Gamaliel network, Kleidman (2004) argues that Gamaliel's commitment to a regional organizing approach allows its local groups to articulate a more consistent progressive vision, with a clearer analysis of processes shaping inequality and poverty, and a clearer strategy for building allies. In New Jersey, for example, Gamaliel organizers just ran – and won – a campaign to ban “regional contribution agreements,” a nice phrase used to describe a vehicle for wealthy cities to avoid taking on affordable housing by giving money to poorer cities instead. The campaign was a recipe for internal conflict – struggling central cities and next-step suburbs are often at each others' throats about the leakage of poor households and attendant problems from one to the other. But organizers focused on shared fates, brought congregations together to support the effort, and even enlisted the support of home-builders and anti-sprawl environmentalists. The eventual policy victory was important, but just as critical was the way in which new and somewhat unlikely alliances were formed and sustained (Gordon, 2008).

The second contribution of regional equity to social movements is explored in more detail in the conclusion. Briefly here, for many of these organizing groups, the region is not only a new level for understanding problems and proposing solutions, it is also a new, fundamental, and strategic scale for building a broad-based social movement for justice. Such an approach to amassing national power – working one city at a time, one region at a time, one state at a time – seems to parallel the strategy once taken by the right: work from the local to the state to the national, moving hearts and minds – or as we say in the modern world, “frames” – in a way that can make a new American politics possible. Thus, regional equity is a tool in that stepping stone strategy to national transformation.

Tensions and tightropes

By distinguishing three types of regional equity efforts – community development regionalism, policy reform regionalism, and social movement regionalism – and associating each with one of a troika of projects, policy, and power, we are not trying to suggest that the three trends are completely separate. In the real world, groups often drift from one role to another, and all three must come together to effect change: as noted above, projects make us see the possible, policy helps make the possible standard practice, and power is what ultimately drives policy reform. All these variants of regional equity are important to the social ecology of change, although we would suggest that the social movement regionalists are critical because of their role in organizing communities to make such change actually happen.

So what is gained by making these distinctions? We think that part of the benefit has to do with some analytical clarity with regard to tensions that have bedeviled the regional equity field in general, including the relationship between communities and business, between different sorts of community organizations, and between communities themselves (particularly around issues of race). These are, of course, not the only tightropes and tensions – others include the balance of policy and politics, the mix of market and regulation, and the interplay of “inside” and “outside” games. But for those dimensions, we welcome readers to read the longer

discussion in our book – you knew that was coming, right? – and more importantly, to join the debate that is raging in the field itself.

Bringing business in, keeping business at bay

One of the most striking developments in recent years has been the growing business interest in regionalism. This partly reflects a well-known rescaling of economic clusters to the regional level but it also reflects business frustration with multi-jurisdictional decision-making that often stymies a competitive approach. Across the country, organizations like Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network, Chicago Metropolis 2020, and Fund for Our Economic Future in Northeast Ohio have set a new agenda for business regionalism – and they have opened up space for equity concerns, partly from an analytical frame that recognizes the drag inequality can present for economic growth and partly from a purely political frame that seeks to expand constituency support.

Yet business is not likely to be a solid champion for social justice. Class interests have not disappeared, many businesses remain opposed to any interference with markets, and the “win–win” dreams of some regionalists are often just that – dreams. While there are numerous possibilities for securing a “double bottom line” of reasonable profits and improved community outcomes (Pastor, 2006), the real bottom line is that political struggle is required to move agendas. The problem is that community developers have to worry about their reliance on public coffers for projects while policy entrepreneurs have to keep access to elites for policy change; social movement regionalists necessarily have a more complicated and more conflictual approach.

The relationship between social movement regionalists and the business class comes in several flavors. In some cases, regional equity efforts have been driven, at least in part, by the reaction to business initiatives. The Social Equity Caucus in the Bay Area, for example, was initially created in response to regionalist tables being set by business groups like the Bay Area Council; while the Social Equity Caucus has since acquired deeper and authentic roots, partly because of its work on transportation equity and general plan revisions, it was essentially scrambling to build (and convince) its base even as it “spoke” for equity advocates. Another variant of this reaction mode can be seen in the case of Working Partnerships in San Jose.

When Joint Venture: Silicon Valley (JV:SV) was launched in 1993, the San Jose-based Santa Clara County Central Labor Council was invited to have representatives on the Board of Directors. Ultimately, John Neece from the Building Trades agreed to serve on the Board, and played an active role in JV:SV’s activities. But labor council head Amy Dean, who worried that issues of equity and opportunity for disadvantaged sectors of the Valley’s population would be buried under JV:SV’s primary focus on economic competitiveness, decided instead to build a separate voice in the form of Working Partnerships, USA.

JV:SV actually helped build the terrain for Working Partnerships by positively reinforcing the sense of Silicon Valley as an interconnected region with a common destiny. Moreover, it served, largely unintentionally, to isolate local business opposition to labor-sponsored policy. JV:SV, after all, focused on the needs of high-technology industries and large multi-national corporations – while the San Jose Chamber of Commerce, more the province of local real estate and small business,

became increasingly perceived as a creature of less forward-looking enterprises. When Working Partnerships campaigned for a Living Wage Ordinance in the City of San Jose, for example, the Chamber opposed it vehemently but JV:SV was largely silent on the issue. While JV:SV's business leaders were generally opposed to a Living Wage in principle, the policy was unlikely to affect them (as they rarely contracted directly with the City and tended to pay higher wages) and they were reluctant to offend San Jose Mayor Susan Hammer, a member of the JV:SV board and an ardent supporter of the Living Wage effort. As a result, the recalcitrant and less-connected Chamber had diminished political clout and the Living Wage passed.

JV:SV also served as a useful foil. Having a clear opponent typically makes organizing strong community sentiment easier, and while JV:SV was never actually a target for organizing campaigns – specific campaigns were organized around city and county government policy, or broad issue areas like a Children's Health Initiative or affordable housing – in community meetings and door-to-door organizing efforts, organizers could point to JV:SV as the “other” regional voice in the Valley. Surely, organizers argued, JV:SV should not be the only voice. This approach generated a sense of urgency around a counterpoint of community-based regional organizing and policy efforts.

Sometimes, the existence of business or policy-led regionalism hinders rather than helps the development of social movement regionalism. In Pittsburgh, for example, regional discussions have been dominated by the business-led Allegheny Conference on Community Development, whose focus over the past 20 years has primarily been on downtown revitalization and promotion of industries linked with the region's large educational and medical institutions. The Conference leaders combined their strong, organized connections to media outlets, regional politicians, and local funders with a paternal openness to CDC-oriented neighborhood groups. This cluster of power has marginalized more oppositional groups, making it difficult for them to gain traction in the public arena (Hamilton, 2004; Lubove, 1996; Pastor & Benner, 2008).

In comparison, the absence of effective business regionalism created an opening in Los Angeles. The relative weakness of business was most evident when the 1992 uprising exploded into the region's (and nation's) consciousness and led to the creation of Rebuild L.A. – which did little to mobilize corporate investment for the areas affected by the unrest. By the time it shut its doors five years later, it had shifted to a strategy of supporting small business development, reflecting the ongoing business fragmentation. With the field wide open, community organizers developed their own regional vision for lasting and far-reaching structural changes, including: the formation of the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE) and its work on accountable development; the efforts of SCOPE to organize grassroots leadership in South Los Angeles and then link South LA to the rest of the region through their Metropolitan Alliance; the Bus Riders Union and its fight to improve transit for the region-wide working poor; and Strategic Actions for a Just Economy and its struggle to slow displacement and gentrification. As such, the 2005 mayoral election of progressive candidate Antonio Villaraigosa actually heralded a new era in which business had essentially ceded ground and realized that a social justice commitment would be the price they would have to pay to get support for large-scale regional economic investment and real-estate development.

Of course, absence of a strong business voice does not always make the social movement heart grow fonder. In the highly fragmented Detroit area, the Gamaliel organizers associated with MOSES have struggled to create a regional transportation authority and a single county-wide land bank. With few others, including business, pulling their weight at a regional scale, making the region come together is a challenge. Meanwhile, in northeast Ohio, the Fund for Our Economic Future has been paving a path toward regional revitalization that includes elements of social equity, having started their effort with a landmark study arguing that overcoming racial and income polarization was part of the competitiveness challenge; here, the worry has been that the equity-oriented regionalists are not quite ready to step up to the plate and the social justice agenda will be defined before they get there.

Business leaders can, to be sure, be indispensable allies for promoting particular regional equity strategies, especially housing and infrastructure-related ones. The Atlanta Neighborhood Development Partnership has sought to actively engage businesses, including lenders and developers, in their Mixed Income Communities Initiative. The Social Equity Caucus, which grew out of the Bay Area Alliance for Sustainable Communities, has collaborated with business on the Community Capital Investment Initiative and the Bay Area Family of Funds, both intended to promote Smart Growth development.

But it is, in our view, too easy to stress the “win-win” of undiscovered inner-city markets or find common (but shallow) ground on vaguely articulated principles of “inclusive development.” In Los Angeles, for example, the now celebrated program called Workplace Hollywood – which reaches into inner-city communities to fill entertainment industry jobs – was only made possible because SCOPE led other groups in protesting a city subsidy going to DreamWorks to build a new studio. The protest led to tough negotiations and an agreement on job training – a commitment Dreamworks stuck by even when they decided not to build the studio, partly because of the relationships that had developed over the course of the fight. The collaboration grew from the conflict – and really moving the politics requires a sophisticated focus on how interests differ and intersect.

Social movement regionalists may be especially well-suited to this challenge. They tend to take into account market realities more than activists in other social movements – they know that business can make money *and* do good in underserved communities, and they understand that companies need to remain economically viable while also paying higher wages. But they also know that bringing people to the table sometimes requires protest and they are fundamentally about projecting a broader vision of economic possibilities. In this view, the community development focus on making deals and the policy reform emphasis on competitiveness can sometimes distract from the real prize: community power to influence regional outcomes.

Finding communities, bridging differences

Community world-views may generally differ from business world-views, but they are neither singular nor homogeneous. Organizations may have a tight or a loose association to regional equity principles, or they may tend to focus more on projects, policies, or power. Bringing these perspectives under the same tent can often be a challenge.

This dynamic is particularly evident in a recent collaboration between Detroit LISC and MOSES. LISC is a classic example of a community-development approach to regionalism. Prior to 2002, Detroit LISC focused almost exclusively on traditional approaches to community development, assisting neighborhood revitalization primarily through helping community development corporations in their efforts to build affordable housing and revitalize commercial strips. By contrast, MOSES' very origins are rooted in some ways as a *reaction against* project-oriented community development. MOSES emerged from three previously existing neighborhood community development organizations that had separately been working to address quality-of-life issues through traditional community development processes, but were frustrated by their limited progress at the neighborhood scale. Since its founding in 1997, MOSES has been focusing on the broader processes undermining neighborhood revitalization initiatives, and stressing the need for regional power-building and democratic accountability.

According to MOSES organizers, Detroit LISC was a latecomer to regional equity – embracing regional strategies only in 2003, and yet garnering large amounts of attention and millions of dollars for work that essentially only modified traditional community-development approaches; LISC paid little attention to policy, advocacy, or power-building. Detroit LISC staff acknowledged both the organization's late start in implementing regional strategies and the fact that it had been prompted by external inspiration, both from National LISC and from the Ford Foundation. Yet they also argued that the nature of development work requires large amounts of money, and this led them to align themselves closely with banks and corporate economic development organizations. At times, they suggest, many people have viewed MOSES as being oppositional and obstructionist.

This seems a perfect setup for a conflict between community development and social movement regionalism. Yet MOSES and Detroit LISC were largely able to overcome many of these organizational and tactical differences. It may have helped that both groups were led by African American women working in environments historically dominated by men (church structures and financial/corporate institutions, respectively); this created a sense of shared experience and mutual understanding, and the two leaders were soon able to help their organizations find common ground, most importantly around efforts to develop a Land Bank in Detroit.

Even in cases where there is significant overlap in visions of regional equity, real tensions can surface. For example, when significant financial resources became available to engage in workforce training, the Campaign for a Sustainable Milwaukee (CSM), fundamentally an organizing effort founded by the Central Labor Council, joined forces with the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership under the umbrella of the Milwaukee Jobs Initiative. The Milwaukee Jobs Initiative was a separate organization, but they subcontracted their training work to CSM – and CSM thought that it would be able to leverage its training service work to gain support for its organizing efforts. But it had difficulty doing so: the organizing and service components of CSM operated separately in practice, and people who received services were rarely substantially involved in the organizing efforts. With mission drift becoming mission split, CSM eventually collapsed.

One particularly difficult divide to bridge is often the divide between labor and community organizations. Labor/community alliances throughout the United States have generally been more the exception than the rule (for the exceptions, see Brecher

and Costello, 1990). Part of this is due to the separation between residential space and workspace, which in turn contributes to the lack of connection between labor politics and community politics (Katznelson, 1981). In many contexts, the labor–community divide is reinforced through racial divides, particularly in the building trades, where people of color have often been excluded from the better paying union jobs. Labor-initiated “collaboration” has traditionally been limited to unions calling on community organizations for temporary support in particular organizing campaigns, or community organizations requesting labor’s endorsement for particular initiatives.

Yet there has been a striking transformation, well-documented in Dean and Reynolds (2008), in the role of labor in community coalitions (see also Nissen, 2004; Rathke, 2004; Turner 2005). In Los Angeles and in San Jose, for example, much of the impetus for labor–community alliances came from the political process, and specifically in response to conservative-sponsored state-level initiatives around immigrant rights and restricting the political monies of unions. There is nothing quite like a shared battle to forge relationships and bring together unlikely allies, a form of “common cause coalitions” (Frege, Heery, & Turner, 2003). Community groups have come to understand the potential strength coming from unions and the value of maintaining ongoing union ties even as the unions have been able to demonstrate their commitment to a broader agenda. Over time, the coalition’s relationships would intensify, morphing into an “integrative coalition” (Frege et al., 2003).

Leadership development and training programs have also been important for building strong labor–community ties. In San Jose, this took the form of a 12-week Leadership Institute (mentioned earlier) that brings together key constituencies in an applied, leadership development program; in Los Angeles, the Community Scholars Program at UCLA serves a similar function. Jointly sponsored by the Department of Urban Planning and the Center for Labor Research and Education, the program brings labor and community leaders together for a two-quarter-long academic and training program focused on specific community development issues in the region: topics have ranged from popular education, to banking in communities, to the impact of Walmart. The very first program in 1991/92 focused on Los Angeles’ tourism industry and played a critical role in the founding of the Tourism Industry Development Corporation, the predecessor to LAANE. Similar to Working Partnerships Leadership Institute, the Community Scholars Program has broken down barriers between labor and community groups by convening labor and community leaders together in a shared environment to study and develop solutions to regional problems.

Of course, relations between labor and community groups in even these “success stories” have their problems. Stressors continue to exist, rooted in a range of issues including different organizational structures, unequal power, different constituencies, and sometimes, conflicting goals. Community groups, in particular, remain wary of labor’s power – while unions may seem toothless compared with business, they are an overwhelming force for many smaller community groups. Yet in many metropolitan areas, labor and community groups have moved beyond coming together only around specific campaigns or fashioning coalitions whose sole aim is to achieve discrete outcomes. Through ongoing, long-term communication and collaboration, labor and community groups have networked together to form a dense “civic infrastructure” with a mutual understanding of regional programs and a sense of inter-dependency.

The tensions between equity agendas, between organizing and implementation, and between labor and community groups do not necessarily result in groups abandoning their regional collaborative work. Detroit LISC and MOSES see their futures as intertwined, and they continue to find ways to collaborate when possible. Many members of the former Campaign for a Sustainable Milwaukee remain active in the Good Jobs and Livable Neighborhoods Coalition, and see the more programmatic work of the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership as an essential part of retaining and building a strong political base in the region. Labor and community groups have found ongoing ways to work together in San Jose and Los Angeles. In many ways, it is the regional economic and political processes that provide these groups with a way of navigating the tensions of different ideological perspectives and varying organizational activities.

Reaching across race

Perhaps the single most important issue simmering in the regional equity world is race. On the one hand, racial inequity and segregation have been key factors in creating the unequal metropolitan landscape of America – and many early leaders in the regional equity movement, be they white, black, Latino, Asian, or other, cut their organizing teeth on some variant of the civil rights movement. On the other hand, the effort to find commonalities across city and suburb, rich and poor, white and minority, has sometimes led to a fuzzy politics that sets aside or diffuses issues of race to build regional coalitions or work on specific issues (e.g. transportation, housing, smart growth, etc.).

Consider the Detroit–Grosse Pointe Park Collaborative, a city-suburb neighborhood revitalization effort on Detroit's eastern border that has been sponsored by LISC as part of its own regional efforts. The contrast between black and white could hardly be more stark: Gross Pointe Park was developed as an exclusive suburb, housing wealthy executives and managers from Detroit's auto firms, and in 2000 the city's population was 93% white and 60% college-educated, with an annual median household income over \$80,000. In the adjacent Detroit community, the population was nearly 90% African American, only 9% college-educated, and the annual median household income was \$25,020. Despite the evident disparities, both white and black organizers from the initiative chose *not* to focus on these differences in their organizing efforts. Instead, they organized around building a cross-border neighborhood business association and fostering communication through sports leagues and other recreational activities for children, in an attempt to bring blacks and whites together without talking about racial differences.

Compare this strategy with that used by the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership to organize workers within the construction industry in Milwaukee. Here, the historic racial inequalities are also quite stark: well-paying unionized construction jobs were largely reserved for white men, and people of color were largely excluded from the building trades and relegated to lower-paid laborer positions (Butler, 2006; Waldinger & Bailey, 1991). Yet in the late 1990s, union leaders recognized the intersection of two major trends. First, the level of unionization in the construction trades was declining across the board; second, increasing numbers of Latino immigrants and African Americans were being employed by the industry, often in non-unionized jobs.

To capitalize on these trends and rebuild union strength, leaders sought to leverage labor agreements on projects involving direct public expenditures or subsidies and concurrently reaching out to minority constituencies. To succeed, they had to credibly demonstrate their commitment to expanding diversity in both the rank-and-file and the leadership of construction unions. They established trust by investing significant amounts of time and resources into BIG STEP, a pre-apprenticeship program for inner-city African American residents, designed to provide pathways into the better paying apprenticeship programs in the building trades. In essence, attention to race and historical patterns of racial discrimination became central to their regional organizing strategies.

The question of how much to emphasize race and racial differences in American politics is not unique to the regional equity movement – indeed, it runs through nearly every aspect of policy-making and coalition-building in this country. Yet it is a particularly sharp tension in this arena precisely because America's urban form – struggling central cities and isolated suburbs – is in many ways the physical manifestation of highly racialized processes of segregation. Race, in short, is an inescapable part of America's regional histories and racism a part of its social institutions.

Talking about race is difficult – both for whites who may be uncomfortable with the implication that they benefit from unfair privileges, and for people of color who are tired of being seen only through the prism of their ethnicity. In large part, the conversation about race revolves around political power – who has it, who does not, and what it will take to get it (Thompson, 2002). In some sense, regional equity tries to complicate this dimension. It celebrates Richard Hatcher of Gary, Indiana, for becoming the first African American mayor of a large US city – but it also notes that he inherited a deindustrializing economy that deprived Gary of its resources and left it with a shrinking public-sector capacity to address the increasing social and economic needs of its people. Regional equity proponents thus argue for a focus on the regional economic common ground – but it seems clear that we cannot build up the economic capacity of the inner city without also addressing the visibility and viability of inner-city political leadership as well (Thompson, 2005).

This effort to simultaneously embrace regional common ground and address historical political discrimination leads to contradictions in the support bases for regionalism. Since so much of the regional equity agenda could benefit disadvantaged areas, many, particularly in the policy reform camp, assume that there will be a natural constituency for regional equity in communities of color. Yet many of these same communities have long been suspicious of regionalism, particularly in places where minority political power stems from geographic concentration; higher levels of regional governance are seen as potentially diluting hard-won political voice. In Louisville, Kentucky, for example, the African American community was largely opposed to a city-county merger for exactly that reason. In Cleveland, Ohio, African American leaders perceived regionalism as being primarily driven by white suburban communities (Savitch & Vogel, 2004). In the racially charged atmosphere of Camden, New Jersey, regional equity efforts have sometimes been perceived as a way to drain the city of residents or pit the inner ring suburbs against Camden.

Highly segregated Detroit provides a compelling example of one way to overcome this challenge. With few opportunities for whites and blacks to interact in their neighborhoods, building cross-racial organizations requires conscious effort.

Patrick Gahegan, a white pastor in a predominantly African American congregation in the City of Detroit and one of the leading pastors within MOSES, describes the dynamic:

Initially, I didn't get involved with Moses . . . In this divided region, [when I was first exposed to the organization] MOSES was seen as a white organization and couldn't cut it in the black community . . . at the time [1998] the organizers were all white. Gamaliel itself was perceived as all white. That is still the perception in most of the black churches . . . In the suburbs, MOSES is seen as a black organization. It is all relative. Detroiters aren't used to walking in a room and seeing half white and half black. That is out of the context of what goes on here. African Americans see all the white people and say this is a white organization. White folks see all the African Americans and say this is a black organization . . . the leadership of MOSES . . . have helped address this, but the truth is that Detroit has become so polarized. It is who we are. It is built into the DNA of us as a people. (Benner, 2006)

To overcome these historic racial divisions, MOSES built an organization with congregations throughout the Detroit Metro region. These congregations are sometimes predominantly African American and sometimes predominantly white. For them, focusing on metropolitan equity has become a means of overcoming racial divides. Through their relentless organizing, they have started to forge a sense of shared destiny between white and black residents of the region.

The challenges are different in the multi-racial metros like those in California. In both Los Angeles and the Bay Area, whites no longer represent a majority of the population, and have not for years. With rapid growth in the Latino population and large numbers of Asian residents, both regions truly reflect a demographic tapestry of race and ethnicities. While white/non-white tensions are still important, there are also important tensions across the range of races and ethnicities. African American neighborhoods in South Los Angeles and East Palo Alto (Silicon Valley), for instance, have experienced a rapid influx of Latino immigrants, resulting in rising tensions that have sometimes exploded into violence. Korean communities in Los Angeles and Vietnamese communities in San Jose face particular challenges associated with being smaller enclaves in a wider urban context (Martinez Jr & Valenzuela Jr, 2006).

But with all the talk of race, we are especially struck by lessons from the election of Antonio Villaraigosa, the first Latino mayor in Los Angeles in over 130 years. His victory was partly driven by regional equity proponents who had worked to win landmark community benefits agreements, build a new metropolitan labor movement, and change the politics of the city and the region – and his field campaign in 2005 was actually run by the head of SCOPE, Anthony Thigpenn. Villaraigosa was perceived as an effective advocate for racial justice, partly because of his previous positions in public life and partly because he invested campaign time and resources to bring together African American and Latino constituencies. But despite his commitment to racial equality, he downplayed race in his campaign, instead lifting up common aspirations for education, public safety, and economic betterment, and running on a regionalist platform derived from a period spent at the Southern California Studies Center at USC. His mantra, adopted from his time there, was about the city needing to “grow smarter, grow safer, grow greener, grow together, and grow more civic-minded” (Fulton, 2003, p. 8).

In short, Villaraigosa's run for mayor embodied the tension of the regional equity movement – the need to have credibility on issues of race while crafting a vision and

policy package that can create broad agreement and a sense of common destiny. It is not an easy balance, but it is the one that needs to be struck if America's racialized metropolitan landscape is to be altered for a more inclusive future, and social movement regionalists have a particularly astute sense of how to strike this balance.

Scaling on up

Regional equity is fundamentally about scale – the proponents are insisting that the problems are caused at the regional level, that policies to address these should focus on the regional level, and that the power analysis and power-building that can change things might be most usefully pursued at a regional level. But another aspect of all this is whether one can scale up from the region – connecting not just actors within a metro but also actors across America's metros – to actually influence and drive national politics.

To some extent, all the variants of regional equity have national aspirations. Community developers are seeking to rework the field, and policy entrepreneurs are hoping that a new administration will once again allow metropolitan experiments to find federal support. The social movement regionalists, we would suggest, have a different ambition: like their conservative counterparts who changed the politics of America by working their way from the school boards of Kansas to the halls of Congress, many are hoping to build a new progressive politics for America one community-benefits agreement, one city-suburb alliance, one transit equity initiative at a time.

The Gamaliel Foundation, a prime example and the network to which MOSES belongs, has adopted metropolitan equity as a central organizing lens and works to promote this perspective throughout its network of 60 affiliates in 21 states. The Partnership for Working Families, a network spanning 18 affiliates in 10 states, including LAANE and Working Partnerships, has developed a new model for urban growth and social justice that analyzes regional sources of inequality and utilizes community benefits agreements as an organizing tool. The Transportation Equity Network, originally founded under the aegis of the Center for Community Change, has brought together organizations such as the Bus Riders Union (Los Angeles), the Northwest Interfaith Federation (Northwest Indiana), the Metropolitan Congregations United (Missouri), and West Harlem Environmental Action (New York) (Swanstrom & Barrett, 2007). The Right to the City Alliance brings together groups around the country, including Strategic Actions for a Just Economy and the Miami Workers Center, who are fighting gentrification by equating their power-building efforts with regional equity goals and a human rights framing. The Pushback Network, with organizations from eight states, including SCOPE in Los Angeles, links and builds capacity of progressive grassroots organizing efforts focused on electoral strategies and state alliance building.

These are big ambitions but they come at a time when the country does seem ripe for change. People are looking for a new policy framework, to be sure, but they are also looking for a new narrative that brings together a disparate nation. The regional equity strategy – in which relationships are negotiated face to face, place to place, and race to race – offers an entry into a new conversation. Moreover, the lessons learned at the regional level are instructive in another way: navigating between the Scylla of a mythical conflict-free “kumbaya” coalition for justice, and the Charybdis of divisive and conflictual politics of blame, social movement regionalists are finding

ways of dealing with conflict in productive ways. By not shying away from confronting power, but also building a sense of common destiny, social movement regionalists are pointing the way towards a forward-looking and practical vision that can have a real impact on America's regions and maybe America itself.

We have no naiveté about the challenges they face at either the regional or national level. Maintaining credibility on race while crafting a vision and a policy package that can create consensus, drawing the connection between regional issues while highlighting neighborhood distresses, balancing the need to agitate for justice with the desire to attract private capital, dealing with fragmentation by jurisdiction, geography, and politics – these are just some of the difficulties regional equity activists juggle. We get tired just listing them; organizers seem tireless in tackling them.

But we are still optimistic. Two of us met for the first time in a church in South Central Los Angeles nearly a decade ago. One of us was a graduate student and the other had recently authored a report on connecting communities and regions. The author was there to provide some academic testimony for the effort to challenge DreamWorks; the graduate student was providing research for the campaign. We both offered facts, charts, and admonitions about a new regional approach – then a local preacher, in a far more effective approach, called the congregants to understand the moral imperative at hand. In a lilting cadence, he invoked “people are tired of drifting apart, they want to be growing together!”

Who was to know that this message would take off, resonating with the central labor councils that have pushed for accountable development, the churches and community groups that have struggled for transportation justice, and the long-time residents who are working against gentrification? They have gone beyond projects and policy, using regional equity as a new terrain for transformative politics. Understanding the challenges these social movements face, documenting the choices they make, and celebrating the spirits they lift should be the focus of the next phase of research in this field. There is, after all, something happening here.

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