The Regional Nexus: The Promise and Risk of Community-Based Approaches to Metropolitan Equity

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/martha_matsuoka/8/
INTRODUCTION

In recent years, community-based organizations (CBOs) have sought to broaden their economic development activities by adding a regional component to their work. The fundamental rationale is simple: regional strategies that complement neighborhood-based approaches can help community-based organizations recognize new opportunities, connect to new resources and allies, and affect broad policies that structure the environment for all their activities. In the Delaware Valley around Philadelphia, for example, community leaders developed a regional Reinvestment Fund, which has provided valuable financing for affordable housing, community service, and workforce development programs in the region. In Milwaukee in the late 1990s, labor and community groups developed a regional plan that included a living wage ordinance, redirected transportation funds to central city workers to access regional job opportunities, and helped establish the Milwaukee Jobs Initiative, which over its first 6 years resulted in 1,400 residents gaining full-time employment in living wage jobs. In Los Angeles, a coalition of churches, labor organizations, and community organizations won a Community Benefits Agreement related to the expansion of a regional attraction—the Staples Convention Center—that included $1 million worth of parks improvement, $100,000 in seed funding to create job training programs through community organizations, local hiring, and the construction of 160 affordable housing units.

While the results seem impressive, engaging in these regionally oriented strategies also creates its own set of difficulties for community groups. It requires developing a whole new set of capacities beyond those required for neighborhood-based organizing and economic development. It means engaging with people with significantly different agendas and working to resolve the emerging conflicts without losing sight of one's own agenda. Indeed, one risk of regionalism is that it can take energy and focus away from other activities more directly linked to neighborhoods. Being effective at developing regional strategies thus requires a careful assessment of both the possibilities and challenges involved.

This chapter tries to take a realistic look at community-based regionalism's potential to affect community development and particularly community economic development in low-income and working poor urban
neighborhoods. We begin with a discussion of why regionalism has become a new focus of both urban affairs literature and some policy practitioners. We then focus on the promise this holds for those interested in promoting equity and community development, elaborating along the way on several different approaches to metropolitan equity, including a municipality-based approach that focuses on jurisdictional equity; a labor-based approach that considers new strategies for improving workers’ outcomes; and a “community-based regionalism” (CBR) that has at its center community-based organizations in specific geographies. In this section of the chapter, we also offer specific examples of the successful application of such strategies; most of the analysis that follows takes this promise as a premise and so instead emphasizes the challenges involved in community adoption and implementation.

Given this emphasis on implementation issues, we then highlight the experience of one group of communities in the San Francisco Bay Area. All have been engaged in a foundation-sponsored set of “comprehensive community initiatives” or CCCS that seek to marry project-based community development with social network and citizen engagement approaches of community building. Each of these CCCS added a regional component to their work sometime in the development of their planning, providing an interesting set of experiments with different communities and different approaches, all within the same larger region. The communities include West Oakland, a large swath of East Palo Alto, and the Mayfair neighborhood in East San Jose. We believe that these cases may offer several interesting lessons for other community-based regional initiatives around the country, particularly those that focus on community economic development efforts.

We conclude the chapter by lifting up two of those lessons. The first is that CBR is not one-size-fits-all: for some neighborhoods interested in community development, CBR might make great sense; others may find themselves unable to agree on a regional agenda or preoccupied with internal issues of self-organization. The second main lesson we draw from both our cases and national practice is that CBR should not be thought of as development per se but rather as advocacy to affect development possibilities. The problem for CCCS is that this can draw organizations into sharp political conflicts, something that may run against the intersectoral collaboration emphasis typical of such initiatives.

Despite these complications, we argue that CBR, with its political/policy emphasis and its focus on scaling networks up to the region, actually reflects a return to some of the original purposes and activities of the community development field. Moreover, CBR is consistent with ongoing developments in the regional economy as well as increasing regional organizing by business interests, municipal actors, environmental advocates, and planning authorities. Therefore, getting into the regional game early in its arrival (or, some say, revival) might therefore be of great utility for those worried about the constraints America’s urban landscape has placed on community development in many communities of color.
WHY REGIONALISM?

One of the most important recent developments in the United States in the field of urban affairs is the emergence of the "new regionalism"—a framework that stresses the importance of the region as a fundamental scale for understanding and addressing urban problems (see Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanson 2001, chapter 6; Henton, Melville, and Walesh 1997; Bullard 1998; Katz 2000; Pastor et al. 2000). The economic argument for a regional approach is partly derived from a scale argument about government services, many of which might be more efficiently delivered on a regional basis. Consolidating services could also level the regional playing field, reducing the hassles many businesses experience when grappling with multiple jurisdictions and regulations.

But this scale argument itself derives from an underlying notion that the regional economy is an increasingly important scale of economic organization: it is where businesses clusters and investments stick. No longer limited to industrial manufacturing industries, the driving industrial clusters of today are more likely to be in information- and knowledge-driven sectors, including computer technology, telecommunications, pharmaceuticals, entertainment, finance, or advanced business services. Success in these "cluster" industries is often driven again not directly by global competition, but instead by the skill level of the local workforce, the quality of life in the region (which attracts more talented labor), and the nature of regional physical and institutional infrastructure, with the latter running the gamut from transportation systems to the community college and regional university systems. Partly as a result, a wide range of business organizations, such as the Silicon Valley Manufacturing Group and Chicago Metropolis 2020, have taken the lead in promoting regional investments in transportation and affordable housing, while other business organizations, such as Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network and the Hampton Roads Partnership around the Norfolk, Virginia area, have worked to encourage regional business clusters and development strategies (FutureWorks 2004; Lampe, Parr, and Woodward 2004).

The focus on the regional economy has also led to new efforts and dimension in workforce development. Groups representing both employers and employees have recognized that industrial clusters are often defined by the regional commute shed for workers and have begun to work together to provide the sort of job training efforts that can keep labor skilled and businesses rooted. The result has been the emergence of numerous innovative workforce intermediaries, including the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership, a joint effort by employers and unions that started with training incumbent workers to help manufacturing firms stay competitive and has since gone on to train entry-level workers. Many of these regional workforce intermediary efforts have also been useful at addressing issues of low wages and job loss, including efforts by Project QUEST in San Antonio, Texas, to train displaced workers for new jobs in the health sector and by Cleveland’s WIRE-Net to train unemployed residents for positions in precision

The regional level has also captured the interest of people working to address persistent poverty in inner-city neighborhoods, particularly neighborhoods of color (Barron 2003). Regional and racial inequalities are, after all, inextricably linked, as institutionalized racism reflected in a range of local, state, and federal government policies have contributed to the creation of racially and economically segregated space (Wilson 1996; Pastor 2001a; Chapter 1 in this volume). Discriminatory housing lending policies based on race, for example, offered metropolitan mobility to some but locked others into designated inner-city areas (Powell 1998). Exclusionary zoning practices, including the prohibition of multifamily housing in upscale neighborhoods, created additional obstacles for poor families in search of affordable housing in white suburban communities (Powell 1998). Racial disparities, then, are frozen into the regional landscape of opportunity—and in the view of Powell and others, a regional approach will be necessary to reverse the trend.

Noting the relationship between inner-city decline and suburban sprawl, some have argued that “Smart Growth”—with attention to redirecting growth to central cities in order to prevent the consumption of open space and farmland—could be part of a recipe for poverty reduction and racial equity (PolicyLink 2002). Others have suggested that the metropolitan agenda could also help both theorists and practitioners move past the place versus people debate so prevalent in community development—that is, the concern that fragmented approaches to improving conditions in poorer communities (for example, separate efforts at housing and workforce development) will lead to economic and social imbalance, with successful housing development chasing out poor residents, or successful job placement via workforce intermediaries leading some to abandon old neighborhoods. Regionalism offers the possibility to think about both people and place, trying to simultaneously raise living standards by connecting to employment anywhere in a region and improving local livability to retain successful residents.

However, regionalism also challenges community development thinking itself. Many past approaches to such development tend to be inward-looking, focused on neighborhood problems and assets, even when major decisions about jobs, housing, and transportation are made at a regional level. David Rusk (1999) in Inside Game, Outside Game argues this position forcefully. In a striking analysis of poor neighborhoods, Rusk finds that locally focused community development efforts generally have quite modest economic impacts (compared to the effects of overarching regional forces such as the state of the metro economy) and instead suggests that the route to development relies on a regional focus. A similar position is taken by Jeremy Nowak (1997:7), who argues that the “future of a more effective community development requires an explicit emphasis on poverty alleviation, which in turn requires linking the possibilities of the inner city to the regional economy.” Certainly, the workforce development efforts briefly reviewed
above are all about making the connections for individual workers to the broader economy.

But the key question for community developers goes beyond individual fortunes: can an equity-oriented regional approach can really help poor neighborhoods? Even if Rusk, Nowak, and others overstated the case about the limits to community development and the advantages of a regional strategy, the emphasis on regional levers and levels may offer a useful counterbalance to the traditional approach. Before we explore these strategies further, we need to more clearly specify community-based regionalism and its relationship to community development.

**WHAT IS COMMUNITY-BASED REGIONALISM?**

Community-based regionalism is a subset of a broader category of equity-oriented regionalism. One variant of this equity-oriented regionalism is focused on the relationship between cities and suburbs, stressing the key role of municipal authorities as regional actors. This perspective itself has two strands. The first emphasizes the possible mutual gain from recognizing the common fortunes of all those situated in a region (see, for example, Voith 1992 and Pastor et al. 2000). Another strand of this perspective is less concerned about widespread mutual gain and instead focuses on the common interests of inner cities and lower-income inner-ring suburbs vis-à-vis outlying and more recent suburbs. In his seminal book *Metropolitics*, Myron Orfield (1997) notes that older inner-ring suburbs are suffering from economic dislocations and experiencing a rising presence of poor and minority residents; as such, their dilemmas have become more connected to the cities many of their residents once sought to escape. Orfield suggests that the best way to address this dilemma is through regional tax-sharing to redistribute funds to central cities and more distressed suburbs.

But alliance building between municipalities is difficult: older, problem-ridden inner-ring suburbs are faced with the choice of striking a deal with their often minority central cities or seeking alliances with the whiter exurbs, where many inner-ring residents wish eventually to escape. Moreover, the implications for community development of municipal equity are somewhat unclear: fiscal balance between cities and suburbs, a key tenet of this “municipal-based regionalism,” holds the promise of improvement for central cities, but there is no guarantee that this will translate to development opportunities in the poorest areas of the central city.

A second broad variant of equity-oriented regionalism is rooted in the labor movement. Recent years have seen the revitalization of central labor councils, federations of local unions organized at the level of regional labor markets (Ness and Eimer 2001). This “metro union” approach combines a bit of carrot and a bit of stick: there are attempts to work with employers to raise skill levels and retain “good jobs” even as there are strategies to raise the floor for the lowest-skilled workers (AFL-CIO Human Resources Development Institute 1998; Luria and Rogers 1997). Some of these efforts focus on workforce development, such as the
previously mentioned Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership. What concerns us here is when regional union-allied institutions go beyond workforce per se and begin to address broader issues of community development and planning.

One of the most sophisticated examples of this sort of approach is the South Bay Labor Council and its affiliated policy research arm, Working Partnerships USA (WPUSA), in San Jose, California. The council rose up partly to counter the influence of several business-oriented regional initiatives to stir economic recovery, including the efforts of Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network. One of its initial policy successes was a typical “bread and butter” labor issue: the 1998 passage of a Living Wage law in San Jose that at the time gave the city the highest wage level of any such ordinance in the country. But both the labor council and WPUSA quickly went well beyond Living Wages per se, participating in debates about smart growth, suggesting new approaches to affordable housing (see Bhargava et al. 2001), and pushing for a broad array of community benefits from redevelopment efforts (see Muller et al. 2003).

While there is much to be said for this approach, particularly its ability to improve outcomes for broad groups of workers within a region, the tie to community development in minority communities can sometimes be tentative. The best of the union efforts are rooted in the emerging workforce, including immigrant workers, and eschew the racial exclusivity of past union practices (see Vargas and Ong in this volume). Yet community waning about unions remains, particularly given the estrangement of many minorities from unions in the past, and the very strength of unions—at least, relative to poor inner-city communities—makes some community organizers concerned that their specific development and neighborhood interests will get downplayed in any coalition.

A third variant of equity-oriented regionalism has emerged from both the earlier principles of the community development field and some frustrations with how it has evolved over time. This approach, emerging from the activities of a range of community-based actors around the country, represents a distinct new way to address problems of persistent poverty in poor neighborhoods. The emergence of different types of community development organizations—community-based organizations (CBOs), community development corporations (CDCs), and comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs)—reflect political and economic trends and changes.

Though there is obviously a long history of community-based activity in this country, community-based organizations saw a significant resurgence in the late 1950s and 1960s. In the context of opposition to urban renewal, the civil rights movement, the urban crisis and the social upheaval of the era, CBOs emerged as specific attempts to improve the social and economic circumstances of residents of poor, primarily inner-city neighborhoods. With organic ties to social movements both large and small, CBOs during this period tended to be strongly focused on mobilization of community residents, frequently advocating not only for specific services and projects that would benefit neighborhood residents but also for changes in local and
federal urban policies, with an explicit goal of transforming power relations in society. Over time, however, many CDCs became primarily focused on more concrete services such as building affordable housing, providing meaningful job training, and promoting neighborhood business districts.

The narrowing of the community development movement to this “bricks and mortar” approach received significant criticism in the early 1990s, as the U.S. urban crisis deepened and the inability of narrow CDC-based approaches to transform conditions in poor neighborhoods became readily apparent. As a result, the community development movement has begun to pay more attention to broadening the focus of community development efforts, particularly paying more attention to the social dimensions of urban poverty and the importance of consolidating community voice as part of a strategy for confronting persistent urban poverty (Walsh 1997). As part of this attempt to return to the roots of community development in community organizing, foundations around the country began developing CCLs, place-based strategies that integrate social network approaches to project-based development approaches.

What does this trinity of CBOS, CDCs, and CCLs imply for community-based regionalism (CBR)? In our view, CBR takes as its starting point the need to understand, challenge, and work with outside forces in the process of community development. It recognizes that the lack of development in inner-city minority neighborhoods is not merely the result of a failure to invest in the local neighborhood, which often results in the escape of both consumer dollars (due to a lack of retail amenities) and the middle-class consumers themselves. It is also the result of isolation from positive regional economic trends, and the only way to secure appropriate regional support for local issues may be to fight for attention, a task that takes advantage of the traditional strength in organizing and conflict of CBOS.

Why would CDCs and CCLs, both of which are so spatially or geographically focused, want to pursue CBR? It is partly because the CBR perspective appropriately complicates the notion that the answer for neighborhood poverty lies primarily in the attraction of business back to the central city in order to overcome the spatial mismatch induced by the suburbanization of employment (see Pastor 2001b; Wilson 1996; Chapter 5 this volume). CBR instead notes that highly successful neighborhoods, particularly those that are higher income, are often quite jobs-scarce; they are, however, rich in amenities, available transportation, and networks to employment. As Nowak (1997:9) argues, “Strong neighborhoods are destination places and incubators; they are healthy, not because they are self-contained or self-sufficient but because their residents are appropriately linked to non-neighborhood opportunities.” In this view, the task of workforce development is to prepare people for available opportunities, the task of community development is to make communities livable so that residents do not depart, and the task of CBR is crafting the connective tissue and supportive policies that will make this possible.
Examples of Community-Based Regionalism

What are the strategies of CBR? In general, CBR includes linkage efforts that connect low-income residents to dynamic growth sectors in the regional economy; advocacy initiatives that try to make equity more central in regional policy decisions such as transportation, environment, and workforce development; strategies that seek to place affordable housing in suburban areas with higher accessibility to employment or to improve indigenous home ownership in low-income neighborhoods on the edge of gentrification; and economic reform initiatives that target the quality of jobs being created in the regional economy and seeking to promote economic and workforce development that better serves the needs of low-income residents (PolicyLink 2002). The potential effectiveness of these strategies can be seen in the work of a range of groups around the country.

In South Los Angeles, for example, a locally based group of organizers under the banner of a grassroots organizing project named AGENDA sought to challenge the decision of the City of Los Angeles to award a $70 million subsidy to persuade the Dreamworks Studio to locate in West Los Angeles. Rather than what might be thought of as the usual neighborhood approach—either kill the subsidy to redistribute the funds to local needs, or insist that the place of employment be situated in South Los Angeles—AGENDA instead catalyzed and anchored the Metropolitan Alliance, a coalition of community, labor, social service providers, and churches to fight for a commitment to train young students from inner-city communities of color for jobs in this powerful (and persistent) regional industry.

Faced with a local problem of development, AGENDA had targeted a regional industry and adopted a regionalist approach to job training; its focus was not on bringing jobs near workers—as it was highly unlikely that Hollywood would suddenly build studios in South Los Angeles—but rather on generating accessible training opportunities that would, in turn, allow job seekers to gain a foothold in a growing and regionally rooted “cluster” industry. Both the workforce perspective and the political organizing to make this happen had to occur on a regional scale, with alliances needed between AGENDA’s grassroots membership in South L.A. and progressive efforts in other parts of the Los Angeles landscape. The result, one brought about in conjunction with the efforts of sympathetic public officials, was a multimillion-dollar program involving the community college system that has since morphed into a larger program involving multiple studios called Workplace Hollywood (see Pastor et al. 2000; Pastor 2001a; Soja 2000; PolicyLink 2000.)

One of the CBR examples most rooted in the community development world itself has occurred in Chicago’s West Garfield Park.2 There, members of the small Bethel Lutheran Church began in 1979 trying to fight the poverty and hopelessness that characterized the neighborhood. Over the next twenty years, Bethel New Life, Inc., has grown to be a nationally recognized, innovative CDC with over 300 employees and has created over
1,000 new housing units, placed over 7,000 people in living wage jobs, and brought $110 million into its community.

Bethel’s regional perspective first emerged in the group’s efforts to redevelop the Garfield Park Conservatory, a once nationally renowned attraction that had fallen into disrepair. Arguing that this local resource was an underused regional attraction, Bethel worked with the Chicago Park District to renovate the site and to host a Dale Chihuly glass exhibit that drew over 500,000 visitors in the first nine months. The park and conservatory is now a vibrant site for multiple cultural events and exhibits throughout the year, and brings significant numbers of visitors to the neighborhood.

A more far-reaching example of Bethel’s regional perspective emerged in 1992, when the Green Line, a rail line that ran through the neighborhood, was threatened with closure due to low ridership. The CDC recognized that closure would damage the ability of neighborhood residents to reach suburban areas where lower-skill employment was growing. But Bethel’s leadership also recognized that suburban residents further out on the Green Line had a common interest in maintaining the route, because they used it to access downtown employment. As a result, the CDC was able to form an unusual alliance of city and suburb. The two eventually convinced the Chicago Transit Authority not only to maintain the line but also to make $300 million in capital improvements and upgrade its service. The Lake-Pulaski station in the neighborhood has now become the hub of Bethel’s transit-oriented development strategy, with a 23,000-square-foot commercial center that will house a day care facility, commercial enterprises, a clinic, employment services, and job training.

The notion of unusual alliances also lies at the heart of the work of the Northwest Indiana Federation of Interfaith Organizations. The effort began in 1994 when three neighborhoods in the greater Gary, Indiana, region, with the help of the Gamaliel Foundation, formed a regional federation of churches to begin tackling the shared conditions facing the urban core. Their first campaign, “Operation Holy Ground,” sought to rid their neighborhoods of drug houses. In the wake of progress in this arena, however, the federation realized that no matter how many abandoned buildings were removed, the systemic causes of concentrated poverty still remained.

The federation thus began focusing on regional transportation as a strategy to ensure that residents had access to jobs and basic goods and services, and organizers and leaders began to call for regional transportation that would link urban core residents to outlying opportunities. They soon realized that an efficient regional transportation system was being hindered by the fragmentation of local transportation systems, which were often designed to make access to white suburban areas more difficult for central-city blacks. This fragmentation, however, also inconvenienced city-bound suburban commuters, whose treks to higher-paying downtown employment were made more difficult by the transit system’s inefficiency.

Recognizing that the issues and voices of the predominantly white suburban communities were also ignored through the fragmented transit...
authorities, the Interfaith Federation reframed its transportation program and redesigned its organizing and advocacy strategy to work in coalition with these suburban interests. The result: establishment of a regional community-based coalition with enough influence and power over elected officials to direct establishment of a single transportation authority that meets the needs of the region, including and particularly the urban core.

The positive impacts of these regional strategies communities are clear. What is murkier is how we go from “here” to “there.” How can minority communities already under economic stress effectively engage regionally, build coalitions, and bring the real benefits of regional development to their areas? Which neighborhoods are more or less ripe for taking on a regional view? What difference does it make if the actor is involved in a CCI trying to combine elements from both the CBO and CDC models—and what difference does it make that many CClS are foundation-sponsored place-based initiatives? We take up these questions below in the context of a specific set of cases in the Bay Area.

**CBR and CClS in the San Francisco Bay Area**

In this section, we consider the experience of three comprehensive community initiatives grappling with a regional perspective in the San Francisco Bay Area. Each of the CClS considered was part of an effort funded and supported by the Hewlett Foundation’s Neighborhood Improvement Initiative. These Hewlett-sponsored CClS emerged just as several other foundation-sponsored CCl efforts were sprouting in other parts of the United States, including Los Angeles, Atlanta, and Baltimore. The foundation made its first planning investment in the Mayfair neighborhood of East San Jose in 1996, when it funded the Mayfair Improvement Initiative (MII). It later made investments in West Oakland’s 7th Street/McClymonds Corridor in 1998, which led to the establishment of the 7th Street/McClymonds Initiative organization (also known as 7th Street), and in a section of East Palo Alto in 1999 which led to the creation of a group called One East Palo Alto, or Oepa (see Figure 3.1 for a map; basic demographics and other data for the three are shown in Table 3.1, with comparison made to the counties of which they are a part).

Initially, connecting the neighborhoods to regional dynamics was not an explicit part of the early programming. The “new regionalism”—new in that it incorporates equity and economic competitiveness as well as administrative efficiency and an antisprawl environmental agenda—was just emerging as a refined concept in the mid-1990s. Newer still was the movement for CBR. However, the element was added to the CCI programming and the sites had varying experiences. The MII became actively engaged in regional discussions and explicitly incorporated regionalism into their agenda. The 7th Street Initiative, which had a significant presence of community organizers, went regional early in its thinking and alliance building, but did not fully attend to local tensions and was thus unsustainable as a CCI. Oepa struggled to gain significant traction on the regional level
although it eventually became a key part of its strategic thinking; while this had something to do with its internal evolution as a program, a striking challenge was that the internal dynamics of the site actually led to different regionalist interests. We develop these points further below.4

Seeing the Bay

The CCS began in the midst of a period in which the Bay Area was seen as the heart not only of the New Economy but of the world economy. At the center of the region’s economic engine was the Silicon Valley: its tech industry—the manufacture of computer components, software engineering, and eventually web design—comprised a fall 27.3 percent of private employment in the San Jose metro area in the 1998–2001 period, well above the state share of 7.1 percent in the same era.5 This proved to be a great boon to growth—but it has also meant the region suffered disproportionately in the subsequent downturn, as business investment plunged and the tech and telecommunications sectors began a sharp collapse in early 2001.

It was, however, not simply rapid economic growth—with its more abundant fiscal resources, clearer reasons to connect to employment, and upward pressures on housing prices, even in neglected areas—that set the context. Equally important was a strong regional consciousness that had emerged in the Bay Area. There were, of course, precedents for regional business and social organization in the Bay Area. Public officials in the 9-county area have long been brought together under the rubric of the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), and the Bay Area Council, a group of private-sector leaders across the region, has been in operation since
<table>
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<td>9.9%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Households with a single female head</td>
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<td>15.7%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonfamily households</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with children</td>
<td>1,460</td>
<td>78,919</td>
<td>898</td>
<td>197,245</td>
<td>1,706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married-couple households with children</td>
<td>72.8%</td>
<td>79.3%</td>
<td>75.8%</td>
<td>79.7%</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-male-headed households with children</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-female-headed households with children</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing tenure: owner</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
<td>63.4%</td>
<td>40.4%</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing tenure: renter</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>77.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1945. The South Bay has had its own set of organizations, including the Santa Clara Valley (now Silicon Valley) Manufacturing Group, an organization founded by David Packard that has long lobbied for improvements in regional infrastructure and been willing to persuade both business and consumers to pay increased taxes to foot the bill.

But the slump of the early 1990s, induced by defense spending cutbacks and a tech slowdown, created the conditions for a new business-led organization called Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network (JV:SVN). JV:SVN developed a regional indicators project, promoted economic clusters based on network models, and developed the notion that firms and cities in the region should “collaborate to compete.” It was soon celebrated as the archetype for a new set of approaches that were eventually encouraged throughout the state by an Irvine Foundation-sponsored project to incubate “civic entrepreneurs.”

In short, regionalism was in the air. But critics also rightly noted that a rising regional tide was not lifting all boats. San Jose’s WPISA, the labor-affiliated think tank arm of the South Bay Central Labor Council, documented growing disparities in its own Silicon Valley backyard, warned of the growth of temporary work and volatile work lives, and pursed such issues as a living wage ordinance, housing policy, and community benefits agreements. Urban Habitat, an Oakland-based group long focused on issues of environmental justice, began to identify issues of gentrification as critical to community stability, issued an important report calling for regional tax-sharing, and organized a Social Equity Caucus to bring together various community leaders who were concerned about the region’s evolution.

The business sector, at least in the heady days of the 1990s boom, became increasingly sympathetic to the calls for change. The motivation behind this sympathy was, in part, purely economic: with demand high and land scarce, developers were interested in the economic development of areas they might once have passed by. Business leaders were also interested in improving the general level of human capital in the Bay Area, noting that the labor shortages of the 1990s might be addressed not only by importing immigrant engineers but also by developing “home-grown” talent (Joint Venture, 2002). But it was more than just cross economic interest—the policy orientation and style of the business groups had shifted as well. The business-dominated Bay Area Council began working with community organizations and a series of important intermediaries—including the National Economic Development and Law Center and PolicyLink in Oakland—to develop a Community Capital Investment Initiative designed to spur private investment in distressed areas. Joint Venture: Silicon Valley revised its signature Annual Index of Silicon Valley to include measures of poverty, income distribution, and human capital.

Other business groups teamed up with housing advocates to lobby for affordable housing in communities that were willing to take on in-fill housing and higher density. This was of special interest to communities like West Oakland, East Palo Alto, and East San Jose, all of whom felt the sting of rising housing prices. Displacement of current residents became a particular worry as longer and more painful traffic jams—caused by the region’s explosive growth and the failure of its housing production to keep pace—ied
some newly wealthy young workers to buy property in inner-city areas. While housing prices in Mayfair were about 60 percent of the Santa Clara County average during 1996–1997, they rose to seventy percent by 2001–2002. West Oakland also saw a dramatic rise in relative prices, from around 30 percent of the Alameda County average to nearly 60 percent over the same period. But the most important and displacing surge took place in East Palo Alto; here the ratio of local prices to the county average rose from 55 percent in 1996–1997 to nearly 80 percent in 2001–2002.

This, then, was the scenario facing the three CCTs as they began their various journeys: a robust economy, a business sector beginning to think regionally, an increasingly vibrant set of progressive regional intermediaries and advocates, pressures on housing stock and hence community stability, and even some interest by businesses boxed out of other areas by over-development and more open to investment opportunities in poorer neighborhoods. In short, there seemed to be a real possibility for neighborhood initiatives to hook up with sympathetic regional actors and even market forces and finally leverage the region to make a difference in their communities.

Taking up the Torch

Were the CCTs able to pick up the regional torch? One fact to keep in mind in any assessment is that the Bay Area economy collapsed as 2001 dawned, a slowdown driven mainly by the sharp decline in the technology sector and its affiliates in telecommunications and web design. Like any first-mover, the earliest CCT organization out the door, the MII, already had ties to business and regional leaders before its attention was diverted to overall recuperation, giving this case a special edge compared to the others.

But the fact that these ties were built at all speaks volumes: early on in its process, Mayfair staff developed a regional advisory board to keep the CCT in touch with broader trends. It also had a singular consciousness-raising experience when it combined its local organizing around health education in the community with an effort led by local unions and community-based networks to lobby county and city authorities to use dollars from a tobacco tax settlement to extend health insurance to all children regardless of documentation status. The resulting victory had especially positive impacts in the highly immigrant Mayfair neighborhood—and it illustrated the power of complementing a local approach with a regional alliance.

The power of combining local organizing and a regional perspective was also seen when the MIT decided to participate in the Strong Neighborhoods Initiative (SNI) launched in 2000 by the City of San Jose and its Redevelopment Agency. SNI stemmed from a city commitment to use redevelopment money to help neighborhoods after years of supporting downtown development; because MIT was highly organized and understood the larger context, it was able to quickly form a neighborhood advisory council for the SNI and consequently became one of the largest recipients of SNI aid.
Thus, as MII prepared to wean itself off Hewlett Foundation funding, it went through a strategic planning exercise in which a regional scan was one of the prominent elements. As a result, MII shifted from a relative smorgasbord of projects to three focus areas: employment, housing, and education. It also came to a clearer idea of its role—that of an intermediary linking regional resources and local needs—and Mayfair staff began to participate actively in activities organized by one of the CRR umbrellas for the Bay, Urban Habitat. Mayfair, in short, had caught the regionalist bug.

West Oakland would seem to have been uniquely positioned to take advantage of a regionalist strategy. The East Bay itself was on a special economic lift-off as the 7th Street Initiative came online, partly because development opportunities on the peninsula were being exhausted. A new mayor, Jerry Brown, came to power in 1998 with an agenda aimed at revitalizing the downtown so proximate to West Oakland. West Oakland itself is very near the Port of Oakland, a place where employment was slated to grow and local authorities were open to the creation of opportunities for nearby residents.

The 7th Street Initiative did develop some regional momentum. Several of the early board members were disposed toward a regionalist approach, including one who received a special leadership award from the Bay Area Transportation and Land Use Coalition for his work on a project launched by ABAG, the area’s regional council of governments. The first executive director had also been involved in the environmental justice movement, a framework that lends itself to regional thinking, and several leaders in the neighborhood passed through a leadership training program organized by Urban Habitat that was viewed as the precursor to the creation of a new community-based cadre for progressive regionalism.

Unfortunately, board and staff turnover meant that those interested in regionalism were soon looking for other venues for their political and community commitments. The first executive director left and the organization proved itself unable to find and agree on a replacement. For complex set of reasons, the Hewlett Foundation made a decision to pull the plug, and the 7th Street Initiative was disbanded. Interestingly, this did not end regionalist impulses; as it turns out, many of the initiative’s leaders participated in a special summit of community-based regionalists in the Bay Area entitled “Bridging the Bay” organized by Urban Habitat. Without the base of the CCI organization itself, however, this stands as a tale of separation of the CCI from the local constituency rather than a regional-local link.

The third story unfolded in East Palo Alto. The newest of the initiatives, it was still getting its sea legs on a community plan when it was presented with a regional challenge: the discount retail chain IKEA announced its desire to place a store in East Palo Alto, which the company saw as a valuable crossroads of regional transportation networks and one of the few areas in the region with readily developable land. The city and some advocates painted IKEA as a potential source of sales tax revenue and generator of entry-level positions. However, IKEA was also viewed as a potential disruption to the local community, primarily because it would add to a traffic
problem already exacerbated by commuters who passed through East Palo Alto on their way to jobs in the Silicon Valley. IKEA, according to these critics, was an external imposition: in criticizing the idea, one resident suggested that "IKEA will serve the Bay Area, not East Palo Alto."7

This was, of course, exactly the point: attracting a branch of this home furnishing chain was supposed to capture retail dollars that were being spent elsewhere in the region and thereby address some of the fiscal disparities plaguing East Palo Alto. Despite being a pressing issue through 2001–2002 and one in which the regional-community connection was clear, OEPA, the Hewlett funded CIT, took no explicit or implicit position in a crucial election in which the issue was decided by the voters. Caution on the regional front remained characteristic of OEPA for some time. While this reflected the fact that OEPA was a new organization focused on the initial steps of building community, the caution also stemmed from some sharp differences within the community that resulted in different regional interests. These differences could not be easily negotiated or resolved, an issue we highlight below.

In 2003, however, OEPA became increasingly interested in the regional dimension, with recent organizational goals including the capacity to broker regional resources and develop leadership to advocate for policy change in the areas of economic independence, education, and neighborhood safety. This suggests the importance of phasing: OEPA required significant internal work before its leadership and staff could look outward.

Analyzing the Patterns

In these three neighborhood initiatives we have one CIT that became deeply engaged in regional processes relatively early and saw that as a way to accomplish local goals, one CIT which sought engagement but found itself vulnerable at home, and one CIT which was very preoccupied with internal affairs and thus eschewed early action when directly presented with a regional opportunity. What explains the pattern, particularly given that these were all in the same broad political economy and were, in fact, part of a family of comprehensive initiatives funded and guided by the same foundation?

First, the nature of poverty seems to matter. Much of the thinking around community-based regionalism assumes that poorer neighborhoods suffer from a problem of isolation, particularly economic isolation, and that the main tasks are to devise employment programs to connect employees and employers, create transportation programs to insure that workers can get to jobs, and attract business investors into the areas to take advantage of a workforce that is ready and willing (Pastor 2001b). Regional workforce intermediaries can help the process along, particularly the sort that provide training to both equip employees with better skills and help regional industries upgrade their competitiveness (Giloth 2004). However, when jobs are out of reach for other reasons, such as child care needs, disability, lack of basic education, and other issues, it may matter little that regional opportunities are available.
Glancing at Table 3.1, note that of the three sites, West Oakland had the highest rate of individuals living below the poverty line but the lowest rate of those living between 150 and 200 percent line, a usual marker of the working poor. Indeed, West Oakland’s share in that category was not far off that of its host county, while both Mayfair and OEP A diverged sharply from their respective counties in this measure. This is further seen in Figure 3.1, which shows those Bay Area census tracts where the percent of those above the 150 percent poverty cut-off exceeds 25 percent and the male labor force participation rates exceeds the regional average for such poor tracts. Note that Mayfair falls entirely into this category, while most of OEP A and a significant portion of an adjoining neighborhood is working poor. West Oakland, by contrast, tends more to the nonworking poor, with an extraordinarily high rate of employment disability and rates of female-headed households with children twice as high (at about twenty percent of all households) as in Mayfair or OEP A. Thus, we would expect regionalism to be a harder immediate fit with West Oakland, even though a broad group of activists were interested.

Second, the size of the neighborhood relative to its immediate jurisdiction seems to matter. Mayfair is a small neighborhood in the third largest city in California; even thinking about local authorities requires a pseudo-regionalist framework simply because of the scale of the municipality. OEP A was about half of the city of East Palo Alto, and residents were therefore able to act at the scale of the city itself; but since East Palo Alto is a small city, this led to more inward-looking thought and action. West Oakland is a distressed neighborhood in a medium-sized city, a seemingly perfect fit for engaging on a higher scale and forming alliances with other neighborhoods. The problem for the area is that other Oakland neighborhoods, such as Fruitvale and San Antonio, were already attracting city, foundation, and regional attention and having great success at understanding regional opportunities (such as Fruitvale’s decision to turn a rapid transit station into an opportunity for local economic and retail development). West Oakland was thus less prominent.

Third, the three neighborhoods seem to have faced different opportunity structures and experienced different comfort levels with regard to drawing upon external resources. Mayfair was a poor area in one of the most dynamic economies in the state, and, as such, it attracted the attention of business and civic leaders, for whom it represented both a significant contradiction to the image of regional prosperity and a significant opportunity to do better. The city of San Jose was also under considerable pressure to do better by its neighborhoods after decades of redevelopment activity focused on its downtown. Thus, Mayfair found itself with ready allies, including city officials.

West Oakland, by contrast, faced a less dynamic business sector—the East Bay was still limping forward in the 1990s even as the Silicon Valley turned into an economic dynamo—and the attention of its new mayor was focused on the central business district. As for OEP A, San Mateo business had a less distinct personality: important tech companies are there but they seem
to draw their geographic identity from Silicon Valley to the south and the San Francisco financial center to the north.

With regard to external resources, Mayfair was the only one of the three CCSs to sustain an advisory board of prominent officials, policy makers, and private sector actors. Mayfair was more used to outsiders in general: while many of the leaders of the NH were long-time residents, this was also an area that had traditionally been an immigrant portal. The 2000 census indicated that about 48 percent of residents above the age five had been living in the same house for five years, three percentage points lower than that for the county as a whole. By contrast, 57 percent of residents in OEEA had been living in their homes for at least five years, slightly higher than that for the county in which the neighborhood is situated.

Fourth, the areas also had different populations and tensions around identifying regional issues and strategies. Mayfair was predominantly Latino and largely low-income but working, hence there were broad commonalities around getting access to health insurance, improving basic adult education, and other such measures. Tensions did exist between native born and more recent immigrants, but the history of the local area as an immigrant gateway meant that even native-born residents were aware of and somewhat comfortable with addressing the needs of the immigrant population.

West Oakland is largely African American and actually has a level of foreign-born residents that is below the county average, a contrast to the relatively high immigrant presence in the rest of the NH; partly as a result, West Oakland was slightly out of touch with immigrant empowerment dynamics occurring elsewhere in the region and tended to be more reflective of the perspective and needs of its overwhelmingly African American community. Moreover, as noted above, West Oakland is not ranked in the Bay Area census tracts we have deemed working poor and it is also predominantly renters rather than home owners; these two facts gave the community common ground in maintaining social welfare programs and resisting gentrification.

OEEA was the most complex of the sites. First, consider home ownership: glancing back at the data in Table 3.1, we see a startling fact: nearly 60 percent of homes were owned in OEEA, essentially the same as in San Mateo County as a whole and much higher than the figures for Mayfair and West Oakland. What this meant was that the pressure of rising housing prices that led many in the other sites to worry about the regional influence of gentrification was also giving some locals in OEEA a reason to celebrate: assets held for years through tougher times were finally coming up in value. Renters and homeowners had potentially very different interests.

This difference in resting and ownership was complicated by demographics. While all the areas had experienced an influx of Latinos, particularly immigrants, during the 1990s, East Palo Alto had experienced the most massive demographic shift, with a 32 percent decline in the African American population (from 9,727 to 6,641) and a doubling of the Latino population (from 8,327 to 17,346). Interestingly, the home ownership rates for African Americans and the burgeoning Latino population were divergent but
not wildly so: 66 percent of black households in the Oepa area were owners versus 50 percent of Latino households. What was truly different was how each group got to realizing this part of the American dream. Latino households seemed to be stretching to ownership through resource pooling: if one glances at Figure 3.2, one can see that nearly 50 percent of Latino-owned households have 7 or more members; by contrast, 42 percent of black-owned households had 1 to 2 members. Looked at another way, around 80 percent of Latino-owned households had 5 or more members; 80 percent of black-owned households had four or fewer members.

The Latino statistics imply that both ends of the households may be stretched: older adults, often family members, pooling resources and the younger children that were attached to primary and other families. The African American statistics suggest a different story: older, often solo, residents hanging on after decades of residency. The pattern is reflected in the results for median age, 37.3 for African Americans and 21.8 for Latinos, a gap of 15.5 years that far exceeds the statewide gap between these two ethnic groups of only about 6.5 years. This large age gap played out in regionalist agendas: older African Americans had fresher memories of a history of exclusion by regional actors, were therefore wary of regionalist agendas, and tended to be more interested in quality of life issues; Latinos had a blanker historical slate and also had interests that were more clearly focused on jobs and development, even at the cost of further clogging traffic corridors.

Regionalist agendas around housing and transportation, in short, were complicated by internal considerations and diverging interests. In that light, it is unsurprising that Oepa was not eager to quickly pick up the regionalist banner, at least until its leadership had built internal unity of purpose. Rightly so, they focused more on internal planning, interethnic communications, and improving local schools and safety. As noted above,
OEPA is now more engaged in the regional dimension, with the organization now aiming to broker regional resources and develop leadership to advocate for policy change in the areas of economic independence, education, and neighborhood safety.

**Conclusion: Waiting for Regionalism**

Excitement about community-based regionalism seems to be building around the country. Many organizations have adopted the mantra, as demonstrated by the over 600 participants, the vast majority working with communities of color—who attended a National Summit on Regional Equity organized by PolicyLink and the Funders Network on Smart Growth and Livable Communities in Los Angeles in November 2002. Supporting the movement are a growing number of examples how local community groups have tried “thinking and linking” to the region, and found new ways to achieve their traditional goals of community development and empowerment. Community-based regionalism also opens up the way to new common ground, particularly since business leaders may share an interest in workforce development for low-income residents while progressive environmentalists may be happy to find new allies in the struggle to curtail sprawl and protect open space.

We share the excitement about regionalism’s potential. However, the analysis we offer here suggests that when regionalism hits the ground, it can stumble as easily as succeed.

We offer two central lessons. The first is that regionalism may not fit all communities, and it is not likely to be the first thing on a community development agenda. As we have noted, an in-depth analysis can help reveal the degree of fit; we think that CBR is an easier match when working poverty is an important factor, when the neighborhood is in a larger area and used to working at a larger scale, and when interests within the community are more closely aligned. More of this sort of pre-preparation—analysis and selection—may be necessary as CBR becomes a more common approach (see Pastor, Beiner, and Rosner 2003 for one effort at just such a “regional audit”).

However, even under the best of circumstances, it is important to let the regional component of community development strategies evolve at its own pace. CBR requires new capacities for analysis and coalition building, and it also requires the credibility that comes from first demonstrating that one is targeting and meeting local needs. CBR is essentially asking neighbors to make a leap of faith, believing that regional levers can move local solutions and that the organization is strong enough to not lose sight of its own interests on that larger playing field. Mayfair was able to make the connection, West Oakland lost its local base (at least in the CBT form), and OEPA was still trying to establish itself before branching out and away.

Our second and more complex lesson involves which sort of local community strategies are necessary for regional engagement. The striking fact is that rather than focusing primarily on specific projects and services provided
within poor neighborhoods, CBR involves communities searching for opportunities that exist within broader regional political and economic processes. Sometimes these opportunities represent potential mutual gains, as when regional workforce intermediaries solve labor market problems for both job seekers and struggling employers. But getting what neighborhoods need from regional decision makers, as with the challenge Bethel New Life launched against the Chicago Transit Authority or the Community Benefits fight during the expansion of the Los Angeles Staples Center, can be a solutely political process—and many CDCs, focused on local projects and worried about funders and government allies, have found this perspective a harder sell than their sometimes more policy-oriented and politically oriented colleagues in CBOS.

CBOS may have more potential to move the agenda.CCI organizations have multiple purposes—they are supposed to both make deals and empower residents, which puts them somewhere between the practical focus of CDCS and the political purpose of many CBOS. CBOS face fewer political constraints (but often more economic constraints since they may not have the property assets CDCS may control). CBOS, in fact, can thrive by enhancing their scale, impact, and perceived level of power. It is little wonder that CBOS dominate in the community-oriented part of equity regionalism (as reflected in the presence of various organizing federations that themselves are regional in scope) or that these groups see the regional policy agenda as a way to pursue organizing that is consistent with the interconnections they are trying to promote. 

This more political organizing strategy, however uncomfortable a fit with community development, may be necessary. Our experience with CBR clarifies the ongoing debate within the broad community development field between project-based community development and "power-based community development" by lifting up the necessity of political activism and community-based agenda setting as an important factor for community development and community-based regionalism. Indeed, Reverend Cheryl Rivera, executive director of the Northwest Indiana Interfaith Federation, has argued that: "Metropolitan organizing is about changing the rules of the game so that those who have not, will have. . . . Metropolitan organizing is the new civil rights movement, and we must be persistent." Casting the phenomenon in that light may be instructive: as with civil rights, any new movement must be prepared to challenge both itself and its allies. But it is also a characterization that can fill one with hope. Progress, however imperfect and incomplete, was made in America as a result of the civil rights generation. Perhaps regionalist thinking and action can help further the field of minority community economic development as well.

Notes
The authors thank the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation as well as the Ford Foundation for funding the research behind this work. We thank Paul Ong and two anonymous reviewers for comments on earlier drafts and acknowledge the able
research support of Javier Huizar, Julie Jacobs, Rachel Rosner, and Justin Scoggins. Finally, we thank the leaders in the movement for regional equity, particularly those in the Bay Area neighborhoods we describe here, for pointing the way to a new approach to community development and empowerment.

1. Labor organizing campaigns of the 1930s and 1940s also provided early models for community organizing and set the context for Alinsky’s community-based organizing efforts in Chicago. Labor union and worker organizing as well efforts by faith-based institutions are highly visible in community-based regionalism organizing and coalition building strategies.


3. See also www.interfaithfederation.org. Information from Cheryl Rivera, keynote address for Bridging the Bay, a conference organized by the Social Equity Caucus, Santa Cruz, California, April, 2003.

4. For a longer analysis, see Pascor et al. 2004.

5. Employment data taken from the Labor Market Information Division of California’s Employment Development Department.

6. Housing data is not available at the tract level. Hence, the data for East Palo Alto is for the city as a whole while the Mayfair and West Oakland figures are for the zip codes that include those areas. As such, these are similar to but not exactly the prices in the neighborhoods themselves. Data come from statistics maintained by the Rand Corporation which were originally derived from data collected by the California Association of Realtors.


8. The geographic areas mapped are tracts, with an overlay of the NII boundaries and a block-level shape to determine potential areas where there are no residents. It is the latter procedure that allows us to determine the low number of people in the working poor area in the north of West Oakland.

9. Indeed, in 2003, the Mayfair neighborhood took the initiative, along with OEPA, in organizing a conference, “From Shadows to Strategies: A Symposium on Undocumented Labor, Workforce Development, and Community Improvement,” which considered how best to incorporated undocumented workers into local development.

10. Home ownership in the OEPA footprint was also much higher than the average 43 percent for the City of East Palo Alto as a whole, suggesting some potential differences from the rest of the city as well.

11. The data on demographic change are for East Palo Alto as a whole while all other figures and data are constrained to the “footprint” or subset of the city (that is, the OEPA service area). We did this to ensure maximum consistency between the geographies over the two census years when calculating change.

12. Over 1,200 people participated in a follow-up summit in May 2005 in Philadelphia, signally growing interest in the field.


15. Quote is taken from a keynote address by Cheryl Rivera for Bridging the Bay, a conference organized by the Social Equity Caucus, Santa Cruz, California, April, 2003.
REFERENCES


