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WE ARE WHAT COMES NEXT:
ORGANIZING ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY IN THE BRONX

By

EVAN CASPER-FUTTERMAN

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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by EVAN CASPER-FUTTERMAN

Dissertation Director:
James DeFilippis

Economic democracy is a framework for the cooperative configuration of society, from daily interpersonal practice, to institutional governance, to a reconstructed set of state-market relationships and political economy. As such an overarching framework, economic democracy has many movement mothers. It is politically pluralistic and even ambiguous.

This dissertation examines the work of the Bronx Cooperative Development Initiative, founded by community organizers in the Bronx in response to ongoing frustration with the process and results of planning, housing, and economic development theory and practice in the Bronx dating back decades. Rather than pursuing a strategy of cooperative enterprise development, the group is pursuing a strategy of creating a community enterprise network. This focuses on the incubation of institutional infrastructure to shift the Bronx politically and economically towards economic democracy. These projects envision capacities of community-led planning and policy development, high-road small business development, advanced manufacturing and digital fabrication, education and training, as well as civic action coordination and a fund for capitalizing, investing in, and sustaining the network of institutions in the borough.

Through semi-structured interviews, document analysis and participant observation, this dissertation seeks to understand how this group of people understand and define economic in this case, and secondly, how does this group of people propose to operationalize that vision of economic democracy in the Bronx?

Through a multi-year embedded research process, the dissertation sketches out several core themes for how economic democracy is being developed here as a framework for shared or collective ownership of economic assets and their democratic management. This working definition arises from, challenges, and is applicable but not confined to, urban community organizing and economic development practice. It both intersects with and parallels global anti-capitalist development frameworks and movements. Core themes arise in regard to challenging assumptions and practices of community organizing, anchor institution procurement initiatives, cooperative enterprise development, scale and scalability, and the construction of durable urban governing regimes. In the final instance, rather than a cooperative development network, BCDI's work is seen as attempting to construct an "equity regime" for economic democracy, drawing on the lessons and failures of the progressive cities movement.

This dissertation contributes to literatures of equity planning, community organizing, economic democracy, the challenges of and obstacles to constructing durable political and economic power for people of color in the United States, community-labor coalitions and alliances, and freedom struggle in the United States.

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I applied to get a PhD in urban planning and public policy after watching the Bush administration dismantle every last vestige of social democracy in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. After decades as foundational institutions of our social contract—never adequately resourced and deeply racialized from their birth—public health, public education, and public housing were rapidly and entirely dismantled in a matter of months. Complicating narratives of a “slow” recovery, within a decade of the levee breaches, these public achievements and goods had effectively ceased to exist. The recovery was indeed rapid, it just wasn’t the recovery we wanted.

In such a dystopia, I was encouraged not to dwell only on the loss of these institutions and what they represented in society, but to develop a resolve to work collaboratively and urgently on the foundations of the third reconstruction, and the theoretical and political vision and evidentiary basis that would legitimize it. Everything I have done since I lived in New Orleans politically and academically and everywhere in between, I owe substantially to the inspiration, guidance, and agitation I got from Lydia Pelot-Hobbs, Kali Akuno, Bill Quigley, Mandisa Moore, Luisa Dantas, Endesha Juakali, Collette Tippy, Clare Bayard, Breonne Dedecker (for introducing me to BCDI as well), and my two academic mentors at UNO, Marla Nelson and Renia Ehrenfeucht.

Compared with the horror stories I hear from peers in their experiences of grad school and “PhDland” as it’s often called, I could not have had a more different experience. My dissertation committee was a true dream team for me: a perfect mixture of geography,

political science, planning, and economics. One fateful summer day after I graduated from college I was browsing the shelves of a Manhattan bookstore and I came upon an interesting looking book with an intriguing title about the relationships between urban communities and forces of capital. It was called *Unmaking Goliath*. I read it and quickly concluded it was one of the most important and inspiring (in a challenging way) works I'd yet read. When I set out to get a PhD a couple years later, my internal monologue was that I wanted to write a sequel of sorts—to update it for the decade-plus between when it was written and when I was starting my own PhD work. Having the author of that book, James DeFilippis, as my program advisor and dissertation chair was thus both intimidating and a blessing. I'm grateful and thankful to James for supporting, guiding, challenging, and mentoring me through the entirety of my time at Rutgers, despite the fact that I never actually took a class with him. I'm thankful to Kathe Newman for numerous seminars on urban politics and reading groups during my time at Rutgers. Her unique perspective combining geography and political science was a fundamental part of how I looked at the world around me in the Bronx, and led me to the literature underpinning my favorite chapter of my dissertation. To Bob Lake, I am especially thankful for the life-altering experience of Social Theory, which exposed me to the work of Karl Polanyi, John Dewey, Tim Mitchell, and Barbara Cruikshank. These works and the intellectual communities from which they drew helped me to continue to unearth my methodological orientation to scholarship and my political orientation to the necessity of democracy in everyday life. Finally, to Jessica Gordon-Lembach, I am grateful for years worth of scholarship on the intersections of racial capitalism and the wealth gap, political economy, and the legacy of black economic cooperation. Her 2014 book *Collective*

Courage not only has deeply shaped my political orientation to economic democracy. I believe it is a generationally significant work for our political moment. Beyond my mentors named above, I'm grateful to my peers in Rutgers and outside, whose collective efforts for exams and with feedback was indispensable to my own analytical development, and helped provide the support network necessary to even conceive of being able to cross the finish line and obtain the degree. Thank you to Jon Stiles, Brian Baldor, Lee Polonsky, Ryan Good, Ben Teresa, Juan Rivero, Melissa Turoff, and Jen Estruth. Although they were not advisors to my work officially, I am very thankful to have taught alongside Dario Azzellini and Mike Menser at CUNY, and I am sure that my teaching and my analysis benefitted tremendously from being able to collaborate in the classroom with them as I finished my dissertation.

Since 2012, when I got back to New York City, I have been active in various political circles to advance economic democracy, solidarity economy, and cooperative development in New York City. I am grateful to the community of activists and practitioners, without whose work there would quite simply be nothing to study. This list will inevitably leave people out, but thank you to SolidarityNYC: Lauren Hudson, Cheyenna Weber, Zara Serabian-Arthur, Ben Blackshear, Kenneth Edusei, Annie McShiras, Olivia Geiger, and Michael Johnson. Everything I know about solidarity economy is a result of being able to think and argue collectively and build community with this delightful group of comrades and friends since 2012. In the rest of the field, I've been able to learn from and work with a bench of talented, thoughtful, and deeply, ardently committed practitioners and advocates. Melissa Hoover, Camille Kerr, Dey del

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Finally, of course, I want to thank my moms for their lifelong support and nurturance of my choices and my work. For both pushing me and for stepping back and letting me find my way sometimes too. Their lives spent fighting for equity and justice inside and outside of their work has shaped me from one of my earliest memories in childhood, standing outside the courthouse steps celebrating New York's first second parent adoption for same sex couples. My drive and ambition to succeed and have political impact and strong relationships comes from seeing them do it everyday. Thanks moms.

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Chapter I: Introduction

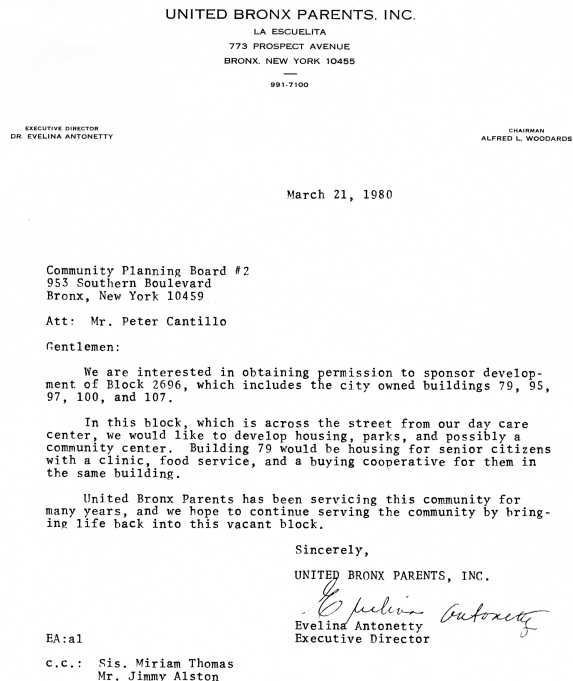
For there are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt, of examining what our ideas really mean [or] feel like...

—Audre Lorde

*Our moral obligations extend beyond pointing to wrongs and offering alternatives. If we are going to take a prescriptive turn in urban political economy, then we should also think strategically about how regimes are changed through purposive and collective action. **Institutional design needs to be joined with social mobilization.***

—Beauregard (1997)

This is a story about what comes next. In March 1980 Dr. Evelina Lopez Antonetty of United Bronx Parents (UBP) wrote to her local South Bronx Community Board to request permission for UBP to sponsor development on several vacant city owned buildings. She and UBP proposed to “[bring] life” back to the vacant block with a health clinic, housing for senior citizens, a cafeteria and a buying cooperative to meet community needs in a neighborhood still reeling from years of redlining, public neglect, and predatory arson (Figure 1.1, above).² Like many before and after, these requests fall on mostly deaf and indifferent ears. In the rare instances where modest community-led or cooperative development occurs, their existence remains as marginal



¹ Beauregard 1997 p. 1573

² Center for Puerto Rican Studies, records of United Bronx Parents, Inc., 1966-1989. Box 5, Folder 5.

and vulnerable as the communities that they have been built to serve. Collective determination remains elusive. The challenges that UBP faced were not new, nor were they unique to the Bronx. What next?

In the nineteenth century, radical abolitionists, black and white, articulated a vision of a world beyond private property and the economic adolescence of wage slavery—a cooperative commonwealth. Ira Steward, a trade unionist, abolitionist, and leader in the campaign for the eight-hour workday, proclaimed that in the emerging post-civil war industrial capitalist economic system, “something of slavery still remains, [and] something of freedom is yet to come” (Gourevitch 2015). The dream of the cooperative commonwealth deferred, instead, by military decree, an ultimately aborted effort at redistribution, redemption, reparation, and reconstruction in the form of 40 acres and a mule.

In the darkness of Jim Crow and the height of white supremacist terrorism that followed in the backlash to reconstruction, W.E.B. DuBois, Ella Jo Baker, and Fannie Lou Hamer once again looked to the future of a system of economic cooperation to ensure the survival and prosperity of the black diaspora (Douglas 2015; Ransby 2003; Gordon-Nembhard 2014). A century after the end of the civil war in 1965 in a speech to Howard University, President Lyndon Johnson again spoke to necessity of affirmative collective action to address the dream of repair and reconstruction deferred: “you do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, and bring him to the starting line of a race and then say ‘you are free to compete with all the others,’ and justly

believe you have been completely fair” (Johnson 1965). Noting the shortcomings of the second reconstruction (Woodward 1955, 2006) and the onset of the second redemption of the Reagan administration, James Baldwin again reminded the nation of both what lay behind and what lay ahead:

What is it you want me to reconcile myself to? I was born here, almost sixty years ago. I'm not going to live another sixty years. You always tell me it takes time. Its taken my father's time, my mother's time, my uncle's time, my brothers' and my sisters' time. How much time do you want for your progress? (Thorsen 1990)

Singing the same song with a different melody, between 1977 and 1980, steelworkers in Youngstown, Ohio fought the closure of Campbell Works, one of the region's largest mills. They mobilized with the moral authority of their faith institutions, and picketed with signs that read “People First Profits Second” and “Who's Next?” They fought using every legal tool available, even arguing in federal court that they had a “community right” to seize productive property from the Lykes Corporation. Federal Judge Lambros, in granting a preliminary injunction against the closure of the mill, wrote in an opinion

...it seems to me that a property right has arisen from this lengthy, long established relationship between United States Steel, the steel industry as an institution, [and] the community in Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley in having given their lives to this industry (Lynd 1987 p. 940).

The idea of a “Community Right” to the productive assets that sustain lives and livelihoods was ultimately denied by legal order, being rightly but somberly seen as incompatible with the US Constitution. What comes next?

The Kingsbridge Armory is a gargantuan structure in the Northwest Bronx that has been vacant since 1996. As with many large vacant structures in dense urban areas, there were longstanding contentious debates about what future purpose the site should serve, and who would benefit from it. In 2009, a plan with support from Mayor Bloomberg's

administration for a large shopping mall was sent to the city council for what typically amounts to a perfunctory approval in matters of land use and economic development projects with mayoral support. An unusual thing happened on the way to this foregone conclusion, however. The New York City council responded to a well-organized campaign from local Bronx residents and activists from labor, faith, and community groups overwhelmingly rejected the plan. The defeat turned mostly on the question of minimum wages versus “living wages” for the jobs to be provided, and was an embarrassment for Mayor Bloomberg. He called the rejection of his plan “disappointing and irrational”, and in a sound bite that would echo loudly in 2019 as Amazon pulled out of their plans to build a campus in Queens, Mayor Bloomberg noted that as a result of this rejection “There will be no wages paid at all at the Kingsbridge Armory for the foreseeable future”. Some residents and business owners near the facility didn’t see it the same way as Mr. Bloomberg. José Nuñez, a barbershop owner across from the facility, told *The New York Times*, **“People need jobs, but they don’t need chump change. This building belongs to the people of this area”** (emphasis added). A customer, seated in the chair, agreed and added “we’re not suckers in the Bronx, we’re not going to take whatever somebody is offering” (Dolnick 2009).

In December 2013, a few years after the 2009 defeat, the city council voted in favor of a different kind of redevelopment proposal. This plan, also with total costs running in the hundreds of millions, will construct the Kingsbridge National Ice Center, a regional facility that, per the agreement of the community benefits agreement (CBA), will prioritize local hiring, pay wages of at least \$10 per hour with benefits, and most notably, set aside one percent of gross revenues up to \$25 million annually for a fund that will be managed by a Community Advisory Council for community purposes.

A community organization asks for the right to develop vacant public property in their neighborhood—to exercise some semblance of control over their economic life. What

comes next? Another coalition thirty years later wins a community benefits agreement, but sees the writing on the wall for the future: real estate speculation, gentrification and residential and commercial displacement. From redlining and neglect to greenlighting “new markets” and a speculative Niagara of economic “inclusion,” the organizers of the Kingsbridge CBA asked the same question: what comes next? What are Bronx residents to do when their labor to improve their communities succeeds, only to be turned against them as a result of the expected functioning of market forces *designed* to operate in precisely such a fashion? As Cahn and Segal note, this story of working class, non-private-property-owning communities being punished for their collective labor is not new or unique:

Is the neighborhood full of children playing in the street? Neighbors work together to get the vacant lot on the corner turned into a playground (And property values go up.). Is fresh produce expensive to buy locally or simply not available? Neighbors collaborate to bring subsidized community supported agriculture to the library once a week (And property values go up.). Is the library closed on Sundays, when most people want to use its meeting rooms and browse its shelves? Neighbors lobby the administration for better hours (And property values go up). (Cahn and Segal 2016 p. 231)

Is a large armory vacant? Community members organize to fill it with services and institutions that serve them. They are rejected, and a regional ice rink facility with some legally enshrined redistributive benefits is attached (and property values go up). “Could the Bronx be the next Brooklyn?” A real estate blog asks in 2016 (Glascott 2016). The story repeats, as does the search for, and insistence on, new and different ways to walk together into the future.

In order to move beyond the progressive but imperfect tool of project-specific CBAs, some of the organizers from the Kingsbridge Armory Redevelopment Alliance—inspired by other institutions and models of community and worker-ownership such as Market Creek in San Diego, Evergreen in Cleveland, and Mondragón in the Basque region of Spain—embarked on an experiment to promote a borough-wide network of institutions to

coordinate and plan community-led asset-based economic development to build wealth and ownership among low-and middle-income people in the Bronx. In many ways, the venture is rooted in a legacy of community control and development agitators: the drive to reunite development and organizing, and to forge meaningful community-labor coalitions (Stoecker 1994; DeFilippis 1999; Brecher and Costello 1990).

And yet something else was happening here too: a shift for organizers from an oppositional or reactive stance to a propositional or planning frame—to change the larger institutional structures enabling and disabling their vision for democratized ownership and control (Rahman 2016; Unger 2005; Menser 2018). In the words of one leader, “We were always responding to an issue and now we’re creating solutions so those problems won’t arise. So instead of always fixing, [now] we are creating” (Kemsley 2013). The protagonists of this effort, what became known, imperfectly, as the Bronx Cooperative Development Initiative, grounded their vision for the Bronx in what they call *economic democracy* and created a new organization to operationalize and enact this vision. As of 2016, this involved four active components: a social enterprise subsidiary to capture and localize local procurement spending from Bronx anchor institutions, an “innovation factory” with digital fabrication and advanced manufacturing equipment for Bronx-based entrepreneurs to develop shared wealth enterprises, a planning and policy arm, and an education and training arm. As of 2019, the final two, a civic action arm and a multi-function endowment and investment fund, were still in development.

As the examples above (and countless others could) demonstrate, the vision of, and fight for, economic democracy is not new, nor is it monolithic. Community organizations have sought to build economic and political power through electoral work, business development work, policy advocacy, education and training for year. In this case, the basic premise is about democratizing control and ownership, and therefore power, in the

economy. However, as Beauregard notes in the epigraph above, how are these visions joined to social mobilizations to make change? In blunt terms: *nice idea you have there, what are you gonna do about it?*

This is a story that has been seen many times in urban planning and community organizing. The question that brought me to the study of what would become the Bronx Cooperative Development Initiative was that first moment of epiphany or pivot from the “victory” of the CBA. Organizers asked themselves if what they had done was really enough to secure material and social benefits for the residents they organized with--and if not, what next? In their estimation, each previous generation of people (which, it should be noted, also involved looking at themselves in the mirror as well) who asked “what next?” had come up against the constricting obstacles of 1) a liberal institutional environment that did not share their values and was incapable of addressing their concerns; and 2) a lack of significant coordination capacity across the different areas of work to challenge those institutions, from organizing to business to electoral and so on. They decided then set out to build the kinds of institutions that would be needed to support these transformative efforts. How could they change the circumstances and environment around them in the Bronx so that their organizing might yield something better and more impactful? How might they write a new storyline for the development of Bronx, in a context in which segments of the real estate industry of New York City appear to be eyeing their neighborhoods with giddy excitement? How do you build (or capture) not just one institution, but several, simultaneously, while the existing ones have decades worth of a head start? The scope sounds ambitious at best, foolish and arrogant at worst. What was I trying to understand about what was happening here?

Guiding Questions

My question for this dissertation was not to assess the likelihood of success for the initiative (whatever that might mean), or whether the protagonists are brilliant or

naïve or arrogant (all of the above or none of the above could be the case, people are complicated). It was first to interrogate and assess why they decided economic democracy was what they wanted, and what they mean by it. The phrase is not new, and BCDI leaders admit freely and eagerly to being inspired by examples from history and around the world for their work. But in the Bronx, in the twenty-first century: what is economic democracy *in this case*? Secondly, defining economic democracy in this case doesn't answer the more critical question that structures this inquiry: *how does this group of people propose to develop economic democracy in the Bronx*? The division between these two component questions is meant to clearly identify them, but should not be construed as an analytical separation. Indeed, BCDI's answers to the question of *how to build economic democracy in the Bronx* inseparable from their ongoing efforts to *understand their own actions in pursuit of it*. Analysis and action, understanding and operation, are mutually reinforcing and co-constitutive here. There is no statue or model of perfectly realized economic democracy that these protagonists are studiously attempting to study and draw on their canvas in the Bronx. The learning of what economic democracy is continues ad infinitum in the doing of it, and the action in turn creates new learning and knowledge. A small window—just a few years—into this ongoing process forms the basis of the majority of the empirical chapters below.

Chapter Overview

In this introduction so far I have framed the work of building economic democracy in terms of a longer narrative of reconstruction and the search for a fuller and freer humanity and society. Even more so, I have framed these political projects as stories themselves, with narrative players and arcs, and most of all, with repetition. In this vein, the history of the Bronx and of New York City's urban development in the last century-plus has been written many times over. Critical to the goals of BCDI, however, is to write a new and different story for the Bronx. In order to capture that vision, I begin in **Chapter 3** with a revisionist history of New York City and the Bronx that seeks to

adequately capture the forces at play as seen by the organizers whose story I am telling. This is not my own private revisionist history, but a threading together of a series of minority reports over the years that have been put together by planners and sociologists and historians to suggest ways of adequately capturing the vast economic and political powers of elite New York institutions and actors. This is particularly important because BCDI's vision for economic democracy in the Bronx is grounded in an analysis of institutions as sites of political, economic, and cultural—as such, the telling of history should match that institutional frame, insofar as that telling is also an historically accurate and scholarly rigorous version of the history.

Having grounded the history of the Bronx as being shaped by broader national and local institutional forces of political economy, in **Chapter 4** I turn to the task of engaging with the textures and complexities of BCDI's process for cohering around a vision of economic democracy for their collective project. This lengthy chapter attempts to grasp the motivations of the individuals involved, and the process of personal and collective transformation that resulted from their work in 2014-2016, as well as the stories of personal experiences dating well before that, which helped to shape the direction of the collective project. It would be convenient to say that the outputs of this chapter are a tidy, cohesive, and coherent vision of economic democracy, but of course the truth of the matter is more complicated. Nevertheless, several core themes around ownership, governance, a Gramscian, Polanyian (and even Marcusean³) focus on institutions,⁴ and an

³ Marcuse 2014

⁴ For how these sociological concepts of institutional power and design land in the planning and public policy discipline, see, among others, Ostrom 1990 and 2009; Williamson 1994; North 1990 and 1991; Bolan 1996; Alexander 2005.

ideal of self-determination incompatible with the present institutional configurations of US liberal redistributive democracy emerge.

In **Chapter 5** I turn to the question of market-making as one form of institution-shifting. In order to challenge and reshape an economic system at any scale, even just the local or regional scale of the Bronx, BCDI had to develop an analysis of, and an understanding of how to change markets in their present state. This is a different set of goals than is typically found on the left in the United States, where “the market” is the unmitigated machinery of greed and immiseration that must be guarded against for the protection of society. BCDI draws on a different theoretical and practical heritage.

The approach they took looked at markets as social tools that have always existed in human societies, and which could be rewired, reconfigured, redesigned—and have been throughout history, as has been noted by more than just Karl Polanyi. The operational form of that hypothesis is the BronXchange, an online/offline platform for connecting local Bronx businesses with ethical, transparent, and democratic business practices to opportunities for greater market access through curated connections to large civic and nonprofit purchasers, often known in local economic development circles as “anchor” institutions because of their place-based focus and hybrid public/private missions. By capturing a share of the Bronx economy—which BCDI notes is in the tens of billions, disputing the rhetoric of an “impoverished” borough” lacking economic resources—the BronXchange raises standards and helps to craft a new normal for what constitutes a “good business climate” in the borough. The surpluses from revenue streams from the

platform would then be redirected back into the larger coordinating capacity of the Initiative, helping to fund other core functions of BCDI's network.

Chapter 6 focuses on the role of individual people as actors in the “instituted process” of the economy. Institutions require actors (most, if not all) to behave according to their rules and norms in order to function. Building a Bronx economy that fosters economic democracy and that challenges the performative model of monolithically acquisitive and utility maximizing *homo economicus* requires that people who live and work in the Bronx understand and embody those values, perform them autonomously, and to lead on and innovate them on a daily basis. From a more pragmatic community organizing perspective: this vision of economic democracy for the Bronx may be wonderful, but how do you embed its theories, logics, and assumptions into the variety of political and economic institutions necessary to restructure the Bronx economy?

In this chapter, I review the curriculum that BCDI developed to hold the “DNA” of economic democracy, as one leader described it. I also briefly outline how exposure to the curriculum led the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition to embark on an ambitious project of organizational transformation towards the full adoption of economic democracy as a framework for its organizing. This example of organizational transformation serves as a core “proof of concept” for BCDI's case for larger changes in the Bronx. But this case of transforming raises the question of the role of training and education in the project of remaking the Bronx for economic democracy. How do

individuals, groups, and organizations learn, adapt, and work towards change larger than themselves?

Chapter 7 pivots from education, learning, and leadership towards the conception of growth and impact—often termed “scale” in the social enterprise and social change industries. How does BCDI propose to move from a start up initiative with reliant on philanthropy into a self-sustaining network of political and economic institutions that shape economic, political, and social life in the Bronx? This is what the funders always ask: what is the plan for scaling up? In this chapter, I examine the infrastructure that BCDI is developing for answering this question, but I also ask its core leadership to define the meaning and purpose of scale itself. In the political context of fears of Bronx gentrification, urgency is paramount. Urgency demands impact, and impact demands scaling up. This all seems a bit too neat, however, and in this chapter I tease out the myriad understandings and definitions of scale, the normative assumptions of scale and scalability, and the question of the compatibility of the idea of “economic democracy at scale”—a core goal and slogan of BCDI’s work.

This daunting question notwithstanding, this chapter and the preceding chapters on the BronXchange and market-making suggest a critical intervention of BCDI into the discourses and practice of late twentieth and early twenty-first century left political orientations and visions in the United States: the critical importance of recapturing a vision for production as a part of a more democratic and free society. The question of institutional design, economic impact, leadership development, and market-making are

all overshadowed by the question of politics. In this sense by politics I mean how these concepts and visions for significant structural changes are accomplished in the daily grind of existing political realities and institutions in the Bronx and New York City.

Chapter 8 ties together the threads and the challenges of the previous chapters and revisits again the core original point of inquiry: how does BCDI intend to institutionalize economic democracy in the Bronx? To an extent of course these are questions answerable only by empirical observation *ad infinitum*. But the graveyard of progressive cities in the twentieth century, and the literature on urban regime construction points towards some initial conclusions. What BCDI has set out to accomplish is not a network to develop cooperative enterprises, but rather the construction of a durable urban regime to support economic democracy in the Bronx and New York City. Whether one can exist without the other is an important question that I address here as well. This vision of what I call an “equity regime” remains at the time of this writing just that: a vision. But embodied in this vision are responses to decades worth of questions, assumptions, and shortcomings of progressive urban politics in the last several decades, dating back nearly a century to the “sewer socialists” of the early twentieth century. In this chapter, I also center the role of black political thought and practice as central to progressive and equity regime construction, not just in New York City, but throughout last several decades of urban politics in the United States. Finally, in **Chapter 9**, I restate my findings from the foregoing empirical chapters and synthesize some overall concluding points. I also note some as-yet unanswered questions and their implications for future research and political action.

Chapter II: Methods and Concepts

The world suffers under a dictatorship of no alternatives. Although ideas all by themselves are powerless to overthrow this dictatorship we cannot overthrow it without ideas.

—Roberto Unger (2005)

This dissertation engaged with BCDI in various ways over the course of approximately three years as an embedded researcher. This included a year long internal formalization process in 2015 to elaborate BCDI's collective vision of economic democracy for the Bronx, as well as how that vision would be operationalized into a strategic operating plan for the organization. The central inquiry for the core BCDI leadership group, and thus for the dissertation is: how has BCDI conceptualized economic democracy for their work and how are they operationalizing that vision in the Bronx?

This project engages with methodological traditions aligned with the feminist approach known as “institutional ethnography” (DeVault 2013), “co-research” (Malo de Molina 2004), and the pragmatic tradition of “moral inquiry”, which is itself closely aligned with Flyvbjerg’s “value-oriented” planning research (Lake 2014; Flyvbjerg 2006) In these traditions the researcher actively engages with participants in the study to understand their lives and work and to assist them in achieving their objectives as part of eroding the subject-object relationship in the research process. Community and labor organizers, faith leaders, politicians, developers, anchor institution executives, tenants, and business owners involved in the creation of the Kingsbridge Armory CBA, and subsequently the BCDI, collectively are trying to move beyond organizing only for community “benefits,” towards building an infrastructure for democratically controlled community economic development in what is frequently described as the poorest urban county in the United States. Through document analysis, participant observation, and interviews, this

dissertation will describe and analyze the process of envisioning and operationalizing economic democracy in the Bronx.

Through the case of the BCDI, this project interrogated how individuals and groups in the Bronx collectively form an operable understanding and vision of economic democracy, and then act to realize that vision. As such, the methods of data collection follow in a phenomenological tradition that uses interviews to acquire insights from participants about how they understand their actions and their rationales for acting in specific contexts, as well as observing their actions in order to corroborate their understanding of their actions with their observed actions.

The research process consisted of approximately three years of conversations, embedded participant-observation, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. During this time I participated in in-person meetings, conference calls, conferences, strategy sessions, dialogues and debates about the activities of the BCDI. I was also given partial access in 2016 to the internal files of the organization's file database and their internal communication tool, an application called "Slack," which functions similarly to an instant messaging service with channels in which participants can communicate and share files in real time. Interviews focused on leadership of the board and staff of BCDI, resulting in a total of 13 semi-structured interviews.

Case Study as Method

The single case study has a turbulent history as a method of inquiry into the social world, particularly for the use of urban planning and public policy analysis. As Flyvbjerg chronicles, however, even some of the harshest critics of the single case, such as Donald Campbell, have moderated or reversed their positions on the scientific value of the single case study for social science research (Flyvbjerg 2006). Paraphrasing Thomas Kuhn,

Flyvbjerg argues that case study research forms an integral part of any healthy discipline. “A scientific discipline without a large number of thoroughly executed case studies is a discipline without systematic production of exemplars, and a discipline without exemplars is an ineffective one” (2006 p. 219). This parallels the equivalent that Burawoy articulates for the field of sociology known as the “extended case method” (1998).

The relative newness of the community wealth approach, import substitution and anchor procurement strategies for economic development necessarily means that there are few existing empirical sources aside from the practitioners who are engaging in these collaborations. Furthermore, outside of DeFilippis (2004), Medoff and Sklar (1994), Heskin (1991) Stoecker (1994), there are few analyses of the type of community-based organizing and development projects for economic democracy of the kind in which BCDI is engaged. Menser’s recent (2018) contribution to the field has been invaluable for both enriching the theoretical conversation and some of the less well-known case examples in the volume, as has Akuno and Nangwaya (2017) for their edited volume on the ongoing legacy of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement and the Republic of New Afrika in the Mississippi Delta and Jackson Mississippi. These notwithstanding, simply stated, the field, particularly in US urban contexts, needs more examples documenting the real life challenges that these political projects face when they are put into motion in different political and economic contexts—particularly in the United States, and particularly in communities of color in the United States. The strength of this project lies in its ability to synthesize voices in the BCDI network of organizers and community development practitioners to provide some structure to the challenges and opportunities that have arisen from these inchoate and dynamic relationships. The results of this in-depth analysis will lead to a set of new research questions that should help to craft future directions of inquiry and practice in the field of community economic development and

economic democracy in urban regions.

In terms of methodology, this dissertation draws on two bodies of work: the anthropology of public policy, and the concept of “phronetic” planning research outlined by Flyvbjerg (2004). In the same way that this project seeks to undermine certain theoretical assumptions about the basis for the actions of the economic subject, the anthropological approach to public policy also looks skeptically at assumptions of “policy as a legal-rational way of getting things done” (Wedel et al 2005). As they go on to write, anthropology of public policy attempts to “uncover the constellations of actors, activities, and influences that shape policy decisions, their implementation, and their results” (2005 p. 30). Perhaps even more important than this is the way in which ethnographic methods can productively disrupt commonly understood frameworks or binaries such as state/market, top-down/bottom-up, macro/micro, and centralized/decentralized (*ibid*). This critical approach to frameworks and categories that appear naturalized is part of what Shore and Wright argue are fundamental aspects of modern power: “the masking of the political under the cloak of neutrality” (1997 pp. 8-9).

This also dovetails with the feminist sociological approach known as “institutional ethnography” (Smith 1987; DeVault 2013). Institutional ethnography (IE) began as “a sociology that would find its questions in everyday life”, but it has developed into a methodological approach that transcends its focus solely on the lives of women that were hidden or excluded from mainstream sociology in the mid to late 20th century. As DeVault notes, as a mode of inquiry per se, IE does not offer any promise of “liberation”, but it can “be of use in exploring, piece by piece, the myriad ‘puzzles’ of everyday life” (DeVault 2013 p. 339). This level of grounding in everyday life is an important tool for this project, as it seeks to uncover an emergent set of understandings and practices that BCDI leaders and staff are continually experimenting with and reworking in pursuit of

their vision of economic democracy in the Bronx.

In the field of urban planning, the research agenda and questions Flyvbjerg aligns with “phronetic planning research” are similar to the questions posed in this case study. The questions he outlines in 2004 were fourfold: “where are we going with planning, who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power, is this development desirable, [and] what if anything should we do about it?” (2004 p. 283). In this tradition, Flyvbjerg argues that a central task of planning research

is to provide concrete examples and detailed narratives of the ways in which power and values work in planning and with what consequences to whom, and to suggest how relations of power and values could be changed to work with other consequences. Insofar as planning situations become clear, they are clarified by detailed stories of who is doing what to whom (2004 p. 283).

The questions above are key elements in an ongoing tension at the heart of urban geography, urban planning, and public policy: the understanding of how knowledge relates to morality, or the ethics of human action. These issues of value in the practice of science and social inquiry harken back to Weber, who quotes Tolstoy in *Science as Vocation* proclaiming “Science is meaningless because it gives no answer to our question, the only question important for us: “*What shall we do and how shall we live?*” (1918/1922, emphasis added). Lake (2014) delves further into the pragmatic tradition of John Dewey and Rorty to disabuse us of the notion that improved or more precise scientific *method* can, obtain superior moral truths, *per se*. Lake concurs with Wyly (2014), who notes that “any epistemology, any methodology, can be co-opted and drafted into service for violence and injustice” just as much as the converse is also true for liberatory political projects. Lake argues then, “what is at stake more precisely is not a method of empirical analysis but a method of moral inquiry” (2014 p. 4). Further along, citing Fox and Westbrook (1998 p. 8), Lake argues that unlike moral judgments, moral inquiry’s purpose is to “enrich deliberation, not preempt it.” In connecting feminist theory to the pragmatist tradition, he cites Anderson (1998), who writes that moral

inquiry tends to produce “thick evaluative concepts” (in Lake 2014 p. 9), which derive primarily from the lived experiences of acting people.

One of the implicit and also increasingly explicit challenges inherent in these deliberative and interventionist research programs is that of the interaction between activism and scholarship. I am not studying economic democracy in the Bronx because it is abstractly interesting to me or only because it offers important insights into economic theory and community development practice. I am politically and personally committed to many of the aims in the project and its vision for the Bronx, where I was born and grew up as a young child. In this regard, I borrow from political economist Jessica Gordon-Nembhard, who writes that

I study political economy because I believe that we can fashion economies that are transformative, liberating, democratic, and equitable—rather than limiting, oppressive, and reinforcing of archaic hierarchies and inequalities. Informed proactive people are the agents of such change. Engaged scholarship and transformative economics are catalytic tools. Grassroots economic organizing and democratic ownership are some of the mechanisms to effect such change (in Hale 2008 p. 265).

As part of the conduct of this dissertation, I have acted as more than just a passive observer, or acting as an engaged participant in assisting with menial tasks around the office: I have actively sought to align my research questions with questions that BCDI leaders and staff are asking themselves about the role of community organizing, anchor institutions, local elected officials, and organized labor in enabling low-income people and communities to be the agents and owners of democratically managed wealth and assets in the Bronx.

It is important to note that asking some of the same questions does not mean that we necessarily arrive at all of the same answers, however. I have also sought out funding

opportunities that augment their capacity to internally cohere around a shared vision for economic democracy, and have acted as a consultant to help them identify state and city policy mechanisms to help them achieve their objectives. This included enrolling a Rutgers masters-level community development studio to help BCDI develop in-depth policy briefs necessary to formulate an early iteration of their policy analysis.

The question of how to negotiate points of disagreement or difference with BCDI re-emerged after the conclusion of my data collection, when most of my writing and analysis had been completed. In September 2017, after a suggestion from a board member, I submitted an application to BCDI to join the staff as the Director of the Economic Democracy Learning Center, one of the first four core project areas of BCDI. In January of 2018 I was hired. In early February 2018, I spent about five hours in a strategy session with BCDI staff and board members learning more about the current status of the EDLC, and where some of my first tasks would take me. In other words, like so many written works that take years to develop and complete, I was already well aware before I defended this dissertation that much of it could be outdated as an accurate description of the current status of BCDI's thinking and work across its projects. Such is the nature of research into the social world. Writing projects must end, while the work cannot afford to. As I defend this dissertation, I do so as staff of the organization that I studied for three years. How can I claim my work is objective and unbiased? I don't. I will, however, claim that it is honest and accurate as a representation of the research questions that I asked: how does BCDI define economic democracy and how do they plan to develop and institutionalize it in the Bronx? For answering those questions, the trust and access I was granted throughout the data collection and analysis stage is a strength, not a compromising weakness.

There are however, numerous reasons that such an explicit statement of intervention of the researcher in the research process does not conform to traditional definitions of research as “a systematic investigation...designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge” (HHS Human Subjects Guidelines 45CFR46.102(d) 1991/2005). While many locate these tensions dating back to the radicalization of the academy in the 1960s and 1970s, Calhoun notes that these tensions about activist engagement in research designs is practically as old as research itself. Indeed, as he argues, “commitment to social action in pursuit of social change is one of the sources for a commitment to social science” (in Hale 2008 p. *xxi*). As I wrote in my earlier work with similar methodologies engaging with homeless organizing in post-Katrina New Orleans, my purpose is to carefully examine BCDI’s work and processes in their various contexts, “not to nominate them for sainthood” (Casper-Futterman 2011 p. 28). One of the competitive advantages ethnographic methodology is its capacity to break through stereotypes and understand knowledge and politics in nuanced and productive new ways.

There is of course also the matter of researcher positionality. Although I was born in the Bronx and lived there until I was five years old, my class (managerial), education (post-graduate), and racial background (white) positioned me as an outsider in numerous ways that influence the collection of human-instrumented data.⁵ As with any other form of research instrument, the process of learning how to account for the strengths and weaknesses of researcher positionality and identity are ongoing. Aside from the strength of the trust and relationships I developed, there is a body of literature that informs how

⁵ Human instrumentation in this sense meaning that I was the research instrument acquiring the data for this project.

white scholars have worked well (and not so well) in communities of color both in the United States and around the world. While I found Heskin (1991) and Lake and Zitcer (2012) the most useful with regard to negotiating these differences and power dynamics within the tradition and practice of planning research, I also found additional insights from public health, education, sociology, and anthropology (Muhammad et al 2014; Milner IV 2007; Way 2005; Chadderton 2012).

In the spirit of values-oriented planning research and the heuristic of moral knowledge, this project engaged with the above challenges of the phronetic and institutional ethnography research agendas in planning and performed an inquiry into the values and vision of the BCDI, and how it operationalizes these values through political engagement with the built environment and the political economy of the Bronx. Since one of the assumptions guiding this project is that there is theoretical and institutional tumult occurring in the field of community economic development as it leans and yaws towards inchoate concepts of “economy democracy”, some of my conclusions and findings are necessarily indeterminate and fall short of forecasting and prediction based on the known realities of this emerging set of practices, understandings, and approaches.

Participant Observation and Interviews

From approximately September 2014 to September 2017 I engaged in extensive participant observation of BCDI planning and strategy processes. This included access to internal documents on the organization’s shared cloud servers, such as staff and board meeting minutes, strategy meetings, as well as in person participation in meetings, trainings, and strategy retreats by request. In July 2015 I accompanied a BCDI-led delegation of core Bronx stakeholder partners to Mondragón, and attended and took notes

throughout the trip. Over the course of 2016 and 2017 as participant observation continued, I conducted 13 interviews with board and staff at BCDI.

All interviews were recorded with a digital recording device and were transcribed verbatim. Because of the small number of interviewees and the potential for identification, I have anonymized all interviewee quotations herein, adding general details about their relationship to the work where necessary for context. Because the dynamics of race and gender oppression in the economy figure prominently and inseparably in this work, I note here some of the basic demographic information of the interviewees. Since no participants identify as trans or genderqueer I use gender binary terms. Three interview participants were men, ten were women. Of the men, one was white, and two were Latino, with one identifying as black/afro-Latino. Of the ten women, four were white and six were women of color. Of the six women of color, one identified as non-Hispanic black, one as afro-Latina, three as non-afro Latina, and one preferred not to specify.

It is worth noting that a member of the BCDI working group refused to be interviewed for this dissertation because despite her belief in the work and our working relationship she said that to be interviewed for this work conjured uncomfortable feelings of being a research “specimen” under a microscope. Rather than attempt to change her mind I left it there. But it is worth noting the strong persistence of these sentiments even towards vetted and trusted embedded researchers. Two others declined to be interviewed because during the course of 2016 and 2017 they left the organization. This dissertation was approved under an expedited IRB protocol #16-780M by the Office of Research and Regulatory Affairs of Rutgers University. The interview protocol is attached as Appendix A.

Concepts and Literatures

For this case study I have surveyed a wide variety of literatures and disciplines in order to try and roughly match the diversity of thought and analysis I found in the course of my fieldwork. This case study contributes to a growing body of community and economic development literatures that describe and analyze collective and democratic wealth building strategies. It also contributes empirically to the literature on “(post)neoliberal urbanisms” (Peck et al 2009b) which help to depict the actually existing forms of the political-economic configurations of neoliberalization and resistances to it, especially in neoliberalism’s “zombie” state after the 2008 economic crash (Peck 2010). Because BCDI is a local effort to redevelop and reimagine space and place, this case also contributes to ongoing debates on self-determination and the production of place, community development, local economic development, the tradeoffs and efficacy of local political organizing efforts, and the issues of the politics of scale as a concept that guides social action. Interwoven explicitly and implicitly throughout all of the above conversations are the historical practices and political movements for cooperative forms of social and firm organization (sometimes known as industrial democracy), economic democracy, and the ideal, from political theory, of the “cooperative commonwealth” (Gourevitch 2015) and the liberal democratic socialist variant of “property owning democracy” (Williamson and O’Neill 2012).

As the empirical chapters demonstrate, BCDI’s goal to rewire the Bronx for economic democracy is, generously put, ambitious. As a result of BCDI’s breadth, I found that a more constrained focus on urban planning literatures of local and regional economic development did not properly address the political legacy, narrative, and impact that

BCDI leaders articulated. In the literature review below, I categorize the critical concepts into the following core thematic areas:

- Rethinking Economy and Democracy for Economic Democracy
- Community, Autonomy, Self-Determination
- Scale and Scalability
- Community and Economic Development and Urban Politics

Rethinking Economy and Democracy for Economic Democracy

Throughout the entirety of this dissertation, I maintain a core set of assumptions that guide my analysis and conclusions. I assume the joint and non-severable interaction of systems and institutions of oppression, politics, and economics. The implications for this work are that I do not seek to articulate a vision of economic democracy that “incorporates” race or gender or oppression into its analysis: the analysis here assumes that economic democracy, like the liberal capitalist political economy that it opposes, does not exist independently of these interwoven systems and institutions. While it is convenient that this is compatible and shared with BCDI’s analysis of political economy in the Bronx, the reasons to ground this research project in these assumptions would hold just as strongly were that not the case. As I will demonstrate in more detail in Chapter 3, this is powerfully true in the shaping of the urban environment in the United States in the 20th century, as well as the Bronx and New York City very specifically (Singh 2017; Thompson 2016; Rothstein 2018; Baradaran 2017; Sugrue 2005; Hirsch 1983; Gilmore 2007; Hackworth 2007; Davila 2004; Pulido 2016; Smith 2005).

In order to adequately engage with an idea of economic democracy, I argue that just tracing and outlining the various historical legacies of its theory and practice is insufficient. I argue that it is necessary to first set out a set of fundamental understandings about the economy and democracy. In this section, I outline my analysis of how institutions and actors mutually interact and reproduce each other through an analysis of

the utopian fantasy of the self-regulating market and its co-conspirator, the utility-maximizing individual known as *homo economicus*. The post-structural analysis that I deploy for the economy and markets here, however, also extends to institutions more broadly, just as BCDI's analysis of institutions expansively defines the economy and markets (see Chapters 4 and 5).

As the dissertation will elaborate in further detail, the history of the rational, utility maximizing individual known to us as *homo economicus* is more turbulent than his⁶ frictionless, atomistic, no frills attitude suggests. In our current national political climate, in which “corporate personhood” (truly the apotheosis of the ideal “economic man” if there ever was one) exists alongside inequalities of wealth and income of historic proportions, it is worth returning to the foundational concept of economic (hu)man to understand where these ideas and political tendencies came from, and how such an economic/legal concept could arise. Such a genealogy is also critical to the pursuit and advocacy of economic institutions, policies, norms, and practices that are more equitable, just, and holistic in their interpretations of the motivations of human action. Debates around the meaning of *homo economicus* are rooted in ongoing tensions between ideas of self-interest, selfishness, cooperation, markets, and freedom.

Economic man has been heralded as the essential and fundamental rational subject, derided as a sinister ideological fiction, and constructed into a metaphorical Frankenstein monster, equipped with “prostheses” of calculation (Callon 1998 p. 51). Some say he emerged spontaneously (Hayek 1988); some say he and the world created for him are

⁶ The gendered construction of the subject is, per Folbre and others, among the most fruitful paths of inquiry into this subject, although it is not undertaken often enough.

“disembedded” from human sociality (Polanyi 1944); still others say that he is antithetical to human nature (Restakis 2010 p. 264). Importantly, some also point to the fact that he is automatically presumed to be gendered male, and detail the political and economic consequences of these assumptions (Folbre 2009; Federici 2004).

The birth of the concept of *homo economicus* can be traced in great part to the works of Jeremy Bentham and Adam Smith, both published near the end of the 18th century. While Bentham’s work is most notable for its elaboration of the terms of utility for the purposes of morality and legislation, Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* is where these applications of utility to the practice of economics is of greatest importance. From the outset, the liberal ideals of economically rational action appear already a bit more ambiguous than is often claimed. In the early pages of his 1776 opus, Adam Smith famously wrote that there was a “certain propensity in human nature... to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another” (1776 p. 18). But unlike some later disciples of liberal economic orthodoxy, Smith was ambivalent, even agnostic, as to whether or not such a propensity was an “original principle of human nature, or whether, as seems more probable, it be the necessary consequence of the faculties of reason and speech” (ibid). This propensity to trade led to his most famous claim, that

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity, but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities, but of their advantages (ibid p. 19).

From this brief excerpt, the self-interested actor in economics was born. Any number of myths, assertions, and counter-assertions about the role of economics in society and the

motivators of human action can be traced back to these few lines. In the liberal school, which looks to Smith with adoration rather than enmity, the ideal of self-interest, rather than an excuse for avarice and greed, is actually the vehicle for a socially cooperative society. In reading Von Mises and Hayek, two of the leading lights of liberal economics, one sees a consistent theme on self-interest as a means, rather than an end. Writing in his epic treatise *Human Action* (1949), Von Mises argues eloquently, “within the frame of social cooperation there can emerge between members of society feelings of sympathy and friendship and a sense of belonging together. These feelings are the source of man’s most delightful and most sublime experiences” (p. 144). In this sense, the liberal stance is not meant to suggest that cooperation is “bad” at all, but rather that impersonal competition and trade is the best and most neutral way to minimize conflict in the pursuit of “sublime” cooperation. Von Mises elaborates on this theme, adding paradoxically, “the philosophy commonly called individualism is a philosophy of social cooperation and the progressive intensification of the social nexus” (1949 p. 152).

Indeed, Von Mises and also Hayek wrote that the negative interpretations attributed to *homo economicus* as selfish and atomistic were so destructive that they repeatedly distanced themselves from such characterizations. “We do not assert that such isolated autarkic human beings have ever lived and that the social stage of man’s history was preceded by an age of independent individuals roaming like animals in search of food,” Von Mises strongly asserts, “Man appeared on the scene of earthly events as a social being. The isolated asocial man is a fictitious construction” (ibid p. 241). Critics of the free market economy, Von Mises argued, constructed an “image of a perfectly selfish and rationalistic being for whom nothing counts but profit. Such a *homo economicus* may be a likeness of stockjobbers and speculators. But the immense majority is very different” (ibid). Hayek further distances himself from the straw man of *homo economicus*, writing

in the same moment as Von Mises that “it seems that that skeleton in our cupboard, the ‘economic man’ whom we have exorcised with prayer and fasting, has returned through the backdoor in the form of a quasi-omniscient individual” (1948 p. 46). Woe is he, our *homo economicus*, who has no home, abandoned even by the premier visionaries of the liberal market society!

How then, does the idea of the economically rational actor survive when his most tenacious and definitive qualities are rejected from multiple perspectives? The key is that Von Mises and Hayek, of course, are not disavowing the principle of self-interest as prime motivator of human action. They are rejecting what they view as an overly simplistic interpretation of self-interest—one that claims that calculating self-interest corrupts morals and society. Whether this is disingenuous or cynical is another matter. The point is that they are embracing an “end” of social cooperation through the “means” of self-interest and trade. The counter argument emerges in two threads: one sociologically, and the other anthropologically.

Writing in the later half of the nineteenth century, Henry George argued that while a self-interested economic man was “potent” and “capable of large and wide results,” he argued that other considerations were stronger. There is another force, he wrote “which melts and fuses and overwhelms; to which nothing seems impossible.” It may be that a man will give all that he has in exchange for his life, he wrote “—that is self-interest. But in loyalty to higher impulses men will give even life” (1879 p. 462). In other words, George’s inquiry into the nature of progress and poverty in society yielded the observation that *homo economicus* may lie within us, but is weak, not strong. Human beings are not primarily motivated by issues of economic self-interest, but by considerations of status and love of others. “Call it religion, patriotism, sympathy, the

enthusiasm for humanity, or the love of God,” he wrote. It is above all “a force beside which all others are weak.” (ibid p. 463). Philosopher (and fellow Austrian) Martin Buber, writing as a contemporary counterweight to Von Mises and Hayek in the mid-20th century, echoes this challenge to the supremacy of self-interest. It is “true enough”, he writes, that “heroism is not in itself a condition of soul fitted to bring about economic results....But let us also acknowledge that economic results are not in themselves fitted to bring about a restructuring of human society” (1950 p. 59).

From an anthropological perspective, Karl Polanyi argued that Smith’s argument of this supposed “propensity” for trade and gain “is almost entirely apocryphal” (1944 p. 46). Like Henry George, Polanyi argued that for most of the history of humanity, until the recent growth of the ideology of the self-regulating market, man was and remains “a social being....he acts so as to safeguard his social standing, his social claims, his social assets. He values material goods only insofar as they serve this end [and not as ends in themselves]” (p. 48). Historically then, the market as a space for the interaction of self-interested individuals pursuing individual gain was mostly incidental, not central, to the economies of human societies. This leads to Polanyi’s famous assertion that the ideology of the market society “disembedded” the economy from its social moorings. *Homo economicus* as the foundation for a society built upon the rule of market logic is found to be unnatural, an historical anomaly and an ideological fiction.

This is just as well, for it fits together nicely with the other ideological abstractions of what Polanyi dubbed the “liberal creed”. Indeed, when we consider certain other leaps of faith and gaps of logic in the construction of liberal economic orthodoxy, the fiction of the centrality of self-interest becomes miniscule. The “age of liberalism” between the Napoleonic wars and World War One that Von Mises heralds as an age of “free trade in a

peaceful world of free nations, [and]... of unprecedented improvement in the standard of living for a rapidly increasing population” was of course predicated upon certain notable unfreedoms such as (just off the top of my head) global slavery, extractive and violent colonialism and genocide, and the denial of basic participation and autonomy to women in political or even public life. Calling colonialism, genocide, and slavery “externalities” of this “peaceful world of free nations” seems perhaps inadequate. That such “data” are not entered into the calculation of this golden age of the market society places it among the human-made wonders of the world.

As BCDI attempts to fashion new economic interactions and (re)make economic institutions and how (and for whom) they produce wealth in the Bronx, part of their goal involves operationalizing the works of a variety of economic philosophers, anthropologists, and work in the field of the sociology of finance to “enrich the theory of the agent” in Callon’s words, as well as how the economic agent interacts with economic institutions (Von Mises 1949; Hayek 1948, 1988; Polanyi 1944 and 1968; Callon 1998; Folbre 1999; Mackenzie 2009; Barnes 1996; Gibson-Graham 2006; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2011; Mitchell 2005 and 2008). While such a theoretical adventure may seem soporific and detached from the violence of economic inequality and exploitation, the project of (re)theorizing “the economy” as an ensemble of social institutions and economic actors at its most fundamental levels should be an important part of a political project for reorganizing economic governance for social and economic transformation.

Polanyi’s conceptualization of the economy as an “instituted process” is particularly well suited to drawing out how BCDI has developed its analysis of the economy. Polanyi’s institutionalist approach apprehends economies as interactions between institutions that

have specific functions in society, and agents who act according to the values and purposes of those institutions. Scholars of Polanyi credit him as one of the earliest theorizers of what became more fully elaborated as a “market socialist solution” that shared a skepticism of central state planning but did not see markets as superior social instruments for the common good, as did the classical liberals von Mises and Hayek (embodied by Schweickart 2011 most notably). As Polanyi envisioned, the price mechanism would and could exist in a humane society, provided that cooperative federations of producers and consumers negotiated the prices as enterprises and parties that valued more than only the transactional profit motive. As described in a recent review, this approach

*enlarged the purpose of economic transaction from that of maximizing profits to broader social ends.... A process in which social groups consciously negotiated prices opened the possibility for ‘overview,’ by which Polanyi means people becoming **aware of and accountable for** the wider consequences of their individual actions, exactly the opposite of the market morality that justifies private selfishness in the name of greater public prosperity (Block and Somers 2017 p. 382, emphasis added).*

To this base layer of Polanyi’s “functionalist” theory of economic institutions,⁷ I have also added an updated from the field of economic sociology and performativity. The language of economic performativity adds to Polanyi by suggesting that these co-constitutive processes exert on influence on, and in turn are influenced by, each other. In hearing how BCDI participants describe and understand their local economy and relations of unequal resource distribution and wealth creation, I heard echoes loud and faint of many of these theoretical and conceptual frameworks for (re)interpreting economic exchange and relationships.

⁷ Block and Somers (2017) note that Polanyi himself was embracing G.D.H Cole’s views in this regard.

This theory of the economy as a dyad of institutions and actors is also well suited to social action and organizing. As Nancy Folbre argues, hopes for a society “beyond” *homo economicus* would be strongest if founded upon the knowledge that if “economic organization shapes our perceptions of who we are and what we can do[,] the causality works the other way as well: *we can design social institutions that reward care and cooperation*” (2009 p. 318, emphasis added). To paraphrase Cruikshank’s interpretation of democracy, my purpose, like the work of BCDI, is to “undermine the self-evidence” and supremacy of the efficient and rational economic subject and the social logics of the market society, while also providing nuance to the calculative rationalities embodied and performed within it. Economic relations, like relations of democratic deliberation “are still relations of power, and as such are continually recreated” through processes of economic interaction and political struggle. This requires that we “never presuppose” the characteristics of the economic subject, “but persistently inquire into the constitution of that subject” (Cruikshank 1999 p. 18). Echoing the work of BCDI’s training series, which frames markets as “intentionally designed social institutions,” I intend to illuminate the authorship, history, fragility, and complexity of *homo economicus* as a one step towards reconstructing economic relations and institutions in a more democratic and egalitarian fashion.

This project is not only a discursive exercise. Knowledge guides action. If the foundational axiom of self-interest as the primary and most powerful explanatory motivator of human action is shaken, then the illusions of what is “practical” and “efficient” for organizing economic activity can be transformed. This transformation may yield a diverse ecosystem of institutions, markets, and practices with which a more holistically theorized economic subject can interact. As economic Elinor Ostrom argued her in 2009 Nobel Prize lecture,

The most important lesson for public policy analysis derived from the intellectual journey I have outlined here is that humans have a more complex motivational structure and more capability to solve social dilemmas than posited in earlier rational-choice theory. Designing institutions to force (or nudge) entirely self-interested individuals to achieve better outcomes has been the major goal posited by policy analysts for governments to accomplish for much of the past half century. Extensive empirical research leads me to argue that instead, a core goal of public policy should be to facilitate the development of institutions that bring out the best in humans. We need to ask how diverse polycentric institutions help or hinder the innovativeness, learning, adapting, trustworthiness, levels of cooperation of participants, and the achievement of more effective, equitable, and sustainable outcomes at multiple scales (Toonen 2010). (Ostrom 2009)

That these innovative, participatory, and equitable, institutions would be in a relatively weakened or tenuous position (in terms of resources, ideological hegemony, etc) is still of critical importance (DeFilippis 1999), and is addressed in substantial detail below in regard to concepts of scale and scalability. From here, however, I turn to the other pillar of social and political action that is fundamental to understanding the project of economic democracy, and that is the notion of democracy itself. What is the role of democracy in the economy, and what are the relationships between these concepts?

For political theorists, democracy can be a moment, an attitude of being, a process, or an institutional configuration. It can be the *sine qua non* of justice, merely incidental to it, or an obstacle to its attainment. After decades of post-fordist and neoliberalizing state and economic reconfiguration (Peck and Tickell 2002; Harvey 2012; Hackworth 2007; Keil 2009; Peck et al 2009), orthodox liberal and elite financial interests, actors, and institutions continue to position the *laissez faire* agenda (in homage to Hayek and Friedman) as a matter of “freedom”. If freedom is the contemporary watchword of the free-market elite and reactionary social movements, the word democracy itself has become the banner of urban social movements across the globe pursuing economic redistribution and socially liberal politics and policies (De Sousa Santos 2007; Purcell 2008 and 2013; Graeber 2013; Sitrin and Azzellini 2014).

These literatures on the left, mostly inspired by Lefebvre, (and reanimated by Harvey 2008) argue forcefully for a linkage between democratization and economic and social justice. In an urban context, the title of Purcell's 2008 monograph perhaps most succinctly describes the Lefebvrian argument: *Recapturing Democracy: Neoliberalization and the Struggle for Alternative Urban Futures*. In the immediate months before the eruption of the Occupy and Arab Spring movements, scholars of politics and geography were referring to a "post-political" and "post-democratic" age in urban politics (Macleod 2011; Swyngedouw 2011).

This multifaceted political movement, which has recently in the United States begun to highlight practices like Participatory Budgeting and worker-owned firms, persists despite the question raised by the more traditional communist left as to "whether or not the notion of democracy provides a useful starting point and organizing ground for anti-capitalist struggle" (Roos 2014). Wendy Brown aptly describes the potential dangers of our current predicament when it comes to democracy: "like Barack Obama, it is an empty signifier to which any and all can attach their dreams and hopes....Berlusconi and Bush, Derrida and Balibar, Italian communists and Hamas—we are all democrats now. But what is left of democracy?" (in Agamben et al 2009 pp. 44-5). Brown's point is well taken, if it is a catalyst for a political strategy to (re)produce a meaningful democratic practice that is relevant, coherent, and liberatory for our times.

Modern liberal theories of institutional democracy focus on the importance of the efficient aggregation of preferences for a well functioning and prosperous society. In such a view, too much participation beyond voting is to court instability and disorder, which can diminish economic growth. It is notable that such "political" theories are often though not exclusively grounded in classical economic theory—a "value-neutral"

science—rather than politics (Schumpeter 1947; Downs 1957; Huntington 1968). Yet even within the liberal canon, such a description of democracy is viewed skeptically as rather “weak” or “thin” (Barber 1984). Writing of the principle liberal deliberative theorists Rawls and Habermas, Mouffe states that “their aim is not to relinquish liberalism but to recover its moral dimension and establish a close link between liberal values and democracy” (2000 p. 3). This deliberative model of democracy, as Mouffe (2000) notes, is still very much based on principles of rationality, which does not sufficiently address the “ineradicable” tensions between liberal individualism and democracy (ibid p. 9). As such, she suggests that merely to argue for a move from an aggregative rationality to a deliberative rationality is “profoundly inadequate” (ibid p. 10).

This brings Mouffe to a more multi-dimensional analysis of democratic practice beyond the purely formal-judicial to the constitution of fully democratic subjects.

Beyond the role of rational deliberation is the “crucial role played by the passions and emotions in securing allegiance to democratic values” (ibid). Mouffe concurs with participatory democratic theorists who argue, “participatory democracy encompasses self-exploration and self-development by the citizenry” (Bachrach and Botwinick 1992 pp 10-11). In other words, democracy is not just a matter of debate in the public sphere—its fullest realization encompasses the totality of human experiences and daily life: something closer to self-determination, which is the master signifier that most BCDI leaders used in their interviews (I discuss self-determination in greater detail below). Mouffe elaborates this clearly, writing in Deweyan fashion, “the constitution of democratic individuals can only be made possible by multiplying the institutions, the discourses, the forms of life that foster identification with democratic values” (2000 p. 11). This call for a multiplication of institutions and spaces in which the public can

engage in participatory politics is where democratic theory reaches for its highest ideals, yet remains to be grounded in a normative or prescriptive politics.

Participation for what, towards what? It is critical to develop a theory of democracy that squarely addresses *relationships of power*, rather than the ideal of *participation* in political life. Even from advocates of participatory democratic politics, there arise cautions and concerns around the discourses and practices of participation itself, without a proper framework for its purpose and ends (Menser 2008; Pateman 2012; Gaventa 1993; Malleson 2014). Brown again aptly describes the danger in calls for a participatory democratic agenda, noting again that democracy can easily become “a gloss of legitimacy” for its own inversion (Agamben et al 2009 p. 57). Pateman echoes this caution, despite the proliferation of interest in participatory democracy in political science. She questions whether in wealthy nations “there is any longer either the political culture or the political will to pursue genuine democratization” (2012 p. 15). It is this type of cautionary tale that leads some like Brown and other theorists to argue (or just wonder) if in our current moment, the politics of democracy should be reserved for the politics of protest and disruption of order (Brown in Agamben et al 2009 p. 56). The romance of democracy as a perpetual politics of resistance to order or “the police” (Ranciere in Swyngedouw 2011) is tempting for the sake of romance, but I argue against this form of sanctification of democracy.

In his review of the urban politics of neoliberalization, Keil (2009) develops a rough framework for a stage of late neoliberalization he deems the “roll-with-it” stage. Building on the roll-back and roll-out stages (Peck and Tickell 2002), Keil attempts to show possible paths for a more liberatory political future. Option 1 is full blown darkness of authoritarian governance with surveillance, privatization, and a normalized rampant capitalist political economy. A softer version, also labeled “neoliberal

communitarianism” (DeFilippis 2004; Newman and Lake 2006), allows some progressive advances in social spending, public health, and cooperation. His third and most politically appetizing theorization is labeled “contestation, alternatives, hope” (2009 p. 240) and includes slogans such as “yes we can”, the “right to the city”, and the world social forum.

This assertion of a vague repoliticization of urban space, posited alongside scholars like Swyngedouw, is indicative of a democratic purity politics perhaps gone too far without sufficient attention to the textures of actually existing practice. The Occupy movement, an inchoate and less-than-fully articulated cry of resistance that perfectly fit the mold that these authors normatively suggest, was even criticized (lovingly) from within the left for its “fetishization” of form and process over program (Roos 2014). The literatures chronicling these popular manifestations (see Graeber 2013; Sitrin and Azzellini 2014) also prize the eruption of democratic participation-as-dissent to global and locally unjust political economies. These “riveting defenses of *real democracy*” (Roos 2014 emphasis in original) still fail to articulate how these demands and cries for an egalitarian and redistributive or equitable political economy can be concretely translated into changes in institutions and practices. They remain uncomfortably empty containers that can still be filled with populist uprisings from the right-wing both in Europe and North America. The ascension of right-wing political movements to national governments across the globe beginning in 2016 rings this bell quite strongly.

How can these movements for urban justice, in all of their various forms, put forth a political *program*—not just an idea, claim, or a rejection of the status quo—that is based in call for greater democracy and economic justice? Even in the 1980s, scholar-activists like Staughton Lynd were encouraging the factory-takeover movement to adopt the idea of economic democracy as a mechanism to move “from protest to program” (Lynd 1990). In order to do this, theories of democracy and politics have to move inductively to build a

theory that is based in actually existing practices, rather than in abstract notions of participation and debate.

Menser (2018) offers a useful answer to the above question of “participation for what, towards what?” He establishes a framework for what he calls “maximal democracy” or MaxD. MaxD is in the participatory democratic tradition, but is a framework that arises from specific social movement practices. The four tenets he establishes are:

- 1) *Collective determination;*
- 2) *Capacity development for individuals and groups and delivery of economic, social, and or political benefits; and*
- 3) *The replacement of unequal power relations with relations of shared authority*
- 4) *The construction, cultivation, proliferation, and interconnection of movements and organizations embodying the first three tenets* (2018 p. 4).

By grounding his framework in cases and actually existing examples of participatory democracy, Menser gives empirical texture to Gould’s notion of “equal positive freedom”, which articulates a theoretical justification for the interconnection of “democracy, capacity development, and justice” (Menser 2008 p. 25). His approach also identifies the social realm as the “primary locus” of democratization, rather than the state. This aligns the practice of MaxD with both traditional participatory democratic practices, as well as the “associationist” or syndicalist model, which has persisted throughout the past centuries as a “third way between the radical individualism of industrial capitalism and the state-enforced collectivization of socialism” (2008 pp. 26-7).

Menser elaborates on MaxD, using more examples from around the globe. MaxD, he argues “aims to liberate or retrieve the democratic impulse from the formal-political so as to remake the political *as well as the economic and the social*” (in Gautney, et al 2009 p. 251, emphasis in original). In this piece, he argues explicitly that the most successful movements using principles of MaxD are those “that have come up with novel ways of using the state to facilitate [their] project” (ibid p. 252). Using examples from Bolivia and Brazil, he shows how movements built upon the tenets of MaxD have gone about

fracturing the organizational and legitimating apparatus of the state, and second, 'transferring' or reclaiming particular state functions (such as the budget process or administration of the water utility) from the state to civil society so that these functions can be normatively restructured and managed by a particular social configuration (Menser 2009 p. 252).

This proposition provides a comprehensive strategy beyond the assertion of an amorphous “right to the city” and cries for “democracy”. It shows how these elements of politics are being claimed and, to revisit Beauregard again, how theories for institutional redesign are being joined with social mobilization to construct new presents and futures. Though uncited in this work, it again has a distinctly Gramscian flavor, recalling German activist Rudi Dutschke’s phrase arguing for a revolutionary “long march through the institutions” to transform and enduringly administer a new society (Marcuse 1972; 2014).

The tenets of MaxD are also comprehensive enough so as to protect against the cooptation or dilution of its aims. By moving beyond the realm of the formal political, MaxD operationalizes the theory of the right to the city as a transformative practice that seeks to remake democracy, *defined as relations of shared authority* into an *economic* and *social* practice, not only a formally political one. I find it difficult if not impossible to understand democracy both as a “moment” and a long march to remake the administrative apparatus of the state, and in this tension I find myself more convinced by the later formulation. I find this theorization of participatory democracy particularly useful because it creates a container into which economic democracy fits as one thread or tendency within larger movements for democratization of society in realms that we may want to refrain from labeling as economic. I address this particular concern more in the conclusion to Chapter 4, in which I outline BCDI’s working definition of economic democracy. In the pages that follow here, however, I spend time reviewing the main histories of thought and practice invoking economic democracy.

Theories and Legacies of Economic Democracy

Similar to how Menser organizes his 2018 work on participatory democracy, I locate the legacies of the theory and practice of economic democracy in roughly 5 historical and intellectual movements, which I label:

- industrial democracy tradition,
- the cooperativist tradition,
- the democratic-capitalist tradition,
- the market-socialist tradition, and
- the community control tradition

Because of the varying ideological underpinnings of the idea of economic democracy, there exist both counterintuitive cease-fires and conflicts in intellectual and political movements over time.⁸ The literatures on economic democracy are an amalgam of political traditions, movements, and philosophies from syndicalism to market socialism to anarchism to “inclusive capitalism” (Kelso and Adler 1958; Freeman et al 2011), “libertarian municipalism” (Biehl and Bookchin 1991) and “property owning democracy” (Rawls 2001; Williamson 2012). As such, it has in its various forms drawn the intense ire of otherwise opposing forces. In its interpretation as a form of total democratic worker ownership over the means of production, both Lenin and Von Mises agreed that it was dangerous. Despite this, Von Mises perhaps surprisingly, provides an excellent overview of two tendencies and tensions that exist within what he called “syndicalism”. Syndicalism, as he notes, had a militant tendency as well as an organizational tendency. The militant tendency viewed worker control in the workplace as a strategy that complemented direct action and organizing to disrupt the machinery of capitalist exploitation. In this sense, it viewed “industrial democracy”—the democratic control of the workplace by the workers—as one tactic towards a socialist end. The other tendency or aspect of syndicalism reflects what Von Mises called a “producer’s democracy” as a

⁸ In some cases, these overlap or share protagonists and theoretical traditions with Menser’s categories of Participatory Democracy (PD): liberal, communitarian, associationist, anarcho-autonomous, eco-social/feminist, and Environmental Justice

form of societal economic organization which was in theory compatible with some form of liberal democratic society (although Von Mises thought it was an absurdist economic philosophy). In this tendency, the end of syndicalism was the “producer’s democracy” itself, not as an intermediary step towards state socialism (Von Mises 1949 pp. 808-9).

While it should surprise no one that Von Mises lobbed volley upon volley of intellectual and economic bombs at the “fundamental errors” of these perspectives, it should be noted that Lenin agreed that “democracy of production engenders a series of radically false ideas” (in Malleson 2014 p. 17) as well. Yet the two traditions or tensions that Von Mises identified remain true to what re-emerged in the late 20th century under the banner of economic democracy, as I explain in more detail below in the context of the (re)emergence of cooperatives as a tool in the field of community development: for those in the “inclusive capitalism” tradition, the ideal of economic democracy is a means toward recapturing the moral high-ground for liberal-democratic, or inclusive capitalism, whereas for the anarchists and socialists, economic democracy is a tactic for broadening popular and participatory control over productive assets and wealth towards a socialist society. It is critical to note the separation here between economic democracy as a theory of workplace relationships or firm ownership, and economic democracy as a view of participatory or market-socialism.

The idea that workers should have greater control over their workplace is not only a concept that emerges in the industrial era, but its re-emergence in industrial and post-industrial contexts is the main focus of my review here. In a late-and-post-industrial U.S. urban context, is as much about collective democratic ownership of land and finance (the other fictitious commodities) as it is about the workplace itself. Historians such as Lynd (1987) and Gourevitch (2014 and 2015) outline how periods of outsized economic equality, known as Gilded Ages, help to raise tensions about economic production and

ownership that transcend concerns about ownership and participation at the level of the individual firm. Yet economic democracy as a political idea in the 21st century is not confined just to “the extension of formal democratic participation to the workplace” as Dahl wrote (1985). Murray Bookchin led the way in criticizing this “bourgeois trick” from an anarchist/liberarian socialist perspective, writing in 1986:

economic democracy has been re-interpreted as employee ownership and ‘workplace democracy’ and has come to mean workers’ ‘participation’ in profit-sharing and industrial management rather than freedom from the tyranny of the factory... (Schramm in Bruyn and Meehan 1987 p. 169).

While workplace control and ownership is indeed a component of economic democracy, it is not enough to restrict the idea of democratic control of the economy to the workplace itself. As Malleson (2014) argues, principles of economic democracy dictate that citizens should have equal “formal decision-making power in their core economic associations: workplaces, finance, and investment institutions” (Malleson 2014 p. 1). This is an important extension, because as Malleson notes, what occurs in the workplace, including whether or not a firm or enterprise exists or collapses, is very much determined by decisions and factors external to the enterprise. This claim is in line with the history of the progressive movement of the 20th century that sought to extend basic principles of democratic governance over the national economy, and speaks to the inseparability of the state-market relationship (Rahman 2018). Yet this doesn’t fully speak to the problems inherent in participation without an ownership stake in the profits (or losses) of the enterprise or institution that creates the wealth in question. Participatory and democratic governance, as noted above, is an important piece of democratic theory and in eroding the boundaries between political democracy and the sphere of the economy, but participation on its own is woefully insufficient without the powers that derive from the ownership of capital.

Staughton Lynd provides examples of factory closures in Ohio and Pennsylvania in the 1970s and 1980s as a critical time for these ideas of ownership and capital to become part

of a popular political consciousness and not merely a matter of theoretical debate. The disastrous economic and social effects of factory closures in the rust belt led to local political mobilizations around the idea that “private decisions with catastrophic social consequences are really public decisions” and that “some kind of community property right arises from the long-standing relationship between a [factory] and a community...” (Lynd 1987 p. 927). With his historical analysis and political assertion of “a community right to industrial property” (ibid), Lynd was already helping to usher in a *place-based conception* of economic democracy beyond the workplace several years before Dahl wrote *A Preface to Economic Democracy* for the Liberal-democratic audience in 1985. Lynd’s chronicling of two rust belt communities articulating a “right” to the control of productive land that was different from state ownership helped to “open up new space for creative worker and community initiatives” (ibid p. 930) that continues today from the National Center for Economic Alternatives to the Democracy Collaborative and the Next System Project.

BCDI’s work, echoing Lynd’s work in the rust belt, helps to connect the theory of economic democracy with the work of urban community economic development (CED), which began in the 1960s as a response to both urban renewal (capital infusion) and redlining and white flight (capital extraction). In this sense, it adds a Lefebvrian flavor to the theory and practice of economic democracy, as struggles over the control of post-industrial or urban land displaces the factory as the critical site of both production and reproduction (Lefebvre 1970/2003). This is also the theoretical and political moment in which democratic community control of urban post-industrial productive land is blended with the existing CED focus on the decommodification of housing, work, and finance (Bruyn and Meehan 1987; Feldman and Gordon-Nembhard 2002; Gunn and Gunn 1991; Morehouse et al 1997).

This local community development and control movement, nearly annihilated by neoliberal, market-based approaches to community development (Rubin 1994; DeFilippis 2004; Newman and Lake 2006; Kirkpatrick 2007; Haber 2016) is now being given the chance to join with broader national calls for transforming and democratizing the governance of the US economy in the wake of the financial system collapse of 2008 (Rahman 2018; Alperovitz 2013; Malleson 2014; Klein 2017). With the disparate introduction and revival of economic democracy initiatives, practices, and institutions in cities across the United States (Allard et al 2007 Lerner 2014; Scher 2014; Alperovitz and Dubb 2013), there is the fragile opportunity to move beyond a claim to a right to produce urban space, to demonstrating *how such a space will be transformed*. Menser (2018) elaborates well on the ways in which these perspectives diverge and overlap on questions of economic control, as well as how these threads of economic democracy relate to other practices of participatory democracy (PD).

While Menser uses the phrase “collective determination” as the primary principle of maximal participatory democracy (PD), BCDI’s protagonists typically used phrases such as “self-determination” and “community control” to describe their understanding of economic democracy. This divergence I think has critical implications for theorizing economic democracy and freedom. Related to this idea of self-determination and control is the necessity of attaching and rooting these concepts to *place*, as BCDI is doing for the Bronx. Arising as it has out of community organizing and control movements and organizing in the Bronx going back decades, it is necessary to outline some basic analysis of the meanings and conceptual challenges of community, autonomy, self-determination, and the production of place. It is to these dynamics that I now turn.

Community, Autonomy, Self-Determination

The politics of relating urban neighborhoods and communities to capital and the local state are fundamentally questions of power relationships. Intimately bound up in these power relations is the spatial component of power, which is frequently understood through the concept of scale. Several theorists in urban studies have noted that the shift to neoliberalization from the Keynesian welfare state compact also “involved a shift in scalar regulation from the national state to the urban region”, and that these new urban “assemblages” necessitate that theorists of urban processes defy “confinement to a territorially bounded space, however fuzzy the delimitations” (Freytag et al. 2006, p. 170, quoted in Keil 2011; see also MacLeod and Jones 2011 p. 2447-8). This new literature follows from an important trajectory that has challenged critical theory to examine both the shortcomings and challenges of politics at the local scale, as well as the opportunities. For example, in 1999, DeFilippis captures the struggle of local counter-hegemonic initiatives through the lens of Lefebvre’s concept of the production of space and autonomy. Citing Lake (1994), he argues that local autonomy is the “capacity of localities to control the social construction of place”. The challenge that initiatives like the forebears of BCDI face

...means that local-scale projects confront different opportunity structures as they attempt to gain control over their relations with the extra-local world. For local scale projects antithetical to capital, the possibilities of realizing autonomy are strictly constrained. (1999: p. 980)

This framing of local responses to global challenges was characteristic of this time period, in which like-minded scholars posited that *local* responses to *global* challenges would be a necessary economic and political strategy for pushing back against footloose capital mobility. Imbroscio, Williamson, and Alperovitz (2003) are indicative of this era, arguing for “place-based” and local policy responses to anchor capital and power in communities.

This gets tricky, however, because all of these authors also acknowledge that localities are inherently at a disadvantage in terms of political and economic resources against larger extralocal networks of power and economic resources. So why focus on places and localities at all? Any examination of local political activities, especially among marginalized groups of the kind that BCDI engages in at the scale of the Bronx, will inevitably raise questions of scale and autonomy as a function of the power relationships that these groups and projects are attempting to both liberate themselves from and reconstruct with more equitable relations. DeFilippis, Fisher, and Schragge (2010) ask an important question: “in the face of...global economic crisis, what is the potential for social change in the current context, and what is the place of community efforts in any progressive advance?” (p. 7). This line of questioning also helps to interrogate the extent to which the local is an autonomous scale with sufficient agency to be considered a primary actor. It also follows from Purcell’s (2005) insistence that the idea of localities not be romanticized or considered any more inherently just or democratic because they are smaller and more proximate in our daily lives.

The focus on “community” and locality also brings along baggage of the complexity and darker sides of what “community” itself is capable of. The specter of the potentially exclusionary nature of “community” is omnipresent in this pivot to the focus on how localities and communities can “control” more of “their” space. These political and discursive turns are fraught with anti-egalitarian peril: just because an initiative or region values strong communal ties, does not mean it will be inherently more just or egalitarian. In the literature on social capital, the tendency of community to exclude based on factors of ideology or identity is often referred to as “bonding” as opposed to the more benevolent “bridging” form of social capital (in Thompson 2006 p. 24), but this just scratches the surface of the panoply of ways in which the idea of “community” can also have its “sinister” or darker sides throughout history (Kelly and Kaplan 2001, also cited

in in Watts 2004). In this sense, framing ethnic cleansing as in the case of the Rwandan genocide in the language of “bonding” rather than “bridging” social capital doesn’t quite cut it. I don’t use this example of extreme violence lightly, however. The tension at the heart of community in an urban context parallels how political theorists describe the elusive meaning of “belonging” in the paradigm of universal citizenship in liberal society (Bader 1995; DeFilippis 2001). In other words, the claim to belonging in citizenship, as it necessarily helps to cohere individuals and groups around political identity and goals, also by necessity establishes those who are other than this group—what Sennett describes as the tendency towards the “repression of deviants” (in DeFilippis and Saegert 2008 p. 178). These tensions also have complex relationships with place and space. As Richard Sennett notes: “a community is not simply a social group or an unrelated collection of individuals living in the same place. It is a group in which people belong to each other, share something in common” (in DeFilippis and Saegert 2008 p. 176).

In the context of urban communities and local autonomy, there is also the crucial element of dynamic power relationships between groups. As Lake (1996) suggests, the example of the citing of LULUs (locally undesirable land uses—such as waste treatment facilities) poses a challenge to competing claims for local autonomy and communal or collective self-determination. Since many of my interviews with BCDI’s leaders reference a relationship between their understanding of economic democracy and the goal of self-determination, it is worth including here an analysis and a definition of the term as it relates to the production of place and power relations. Additionally, Lake’s use of examples from urban development, including one from the South Bronx, make the case even more concrete and practical for this dissertation.

Lake uses the example of two communities that successfully repel the placement of an undesirable environmental hazard in their community. A wealthier or middle class

community that mobilizes to reject this use is often described as “NIMBYs”, implying a selfish or exclusionary stance, whereas a working class community or a community of color that successfully repels this hazard might be “hailed as a progressive instance of grassroots empowerment for local autonomy...” (Lake 1996, p. 16).

This is a key component in the discussion of community because it helps move beyond the idea that what matters is how people are connected into networks of trust (the social capital model) and reframes the discussion in the more important terrain of unequal power relationships in urban political economy (see also DeFilippis 2001 p. 791). That is to say, the ability of communities to act in exclusionary ways, whether related to mass transit, affordable housing, or ecological hazards, is not only a function of their connections with each other but the collective political and economic power of communities, however they constitute or define themselves. This is why, when BCDI staff discuss the concept of collective ownership as a function of economic democracy in the Training Series, they give the precautionary example of an affordable housing cooperative composed primarily of Dominicans deciding to exclude Puerto Ricans. The instruction here, at first implied and then explicitly stated either by the workshop leader or through audience participation, is that community ownership in the pursuit of economic democracy cannot be compromised by exclusionary or discriminatory behavior based on identity.⁹

Lake’s discussion of self-determination also clarifies the nature of the forms of justice that economic democracy is meant to represent for BCDI’s leaders, as well as the substantive nature of what they mean when they talk about democracy in the empirical chapters that follow. In his consideration of self-determination, Lake integrates procedural justice and distributional justice in an effort to show how, despite their

⁹ See chapter 6 below for more detail on this example.

intentions to produce a more just world, the environmental justice movement retains elements of a short-sighted liberal redistributionist framework that focuses only on the concern of where environmental burdens, broadly construed, are to be located, rather than on the lack of democratic process in determining what environmental burdens are being produced in the first place. In this argument, the problem is reframed from just one of differential power relationships to produce locational or spatial equity, to one of much larger inequities concerning who decides what environmental burdens are produced, and how.

The approach of justice as equitable distribution, in Lake's estimation, simply cannot result in an actualization of self-determination without addressing this. In this delineation, the fuller integration of justice and democracy begins to sound similar to Ed Whitfield's description of "productive justice" as a necessary feature of economic justice (Baskin 2017), but more relevant, it also starts to sound similar to how BCDI defines economic democracy as a fusion of procedural justice (democratic management of economic assets) and distributive justice (the collective ownership of economic assets).

The definition BCDI uses doesn't specify the necessity of production specifically, as Lake and Whitfield do, but in practice, as I will show, there is an incorporation not just of the necessity of owning productive assets beyond consumptive assets, as well as a broader definition of ownership to include ownership over process and production of the assets to be owned. For BCDI, economic democracy is an instrumental feature in the realization of self-determination and the ability of Bronx residents to collectively exercise greater control over the production of (their) place. What this discussion immediately raises then is the question of the political and spatial expansion of this sphere of control, or economic democracy and its relationship to space and place and power that exists

externally to it. In other words, this moves us towards a discussion of scale and scalability.

Scale and Scalability

The preceding discussion of space, autonomy, and community arises in this dissertation, and quite often in the real world, out of a particular place. The question, whether framed by political theory, or geography, or urban planning, or sociology, or economics, is how the set of relationships or aims established in a particular place, say, the Bronx, become replicated or expanded to encompass other people and other places. In other words, how (and where, and towards what) do they scale? In this section, I provide an overview as to how questions of scale and scalability have come to dominate, and even perhaps create, the field of social innovation, and how these questions are in some ways quite directly related to the legacy of the scholarship in the preceding section, in which community control and economic democracy was often conceived of as a local project.¹⁰

In the field of community development in roughly the last decade, scarcely a few weeks go by without a published article raising the specter of how to get “to scale”, operate “at scale” or “scale up” (Iuvienne et al 2010; Hoover 2010; Guinan and Hanna 2013; Abell 2014; Kerr 2015; Kelly and McKinley 2015).¹¹ Philanthropy and social impact funders and think tanks seem to regard the concept of scale and scalability with nearly religious reverence. While these streams of scholarship, thought, and practice, have yielded important insights for the broadly defined field(s) of economic democracy, they also suffer from simultaneously rigid and squishy understandings of the many possible meanings and purposes of scale and their relationships to economic democracy. Scale is a

¹⁰ I don’t mean this pejoratively. As JK Gibson-Graham note, you have to start from where you are.

¹¹ I have also reviewed this topic from a slightly different angle in *Metropolitics*, see Casper-Futterman 2016

noun; scale is a verb. One finds scale to be at once a process and a destination. It can be both infinitely vast and overly narrow. What unites these papers is that scale is rarely interrogated or defined, yet its absence is universally disparaged. What is needed, then, beyond just theories of “scale” in the geographic sense, is a theory of scalability and nonscalability (Tsing 2012) for the project of economic democracy.

An introductory caveat: there is a well-established literature in geography on the production of scale and the production of space (Marston 2000; Taylor 1982; Smith 1992; Gibson-Graham 2006; Cox 1993; Mansfield 2005; Jessop 2002; Keil and Mahon 2010; Herod and Wright 2002). That literature broadly addresses issues of capital, labor, state, race, and gender as primary sites in scalar and spatial (re)construction. The key takeaway, courtesy of Mansfield, for this dissertation is that *scale is not only a process of spatial production but rather the production of power in multiple forms, one of which is spatial*. This is eloquently simplified in Mansfield’s suggestion that scholars follow and document the scalar dimensions of political and economic practices, rather than approaching practices through the prism of how they take place “at” certain scales (Mansfield 2005). This dissertation relies on this extensive body of geographic work on scale but also places it into conversation with literatures on scale from organizational sociology, actor network theory, participatory democracy, and social enterprise.

With reference to the debates on localities and autonomy in the preceding section, a useful site of inquiry to begin is with the role of cities in twenty first century political economy. Many of the works cited above about how localities could be empowered to respond to globalization were authored in direct or indirect response to Paul Peterson’s

1981 *City Limits*. This work framed the debate on urban politics and political economy as a matter of structurally determined powerlessness due to the changing global economic division of labor away from US industrial supremacy from the post-war period. In these early days of what was then and currently known as the neoliberal turn, those who dissented from Peterson's deterministic thesis were not given much audience until the Fukuyama's "End of History" declaration was promptly shattered by WTO Protests in Seattle and the World Trade Center attacks of September 11th 2001.

Over the first decade of the 2000s, these voices of what was clumsily labeled the "anti-globalization movement" crept slowly into greater circulation, and more widespread consideration among scholars and practitioners (Imbroscio 1995; DeFilippis 2004; Gibson-Graham 2006; De Sousa Santos 2007; Allard, Davidson, and Matthei et al 2008; Imbroscio, Williamson, and Alperovitz 2003; Cohen and Rogers 1996; Rogers 2013). These narratives of "alternative" development and economic futures were thus sufficiently developed and circulated by the time of the global economic recession in 2007-2008, the election of Barack Obama, and subsequently, the "Black Lives Matter" and "Occupy" movements. In 2012, the United Nations also celebrated the International Year of the Cooperative, which in the United States was an opportune timeframe for community development practitioners, community organizers, Occupy activists, and cooperativists to develop a sense of greater political affinity for, or at least familiarity with, one another. These linkages were stronger in this conjuncture than they were in the early 2000's, as DeFilippis (2004) observed when he described a meeting in which human rights activists in New York City were unfamiliar with the largest trade

organization for nonprofit housing developers and community development corporations.¹²

As the Obama administration ended and the election of Donald Trump further upset most predictions of the US election outcome, urban progressives, from the traditional Democratic party apparatus to social movement organizers, found themselves politically and spatially isolated. In his (2017) book, *City Power*, law professor Richard Schragger (2018) addresses this problem in the context of a direct response to Peterson's *City Limits*. Shragger argues that cities actually have taken leadership, and will continue to lead on social and some economic policy, including health and climate, despite some jurisdictional challenges due to the doctrine of preemption in the United States.¹³

In a post-Trump political context, this thread co-mingles with an emergent post-Occupy network of “Fearless” and “Rebel” cities, and radical “municipalism” (a nod to anarchist social ecologist Murray Bookchin) in which progressive electoral politics are fused with socialist or social-democrat political groups to attempt to seize (and remake) municipal levers of power. Notable successes have included Jackson, Mississippi in the United States, and Madrid and Barcelona in Spain. In dispatches written about these movements, often from the protagonists themselves, one sees many references and metaphors that

¹² In the closing pages of DeFilippis 2004, he recounts a telling story about the scalar and movement mismatches between anti-globalization and local housing organizing work in New York City in which anti-globalization activists in New York City were unfamiliar with local affordable housing organizers and their main trade group, the Association for Housing and Neighborhood Developers (ANHD).

¹³ This is the legal standard by which cities are created by state law and thus are often not granted significant powers of home rule, leaving most legislative authorities for even the largest cities vested in state legislatures.

reference spatial and organizational scale, particularly around concepts of decentralization and networks (Colau and Bookchin 2019). This mirrors the discussion of the role of the Social and Solidarity Economy at the “global” scale, in which the challenges of scale are framed as “bottom up contestation” followed up technocratic fixes as a form of elite response/cooptation (Utting and Laville 2015; Dinerstein 2014).

While the reassertion of “the local” and its ongoing integration with the (anti)global appears to be a relatively recent political configuration, a great deal of the kernels of this tension around the scalar dimensions of political and economic transformation harken back to EF Schumacher’s eccentric treatise *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if people mattered* (1973). In the midst of the early years of the postindustrial, post-national shifts in the global north (Jessop 2002), Schumacher decried the “idolatry of giantism” and the “problem of large scale organization”. He posed a series of heuristic tensions endemic to modern political economy: large versus small, centralized versus decentralized, hierarchy versus network, and ultimately, order versus freedom (1973). These tensions were not absolute, and not all big was bad, as he clarified within the meandering text. For example, the “problem of large scale organization” had to be placed in dialogue with the “virtues of economies of scale” (1973 p. 241; see also Chandler 1990 on industrial organization and economies of scale). These tensions and debates re-emerge in Joyce Rothschild’s sociological framework analyzing “Democracy 2.0” (2016), in which bureaucratic and hierarchical organizational forms are experimentally challenged and rearticulated through cooperative and participatory governance structures. Similar to DeFilippis (1999), Rothschild notes that an “explosion of local innovation and experimentation” has

occurred on this front, from cooperatives to social enterprises and social movement and mutual aid governance practices, but “remarkably little legislation or national change” has resulted.

This concern was presented in slightly different fashion, when Imbroscio, Williamson, and Alperovitz (2003) wrote that “local responses to globalization” engaging in democratic and place-based governance of the economy (see also Gunn and Gunn 1991; Bruyn and Meehan 1987), all faced the twin challenges of lacking access to capital and lack of policy enabling infrastructure. In some ways, this is both the most parsimonious and accurate explanation for the debate on scaling up: capital and state. The absolutely fundamental point of divergence here between the social enterprise focus on scale and these more broadly anti-racist and anti-capitalist projects and movements is that scale must not and cannot be confined to growth without transformation and change of larger systems of ownership, oppression, and exploitation (Ganz, Kay, and Spicer 2019). The “whole damn system is guilty” approach, however, makes rapid and formulaic ascent into that system inherently politically neutered, suspect, and coopted. In other words, scale is made more difficult and suspect in this process.

The challenge then, articulated in different ways dating back at least to Rosa Luxembourg, is how to “scale up” these transformative practices—to take on the powers of capital and state—without losing their transformative characteristics (political, ideological, cultural, economic) in the process? For these protagonists, this challenge of “scaling up” is a political question, not an economic question. In shifting this debate to politics, the politics

of scale itself become perhaps the definitive theoretical and practical question of the current moment.

Philanthropy and government alike are seeking rapidly scalable projects, but are often unaware of, or unconcerned with, the requirements of scale or its risks and tradeoffs. It is also possible that they are aware of these tradeoffs and intentionally prioritize scalable and impact-oriented work with the explicit desire to strip the transformative political content from their investments. These questions will be described and clarified below, and I take care to differentiate the affirmative and organizational discussions of “how do we scale up” from the normative questions around “should we scale up?” and what is the nature and purpose of scale in society?¹⁴

Perspectives in Scaling Up

Once you decide, or others decide for you, that scale and scalability are essential (itself debatable, as I briefly visit below), there are essentially two ideologically grounded debates about how to scale transformation. These schools of thought are roughly grounded in Marxist and anarchist polarities, and are in some ways also theories of the nature and function of the state. I argue that perspectives on scaling up towards a society of radically improved material equality and justice exist on a spectrum anchored by two ideal-types: the “Arborescent” on one end (the more Marxist analysis), and the “Rhizome” on the other (see Woods et al 2013; Young and Schwartz 2012).

¹⁴ In the field of urban planning and public policy, the analogous form of this schematic is the delineation between “theories in planning” and “theories of planning”.

Both take their names from theorizations of Deleuze and Guattari, meant to approximate the visual metaphor of a tree trunk and the radically decentralized rhizome. Imbued in the tree trunk metaphor are facets of modern political formations that approximate the hierarchy and bureaucracy of the modern liberal state. The characteristics of the arborescent political formation are both positive and negative: durability, institutional memory, predictability, accumulation of social capital and financial resources, long-term vision and programmatic coherence, leadership development, as well as the down sides of rigidity and corruptibility (Woods et al 2013, Young and Schwartz 2013; Shapiro 2016).¹⁵

Under this theoretical, or metaphorical, conception of scalability, a vision or project succeeds in scaling through regimented organization, professionalization, hierarchy, and standardization. In other words, through the acquisition of legibility to the state in the form of an enabling policy ecosystem, corporate identity, officially sanctioned legal codification, and of course, accompanying access to financial markets and sources of equity and debt capital.¹⁶ You seize the state by mimicking the state, and then replacing it.

¹⁵ Woods et al brilliantly use the framework of termites and rot to describe how these durable and hierarchical, state-like organizations such as national advocacy organizations and political parties, can become degraded and corrupted over time.

¹⁶ There is a body of work on the ontological aspect of scale and scalability—“is big really big, or is it actually small” for example, that exists in pockets of actor network theory, but these larger questions extend just slightly beyond the scope of this project. See, for example Callon and Latour 1981; Law 2004; Rose 1991).

The counterpoint to the arborescent approach to scale is the rhizome. Where the state-mimicry of arborescence has stability and rigidity, the rhizomic approach to scalability is characterized by flexibility, adaptability, contagious/infectious or ‘viral’ replicability, innovation and experimentation and rapid responsiveness to changing or unstable conditions. Under this theoretical framing of scalability in which many smaller efforts, movements, organizations cohere together through a confederation or coordination network and together produce impact or change “at scale” or at a scale that is greater than the sum of its smaller individual parts. Holloway also outlines this theory of change in “Crack Capitalism” (2010) in which he asks how “cracks” in the economic system can become “something bigger” and harness the power of “large scale and coordinated” action(s).

In the geography literature, this divide between arborescence and rhizomicity is most accurately inscribed in Springer’s debate with Harvey (Springer 2013). In his piece “Human Geography Without Hierarchy”, Springer shadowboxes with Harvey’s work on the spatial dynamics of capitalism, arguing, like Holloway, that while the Marxist mode of vanguardist party apparatus and revolutionary seizure of the state may achieve certain ends, it does not and has not brought *transformative* changes with regard to oppression and egalitarian, participatory democracy. Springer, from his anarchist posture, argues that the army of a multiplicity of radically participatory, horizontal, and anti-bureaucratic formations will overtake and transform existing political economic structures for the better on both governance form and substantive economic redistribution (Springer 2013).

It is tempting to argue that these debates are so abstract as to be thoroughly meaningless in the field of practical and everyday politics. And yet, if “scaling up” is a process and a destination, the manner of that journey and the theoretical endpoint toward which it marches of course have significant economic and political consequences for the shape of the transformation desired. Woods et al summarize the point nicely:

Recognising the arborescent characteristics of mass membership organisations contributes to understanding both their enduring political influence in the modern state, and their vulnerability to destabilisation and a loss of authority in times of crisis. Similarly, identifying the rhizomic features of social movements can inform an appreciation of their capacity to mobilise rapidly and achieve impact by colonising cracks in the political landscape, but also of their frequent ephemerality (2013 p. 449).

An example drawn from recent surveys of the Solidarity Economy in the United States illustrates the diversity of perspectives on theories of scaling up. I compare three recent papers and analyze the differences between them. In the first, Hoover and Abell articulate the framework of a worker cooperative “ecosystem” for reaching scale.¹⁷ In this framework, there is a judgment made as to the essential value of certain kinds of skills and capacities: financing, strong developers, technical assistance, and core competency of business skills are categories as “essential.” Policy development, advocacy, and business support services such as market connectors are categorized as “important”, and finally, attitudes and culture, values-based businesses, and the presence of cooperative education are labeled “environmental factors.” While environmental could be seen as strongly fundamental—the air we breathe and water we drink are both “environmental” and “essential”—the framing of the development ecosystem suggests that these factors are

¹⁷ Elsewhere Abell 2012 discussed “Pathways to Scale” as well, which also fall into the broad spectrum of

not quite as urgently critical as the basic business functions of worker owned businesses and the professional competence of their developers.

Scalar thinking of this nature leads towards projects like the “Fifty by Fifty” initiative, which seeks to transform 50 million U.S. workers into employee owners by 2050 (“50 by 50: Taking Employee Ownership to Scale”). Under this categorization, the content of that transformation is left unspecified. In other words, the depth of participatory governance or extent of profit sharing (the associated “Certified EO” certification begins with a minimum of 30%) is of less importance than scaling up for “impact”. The goal of rapid scaling up for “impact” leaves the question of *the nature of what precisely that impact is*. Impact on bank accounts of employees? The ambition for rapid scalability here is also enabled by the pre-existing legal framework offered by the ESOP, a federal designation that provides a nationally uniform legible entity with policy mechanisms and financing apparatus already in place. The machinery, or engine, of scale and scalability, in many ways already exists.

By comparison, the Solidarity Economy Initiative (Loh and Jimenez 2017) produced a report in the same period for a broader range of community and neighborhood-based collective and social enterprise formations with connections to community based organizations and activists. In their paper, their theory of scale is similarly oriented into three stages, but is essentially reversed. Their approach prioritized community organizing and ideological victories for building leadership in economically marginalized communities of people of color and immigrants, and the articulating a local and regional

policy advocacy program grounded in that leadership. This political movement, they argue, yield economic impacts that will be more values aligned because the values and ideological framing was the fundamental starting block of the advocacy project from its inception.

The concept of shorter-term and metric-friendly “impact” is traded for deeper ideological movement and political leadership from communities that lack representation in all aspects of society, not only the cooperative movement. Whereas the “ecosystem” approach prioritizes business acumen and economic impact, the Solidarity Economy Initiative prioritizes ideological transformation over business acumen and growth, *yet they both argue that “scaling up” is critical*. While the former position may argue that theirs is the more practical or reasonable, progress on scaling up these initiatives for economic democracy regardless of the strategy is so infinitesimal that the question remains open. At the present juncture, no one has the evidence to claim superiority of tactics, these debates are being played out in real time, but they each seem a bit too simplistic and ideologically entrenched.

A third article perhaps presents somewhat of a synthesis of the above. Loh and Shear (2015) articulate the same three dimensions of scaling up the solidarity economy: ideological, political, and economic, but merely arrange them in a triangle, arguing that prioritizing any one of the three is not immutable superior or inferior, but rather a matter of strategic tradeoffs with consequences.

From conflict and difference, then, the scalability debate proceeds towards an amicable conclusion: the resolution of the scalability debate of arborescence and rhizomatics is a both/and solution, rather than an either/or solution. As Woods et al articulate, the two serve different purposes, and actually function best in relationship with one another.

Beginning with a bit of whimsy from Deleuze and Guattari (“We are tired of trees”), Woods et al note that

Social movement researchers have rightly identified the rhizomic characteristics of such movements, but the largely superficial and unproblematised application of the metaphor has both overstated the distinctiveness and novelty of rhizomic politics, and underplayed [its] analytical potential. (2013 pp. 448-9)

They go on to conclude that, perhaps intuitively, “no political organizations are wholly arborescent, or wholly rhizomic...further exploration of the entangled relations of arborescent and rhizomic forces will enrich social movement studies” (2013 p. 449)¹⁸

To ground the point in less abstract terms, Young and Schwartz call upon Belinda Robnett’s historical accounting of the role of black women in the US Civil Rights movement in the 1960s as evidence of both the complexity and the necessity of these so called “entangled relations” for arriving at social, political, and economic transformation “at scale” and with “impact”. Young and Schwartz’s description of Robnett’s work is compelling enough to merit quoting at length (emphasis added):

¹⁸ It’s also worthwhile to note here that rhizomic formations are not inherently politically radical or transformational, nor are arborescent formations inherently reformist rather than revolutionary. Rothschild (2016) makes brief note of the rapid scalable virality of “Burning Man” as an empty signifier of rhizomic scale that has achieved rapid growth and “impact” precisely by offering no strong challenging political message.

Belinda Robnett (1997) argues that the success of the 1960s US Civil Rights movement was largely due to the movement's organizational structure, which included both the formal leadership of the big national organizations (with dangerous tendencies toward oligarchy and co-optation) and an often-ignored 'bridge leadership' tier closer to the community level. This latter category was composed of southern blacks (most often women) embedded in black communities in the South and committed to the radical democracy that was historically associated with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Bridge leaders formed the essential links between these communities and big organizations like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and were responsible for articulating much of the movement's grass-roots radicalism. Formal leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr, on the other hand, were restrained by the need to maintain conciliatory relationships with the white power structure. Robnett's theoretical conclusion is that '[b]oth types of leadership are required, and neither the bridge leadership nor the formal leadership is more important than the other. Rather, the two operated in a dialectical relationship marked by symbiosis and conflict' (1997: 21). The outcome of this dialectic was the movement's remarkable ability to extract concessions from dominant institutions while sustaining (and for years, expanding) liberatory practices at the ground level. (2012 p. 234)

The lessons in Robnett's work, drawing on black liberation struggle, suggest a path forward in the 21st century that does not obviate tensions or conflict around strategies for transformation, but makes the critical observation that both scalar formations and the associated partisans not only have to tolerate one another or fight to outmaneuver the other, *they actually need each other* in order to succeed. These observations are echoed in interviews I conducted with BCDI staff and board members, and have significant implications for policy, philanthropy, and organizational and political strategy in New York City and nationally among advocates and activists for greater economic democracy. Insights from the Bronx are discussed in greater detail below in Chapter 7.

What I've done here is outline a set of competing analyses grounded in ideology and practice about how to scale. But this is not a complete theory of scalability. In order to

round out a more comprehensive theory of scale and scalability, we still have to more fully address the fear of loss of transformative potential that consistently arises in the process of scaling. In other words, there is a lingering moral dimension of scale that has to be addressed. If scale is suspect, would that not make a theory of *nonscalability* more useful as a guide for these transformative political and economic aims?

Anna Tsing emphasizes this point more by not only developing a narrative theory of scale and scalability but by contrasting that with a theory of nonscalability (2012). It is in this comparative framework that the normative questions I raised at the beginning of this section—what is the role of scale in society? Should we want to scale?—are most meaningfully interrogated.

What is most useful about Tsing's theory is that she develops a frame for understanding scalability and nonscalability in such a way that is normatively agnostic (i.e. both can be either "good" or "bad"). Scalability at its core is about the capacity to expand without changing its core essence or functions. As a project of "worldmaking," the point of scalability she argues "was to extend the project without transforming it at all...that is, move from small to large without redoing the design" (2012 p. 506-7). Because scalability depends on predictability and replicability, she draws on digital imagery characteristics to describe the basic unit of scalability. If the "pixel" is a composite noun combining "picture" and "element", the base unit of a scalable world is a nonsocial element, or *nonsoel* (2012 p. 508).¹⁹

¹⁹ I have also referred to this concept in my own work as just "widgets", since the point of them is that they are fixed and interchangeable.

Because the world is complex and diverse, she argues, there is a tremendous amount of work that is required to produce these *nonsoels* and hold it in place against the kinds of irregularities that would transform or disrupt scalable projects, particularly in 20th century industrial and developmental economics: “The twentieth-century advance of modernization succeeded, in part, through a chain of related projects *in which government and industry formed joint-scalability pacts*” (2012 p. 514; emphasis added). The concept and project of a scalable world dates further back than the 20th century however. Tsing’s primary vignette for her history of scalability and the nonsoel is the history of the US sugar plantation, drawing on a rich blend of disciplines (p. 510, footnote #7). From this history, the vision of infinitely expandable progress became part of a formula that “shaped a dream we have come to call modernity,” where modernity is “among other things, the triumph of technical prowess over nature” (p. 513).

One hears echoes of EF Schumacher’s (1973) tension of “order versus freedom” in these pages. As for nature, so too for the social world: Tsing notes that Marx posited the scalability (or commodification) of labor as the foundation of capitalism itself. Summarizing these viewpoints, she concludes “as capitalism spreads, they argue, so too does scalability” (p. 514). Where this becomes most relevant to BCDI’s work is that investors of all stripes, whether traditional capitalist or social impact, possess a worldview that posits everything on earth (“and beyond” Tsing adds) “might be scalable and thus exchangeable at market values....In contrast to Marxism, which considered the potential for radical [liberatory] change offered by scalability, neoclassical economics theorized the potential for scalability offered by even the most radical change” (2012 p. 514).²⁰ This paradox eloquently summarizes what most activists call “cooptation” or

²⁰ Concrete examples of the former might be things like universal healthcare coverage and access, or a universal job guarantee, etc. The deploying of large-scale state power for the creation of an economically egalitarian society. The latter alludes to the mechanisms by which capitalism successfully coopts politics designed to challenge or undermine it

“selling out.” If capital recognizes value in anything, it can work assiduously to convert that innovation or threat into a commodifiable product. The Ché t-shirt here represents the most iconic form of this ingenuity.

Out of this brief outline of Tsing’s work, the most critical thread for a theory of scalability and BCDI’s work is this relationship between the state and capital in the formation of “joint scalability” projects. As I will outline below in Chapter 7 with the words from the BCDI team, the nexus of capital and state is a critical point for building scalable projects and worlds, and is a point that is often elided in discussions of scale in the field of community economic development and philanthropy. At the most fundamental level, the lesson of Tsing’s theory of scalability is that scale requires homogeneity, predictability, and uniformity: a uniformity that is produced only with tremendous resource inputs and often at the cost of diversity and the possibility for transformation that does not fit into the “scalability compact.” At it applies to mechanized agriculture, it also applies by analogy to realms of policy, law, financial regulations, and the state/market nexus that govern worlds of business and philanthropy: the uniformity required to produce regimes of scale carry with them possibility for immense change, but also have costs associated with them.

The theory of nonscalability provides a window into theorizing and practicing transformative political and economic projects that are able to grapple effectively with these tradeoffs, and negotiate *between scalable and nonscalable worlds*. Some in this space are arguing for emancipatory and liberating nonsoels or widgets. I call this “emancipatory widgetry.” I would place BCDI into this category generally: by focusing on what they call “infrastructures” for economic democracy in the Bronx, BCDI is

(see also Federici and Caffentzis (2014) for this discussion in the context of “the commons” and Dinerstein (2014) for how this dynamic plays out in solidarity economies

attempting to develop a joint-scalability compact for economic democracy. Others, in line with Springer above, believe that emancipation and a just future lies in emancipation *from nonsoels and widgetry*—a political project that sets its sights towards a nonscalable (or less scalable) world. This is more in line with the diverse economies and solidarity economies theory and practice literatures (Roelvink 2016; Roelvink and St. Martin 2015). Those who would militate for a world without scale, or against scalability, are in essence attempting to turn back (or forward towards accelerationist self-destruction) the clock on the total and unredeemable harms of industrialization and modernity.²¹ The question of whether that is a project worth undertaking or a box that can be unopened—whether those who believe a world beyond modernity and scalability are prophets or fools—is metaphysically and practically beyond the scope of this dissertation. The more pertinent question, I would argue, is how the worlds of the nonscalable and the scalable, the SNCC and the SCLC, can be best fused for the purposes of a more just human experience in any given generational epoch. My work with BCDI, examined further in Chapter 7, provides a small addition to the search for answers to these questions. In my final section here in the lit review, I turn to the literatures on urban politics and community and economic development, which theoretically and practically anchor much of the day-to-day context for the work in which BCDI is engaged.

Community and Economic Development and Urban Politics

In this final section, I review the literatures that have governed the practice of urban politics, community development, and economic development in the post-World War Two period. While community development sought to address harms of redlining and urban renewal through neighborhood based organizing and service provision in the

²¹ If “turn back the clock” sounds too pejorative, I will stipulate to a desire to transform the characteristics of modernity so fundamentally as to make it unrecognizable from its present state.

context of the civil rights and post-civil rights era, economic development emerged in the 1980s and going forward to reconfigure growth spatially for a post-industrial urban future. Throughout this period, the role of municipal government has been to navigate these contradictions and competing visions of what a city can and should be. I look particularly at the legacy of “progressive city” policy and politics as it informs the work of BCDI.

Community and Economic Development

As a program of economic development, the BCDI has addressed many of the key issues in the debates around the mobility of capital and the race to the bottom of labor and wage practices and public subsidies. This is of course merely one instance of improved practices, but the larger aim of BCDI to move beyond this towards democratic firms and community wealth building are part of a trend gaining renewed attention in community development practice literatures (see Gordon Nembhard 2004, 2006; Howard 2012; Iuvienne et al 2010; Dubb and Alperovitz 2013; Zeuli and Radell 2005; Majee and Hoyt 2011; Krishna 2013; Huertas-Noble 2010; Haber 2016).

The debate around the problems with social costs of the hyper-mobility of capital has recently led critical observers towards a discourse of how to “anchor” capital in local communities through non-market-based forms of ownership of work, land, and money (DeFilippis 2004; Restakis 2010; Imbroscio 2010). It is primarily in this tension that the differences between “economic development” and “community development” lie. Below I delve into the history of the community development movement and practice, and its beleaguered-yet-remnant-linkages to progressive politics.

Over 50 years ago, Senator Robert Kennedy’s visit to the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood in Brooklyn led to the initiation of the first wave of community development corporations in the United States. As a part of the Great Society movement

in the Johnson administration, this effort itself was a reiteration of the earlier “progressive” movement of the 20th century, which focused on issues of housing, immigration, and public safety and health in a rapidly urbanizing nation with explosive population growth. If this earliest iteration of “progressive” urban politics sought to bring the state into the basic regulation of the industrial city in the early twentieth century, the post-world war sought to expand upon this movement and use public resources to further promote the promise of equal opportunity for all.

As this urban growth coalition declined, another iteration of progressive urban government arose in the 1970s across the country, focusing on the politics of redistribution of wealth to the extent feasible, as well as enhancing the role of neighborhood participation (Clavel 1986). In his book, Clavel refers to progressive government as operating “in the interests of the current populations” (1986 p. 9). While this definition may have been useful in the 1970s and 1980s, when cities were reeling from multiple catastrophic structural economic shifts such as deindustrialization, suburbanization, and retrenchment of federal funding, such a definition is perhaps no longer as useful as it may have once been. The progressive model for urban politics of the 1970s and 1980s had yet to contend with the rapid transformation and commodification of the urban fabric that began symbolically with the fiscal crisis of New York City in the 1970s (Tabb 1982; Greenberg 2008; Brash 2011).

While a great deal of the “progressive cities literature” focused on municipal administrations, As DeFilippis noted in 1999, this often omits the most important element of the political base of these administrations: their support in the form of social movements and CDCs or what Rubin calls locally controlled “community based development organizations (CBDOs)” (1994 p. 401). As both Rubin and DeFilippis make clear, these local organizations are often non-profits in a legal sense, but also frequently

engage in what Rubin calls “quasi-capitalist” market activities.

There has also always existed within pockets of the community control and community-based development sectors, and in some urban social movements, a movement to democratize the control of wealth at its creation and source in communities. This movement focuses on the collective ownership, control, and decommodification of key components of wealth production and social reproduction such as housing, work, and money (Bruyn and Meehan 1987; Gunn and Gunn 1991; Morehouse et al 1997; DeFilippis 2004). In addition to providing for a resource base independent of the state, such a movement also troubles the entrenched boundaries of market versus state, or the idea of a community passively benefitting from the public. It reframes “community” not only as a site of reproduction or collective consumption but also as an economic actor in its own right—a site of production and wealth creation as well. This “broader field of action” is part of a movement to become more assertive in defining community’s relationship with capital, and productively merge the trenches of “class” and “community” politics and their subsumed gendered divisions of labor (see Katznelson 1981). Such a vision, “can begin to redefine the process of development itself” as Gunn and Gunn argue (1991 p. 155). This is also similar to the context and framing from which the practice and theorization of solidarity economy arose during roughly the same period in the global south, and particularly for South America (Allard et al 2008; Dinerstein 2014; Borowiak 2016; Marques 2014).

In the US context, as Rubin notes, this community-based development movement provides individuals within a community “with ownership and control” and therefore the “possibility of having an empowering place at the table.... But the effect is multiplied beyond the limited number of people individually helped...” (1994 p. 420). This literature on CBDOs and the community-control or “organic” development movement is

a critical pole that anchors the opposite end of state-led entrepreneurial neoliberal development projects.

Cooperatives and Community Development in the US

Although cooperatives, particularly worker cooperatives, have gained greater visibility more recently in the field of urban community development, it is critical not to label them as “new” strategies. The intersection of community control and wealth building with cooperative firms does not emerge in a vacuum. While cooperatives have always been a part of US history, as well as throughout the 19th and 20th century in the African-American community specifically (Curl 2008; Nembhard 2014), their most recent manifestations occurred in two waves: The Great Depression beginning in 1929, and then again in the beginning of industrial flight prompted by the crisis of the Keynesian compact in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Since the first warning shots of de-industrialization were fired in Midwestern states such as Ohio and Michigan, the United Auto Workers and other labor and civil rights activists have looked to reorient the capital-labor relationship into one where labor hires capital, rather than the other way around (Ellerman 1985; Lynd 1985; Swinney 1985). There is a large literature that covers worker cooperatives as a form of ownership in the United States, including some that anchor their discussion on the successes, as well as the mythologies, of the Mondragón model in Spain (Kasmir 1996). The Mondragón Corporation in the Basque region of Spain is the world’s largest multi-sectoral cooperative conglomerate, with over \$5 billion in assets globally. Mondragón’s model of business is cited extensively in the planning documents that led to the establishment of the BCDI (Iuviene 2010; Iuviene et al 2010). Furthermore, at the level of regional and community economic development, Jessica Gordon-Nembhard (2006; 2014) addresses these cooperative forms as tools specifically within the context of African-American histories of cooperation and solidarity to combat discrimination and

poverty.

The movements for community control and community development above, including those touting the role of worker-ownership, have most recently arisen in tandem, and in response, to what we today recognize as the regime of urban economic development (Lauria 1997). If the community development field is the bottom-up response to market failures and racial discrimination, the formation of economic development would be the elite-led version of adapting to market failure and seizing growth opportunities and competitive advantages in a competitive post-industrial context. What constitutes urban economic development today is a relatively recent post-industrial phenomenon: for example, New York City's Economic Development Corporation (EDC) was created in 1991 by merging two entities, and the leading journal of Economic Development practice and theory, the *Economic Development Quarterly*, was only created in 1987. What happened in the 1980s then that brought "economic development" as a set of mostly agreed-upon practices into the public eye so rapidly? What is economic development, after all, and where did it come from?

In 1981, Paul Peterson wrote *City Limits*, which argued that cities had to focus on developmental, not redistributionist, policies in order to be economically prosperous. This was the urban configuration of deindustrialization and smokestack chasing that haunted the rust belt factory organizers cited above. For urban studies, Peterson represented what many consider the opening salvo in "TINA" economics.²² Since this time of devolution of federal powers and resources to local governments, economic development practice has been viewed as a principal focus of local government.

²² TINA stands for "there is no alternative" and is attributed to Margaret Thatcher's opinions and expressed views that, in the cold war context, were meant to strongly assert that there were no viable economic alternatives to her market-oriented political-economic program.

Peterson's empirical and normative assertion for a new urban political economy arrived within a few years of the mid 1970s—a time period that has been referred to in literatures from a broad ideological spectrum as a key turning point in political economics at various scales ranging from the global to the local. As Jessop notes, governmental actors at the national and sub-national scales began to describe wages and welfare payments as costs of production, and no longer as sources of demand (2002). The changes that Peterson and others identified in urban centers during this time paralleled shifts at the national and international scales from “Keynesian” welfare state policies to Schumpeterian competitive/entrepreneurial workfare policies, particularly in the Euro-American axis, as Jessop describes.

So what does this shift look like? Over the last several decades, urban politics and political economy have been transformed by reductions in federal government support, and the shift to “entrepreneurial” (Harvey 1989) tools such as public-private partnerships and quasi-public economic development organizations that, while unelected, make often-significant decisions with and about public resources. These have also been referred to in the literature as broadly characterizing a “New Urban Politics” (Cox and Mair 1989; Cox 1993). In this context in which pro-growth economic development is seen as a key function of local government, scholars of urban politics are also witnessing that the processes that influence these decisions have become less democratic (MacLeod 2011).

As I briefly detailed above, the shift at the national scale to a greater focus on inter-local and international competition was a result of the declining returns from the Keynesian welfare state compromise of the post World War II era. This had a significant influence in forming the political and institutional ground for what we now recognize as economic development. Cox's and Harvey's New Urban Politics focused on how changes in

political economy at larger scales were enabling Peterson's thesis to be enacted, as local governments began to focus acutely on the "mobility of financial and industrial capital relative to city governments and communities and the process of interurban competition ensuing as a consequence" (MacLeod 2011: p. 2633).

In addition to the focus on the political-economic reconfigurations that facilitated this shift, a great deal of work has been devoted to chronicling the tools of this recent urban economic development ensemble. As MacLeod outlines, the goal of a "favorable business climate" for economic development professionals and organizations entailed the wholesale adoption of mostly similar policy tools to lure capital and investors into cash-strapped cities. These tools included most frequently the relaxing of planning regulations, low-interest loans, tax abatements, public provision of infrastructure (direct subsidies), in the pursuit of jobs and economic growth. As I and others have argued (see Casper-Futterman 2012: pp. 115-120), the pursuit of these capital investments often yield fewer jobs than promised, and those that do materialize more often than not pay low wages. Beauregard argues that this is often by design, as economic development practice tends to "subordinate job growth to capital investment" in addition to being "inattentive" to the quality of jobs that are created (Beauregard 1993 p. 270). Large-scale construction projects such as convention centers and sports arenas and tourism complexes are most indicative of these strategies, which often claim construction jobs as part of their benefits, even though many construction jobs do not employ local residents.²³ This is one of the key political tensions around which much of the organizing against the initial Kingsbridge Armory redevelopment revolved.

²³ See Casper-Futterman 2012 for an overview of these debates on economic growth (tourism is mostly low-wage employment, and capital commitments are construction projects which don't necessarily employ local residents) versus economic development, as well as a critique of Peterson and export-base theory as a driver of local economic growth.

In this vein, there is also some analytical and practical confusion and conflation between standard “economic growth” strategies and what gets labeled “economic development”. One of the principal challenges confronting economic development practice is a lack of clarity between what strategies promote development versus what simply promote growth. Wolman and Spitzley (1999) note that while growth simply implies greater outputs, development refers to structural changes “in the technical and institutional arrangements” that produce and distribute economic output. In my earlier work, I followed in the path of Wolman and Spitzley, arguing that economic development should be thought of as “an increase in the well-being of area residents,” including positive changes in the *level* and *distribution* of employment as well as per capita income (Wolman and Spitzley 1999: 226). This is in addition to the ways in which the modifier “economic” itself is “an ideological statement meant to deflect attention from the inherently political nature of economic development...” (Beauregard 1993 p. 269).

A part of this confusion between economic growth and economic development derives from the hybrid institutional configurations that are a part of these economic development regimes. In these arrangements, there is a conflation between private and public interests, as well as public and private institutional configurations. There is also a preference for larger actors, which help to privilege only larger actors and institutions as relevant to the economic development process. In this sense, as Beauregard notes, there are decisions to circumscribe the participation of certain actors and institutions in the practice of economic development, even when these limitations may act to hamper potential growth or returns on capital investment (Beauregard 1993 p. 271). As such, “many significant projects are increasingly undertaken either by private concerns tendered to ‘the market’ or special-purpose authorities and quasi-autonomous agencies, often endowed with the power of eminent domain” (MacLeod 2011: p. 2635). Peterson makes the benefits of this

arrangement somewhat explicit when he notes that this institutional configuration safeguards these partnerships from electoral and political processes of accountability, thus allowing them freedom from “the usual political constraints” (Peterson, 1981, p. 148; see also Gilmore 2007 for how this process contributed to mass incarceration in the latter half of the 20th century). Others such as Leitner echoed this sentiment early on, noting that these new trends in urban governance “strongly suggest a distinctly different, entrepreneurial approach to urban governance: an entrepreneurial orientation which manifests itself in the attitudes of politicians as well as public administrators” (1990: pp. 148–149).

Local Economic Development: Cooperatives and Anchor Institutions

Responding to the perception of footloose capital, and seeking to counter the inter-local competition to race to the bottom with economic development incentives, worker ownership and place-based economic engines have emerged in the post-2008 economic landscape to address urban inequality. In the same way that cooperatives are being looked at with renewed interest in the field of community development (Zeuli and Radel 2005; Gordon Nembhard 2014; Huertas-Noble 2010; Krishna 2013), another long-standing urban institution is emerging from obscurity and being mobilized into local efforts to combat economic and social inequalities: anchor institutions (Zerang and Thompson et al 2013; Kelly and Duncan 2014; Schildt and Rubin 2015). Anchors have recently been mobilized as economic actors through the lens of community development in order to harness their tremendous buying power for local economic development in the absence of other core economic activities. This model, based on the Evergreen Initiative in Cleveland (see Casper-Futterman 2011) pairs the local purchasing power of place-based “anchor” institutions with worker-owned firms to build wealth not just offer wages and jobs in low-income inner cities. This approach has taken off considerably in cities of the

Rust Belt such as Cleveland, Detroit, Cincinnati, Chicago, and Rochester New York, with other cities outside the core of the former US industrial heartland examining the ways that municipalities can leverage anchor procurement spending for local economic growth and development. The argument in favor of anchors as potential catalysts and engines of inner-city revitalization is strong: after all, as the core of the argument goes, anchor institutions have that name for a reason.

Unlike traditional for-profit industries or firms in the market, large hospitals, universities, and other civic and cultural centers are less likely to be as susceptible to diminishing profit margins and increasing labor costs as reasons to shut down or depart. To return to the basic conception of the “growth machine” from Logan and Molotch (1987), anchors are in most meaningful senses place-bound actors, and as such have a strong interest in local economic success. As outlined above, this “anchor mission” or “anchor solution” has been tapped to great effect at the intersection of mainstream community development practice. In the excitement around cooperatively owned firms and urban revitalization that in real ways addresses some of the shortcomings of market-based urban development policies, some of the key tensions around the institutional interests and capacities of anchor institutions have perhaps been overlooked.

Around the same period as Logan and Molotch developed their analysis of the urban growth machine and its interests with respect to urban political economy, William Worthy took a critical look (or perhaps a sledgehammer) to the emerging mainstream consensus around community development in inner-city and predominantly low-income communities of color. Rather than seeing the civic institutions such as educational and medical centers acting as benevolent investors of last resort, he saw at its heart what he called “institutional rape” connected to residential displacement and disempowerment of low-income communities of color in inner cities (Worthy 1977). This critique has been

recently revived in a case study from Buffalo (Silverman, et al 2014), but the basic components of the argument could be used as a prism to investigate the motivations of any and all anchor institutions in any major US city: their non-profit, mission driven legal status is constantly in tension with its institutional imperatives for prestige and growth in its physical and symbolic surrounding environments. Martin (2003) also examines the ways in which a local hospital became embroiled in both sides of a community development conflict over neighborhood land use and change, showing that the anchor “mission” is not necessarily as internally consistent as those promoting anchor-led or anchor-based partnerships will claim. A key component of the dissertation will be to describe and analyze how BCDI’s leadership approaches its relationship to anchor institutions, with both their promise as local partners and challenges as tremendously powerful players in New York City’s real-estate-led growth machine.

Local State: From Community Benefits to Urban Regimes

Within the world of community control and ownership, the elephant in the room is not just the relationships to markets and capital accumulation. There is also a well-chronicled tension with the local state and similar proximate governing institutions (Williams 2018). This issue poses such an enduring tension because it speaks to questions of strategy as much as, if not more than, principles and beliefs about justice and how it is obtained. The need for nuance and clarity becomes even greater when addressing the local state specifically. Yet a clear understanding of what the local state can and cannot yield in terms of a progressive urban vision is indispensable.

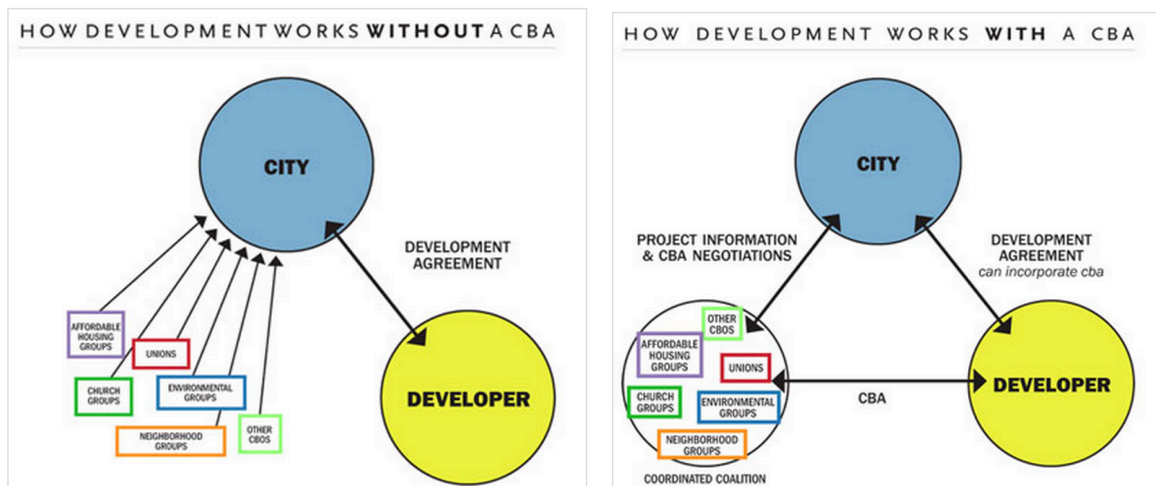
Kanishka Goonewardena provides a helpful personal anecdote that helps us envision what is at stake here. He recalls a time in his early career when he was working for a local government in Sri Lanka providing more affordable housing. He was passionate

about this mission to provide a “right to the city” for the urban poor in his city, but was constantly haunted by the fact that he was working for “the same state that was murdering my fellow students by the thousands” in the insurrections happening throughout the country (Goonewardena 2014 p. 45). This personal anecdote provides some necessary texture to Pickvance’s fighting words to his fellow Marxists: “that the local state is capitalist remains no more than a theoretical assertion” (in Judge et al 1998 p. 10). More simply, Menser describes this as the “heterogeneity” of the state (2018 p. 244). This is important to keep in mind because certain political orientations in progressive social movements have a tendency towards averting state power and engagement as a result of anti-authoritarian perspectives on domination and power. What can emerge from these tendencies is “an anti-statist model of social change with little content beyond localism.” In this vision that Gunn and Gunn lay out, “civil society becomes all, and the combined power of the state and capital are supposed to somehow evaporate from life. Since that outcome is unlikely, these approaches can lead to forms of local isolationism and ultimately to a politics of simple self-help” (1991 p. 165). As Stoecker (1997) and Rubin (1994) have noted, these self-help analyses became pervasive in the CDC field through the last decades of the 20th century, which further enfeeble CDCs as organizers and stabilizers of the urban neighborhoods and constituencies that surround their catchment areas.

As has been noted above, such politics can become enabling of further upward capital accumulation and concentration when situated in the context of neoliberal communitarian governance and governmentality (DeFilippis 2004; Newman and Lake 2006; Keil 2009). The key for the politics of community control and ownership then, is to find the balance between a strategy for building power that engages the state without becoming dependent on elected officials and public opinion, while also holding on to autonomous sources of wealth and political power (DeFilippis et al 2010 pp. 14-15). In short, to paraphrase

Susan Fainstein, the left needs its own version of the public-private partnership in order to bend and contaminate urban governance towards its progressive aims (in Fainstein and Campbell 2002 p. 119). This is very much aligned with the analytical frame of the “social-public” that Menser began to develop in 2009 and then fleshed out in greater detail in 2018.

On the topic of partnerships for progressive aims, it is necessary to look critically at a tool in the community organizing toolkit that has emerged over the last decade or so in the realm of equitable urban (re)development: the Community Benefit Agreement (CBA). In the context of an increasingly entrepreneurial local state as described above, the idea of a CBA was to help local communities benefit more directly from urban revitalization through the adoption of a legal contract between the developer and entities representing “the community” (Gross et al 2005; Been et al 2010; Raffol 2014).



(images: Michelle Ney/YESMag)

I place community in quotations here because the history of actually existing CBAs shows that there are numerous challenges involved in executing one successfully, the first of which is that any number of entities can assert a claim to represent “the community” in

such negotiations. Community Benefits Agreements are a relatively new component of practice in community development in the United States. While still relatively uncommon, they have grown in number since emerging from Los Angeles in the late 1990s. A CBA is a contract between a developer and a set of community organizations that states that the developer will provide a set of “community benefits” as part of the development. Usually this involves local hiring provisions; living wages for the jobs on site; affordable housing, if there is to be a residential component to the development; and other benefits.

These CBAs vary a great deal in quality, and Parks and Warren (2009) have argued that there are three components to a CBA that determine its strength: scope, transparency, and oversight. In this framing, scope refers to how broadly the benefits are spread within a community; transparency refers to how publicly open the process and the agreement were and are; and oversight refers to how the agreement will be monitored, and what the penalties are to the developer for failure to provide the agreed benefits. These agreements can be very useful tools for communities to employ in the context of large developments such as airports, sports stadiums, and other large mixed-use projects, but they can vary widely in quality. They are also nearly always *project-specific* agreements, which means that they do not directly impact other economic development projects, even in the immediate vicinity of the CBA. Finally, they also require a significant amount of organizational energy and persistence to ensure that they are signed and, most importantly, implemented and enforced.

The Bronx has the distinction of being host to both one of the most ridiculed CBAs in the history of the instrument at Yankee Stadium (in 2006), and its most comprehensive and lauded, with the Kingsbridge armory CBA in 2013 (Flanders 2014). Even if we presuppose that the entities representing “the community” in negotiations with the developer or both the developer and the city, in the best set of circumstances, the benefits

will accrue “hyper-locally” only to project participants and beneficiaries. In the absence or organizing for public policies that encourage safe worksites and living wages and the equitable allocation and capturing of newly created value from redevelopment, CBAs are a half-measure that can, paradoxically, deliver few benefits while absolving the city and private developers from future conflicts or claims (Raffol 2014). It is precisely out of these tensions that BCDI participants directly from their victory with the Kingsbridge Armory CBA towards organizing towards a broader vision of greater community wealth and control in the Bronx. As their pivot immediately makes clear, the fundamental issue with CBAs goes to the heart of urban politics and geography: to the matter of scale and the political and economic structures and institutions that govern urban development.

DeFilippis presages the heart of the political-economic cauldron into which the BCDI has inserted itself. He notes, “the current status of local ownership is one of a thriving, but largely marginal, existence. [...]In fact, their growth has been largely facilitated by the absence of confrontation, as local governments have often been very supportive of their work.” He goes on to encapsulate the key tension between thriving economic power and oppositional political power rather succinctly:

This dual status of thriving but marginal is not sustainable, and sooner or later, the new institutional framework that these organizations are building will eventually need to confront the hegemonic political economy if it is going to construct an alternative to that hegemony (1999: p. 986).

This dynamic of a thriving marginality has come to haunt the entire arena of economic democracy in the United States, and the selective use of CBAs illustrates the challenges of this uneven progress. By attempting to “jump” scales from local and discrete neighborhood-level initiatives and attempt to produce a borough-wide network that captures surpluses and generates its own wealth, BCDI is attempting to enlarge the sphere of local autonomy and control a set of flows and relations that is more ambitious than many of its predecessors and contemporaries. Yet this challenge to the existing hegemonic political economy—the decision to challenge its marginal economic and

political impact, comes with its own set of challenges.

This flashpoint of confrontation brings the debate squarely into the realm of political power and the question of urban regimes (Lauria 1997). In the former instance, the codification of power relationships and benefits of development that adhere to the agreement are unique and singular, whereas in regime construction, the question is one of how to institutionally coordinate and deploy power over multiple electoral cycles and even changes in political party.

David Imbroscio, alongside with some colleagues, has formed a consistent chorus of a minority report on this practice, suggesting a range of alternative policies and strategies for local economic development that they argue would generate more egalitarian outcomes for urban areas.²⁴ Cohen and Rogers in 1996 and then Rogers again in 2013 still argued that liberals are barely able to contemplate what a more popular administration of the economy might look like.” The long history and delineation of economic alternatives in the last four or five decades of urban and community development runs up against a consistent rebuttal from the likes of Clarence Stone: while these strategies and policies perhaps could be beneficial for those who aim to increase civic participation and reduce economic inequalities, there isn’t much evidence to support the efficacy of these strategies because they are only rarely implemented, and when they are, often for very short periods of time or at very small scales as pilot projects.

An example of this is showcased Imbroscio’s same 1995 piece on alternative strategies for economic development. The article outlines the life and death of the “Homegrown Economy Project” (HEP), a project initiated in St. Paul, Minnesota in the 1980s

²⁴ Others in this chorus have included Bruyn and Meehan 1987; Gunn and Gunn 1991; Haynes and Nemhard 1999; Nemhard and Marsh 2012; Imbroscio, Wiliamson, and Alperovitz 2003; Alperovitz 2013; Imbroscio 2013.

(Imbroscio 1995). The HEP in St. Paul was announced by the Mayor in 1982 and was a set of economic development policies designed to implement what at the time was framed as greater “self-reliance” through local business development and growing wealth for the city through local multiplier effects. Over a period of several years, Imbroscio documents the inability of the program to have significant results and attributes its “marginal results” not to the ineffectiveness of the initiatives themselves in terms of their impact on the local economy, but rather that, as one of his informants describes HEP “never came together. Much of the planned activity was never put into practice.” As Imbroscio adds, HEP turned out to be infeasible even with support from the Mayor. The departure of a “key aide” charged with implementing the HEP is mentioned as a significant blow to the work (ibid p. 852).

This is simply one example, but is indicative of a great deal of the progressive cities literature. An administration, never mind a policy initiative, cannot be on very strong ground, or claim to be part of a strong urban political regime, if the departure of one aide can be credibly blamed for sinking a citywide policy initiative. As Doussard notes, the sclerosis of progressive mayors and city administrations in the US is the product of two central obstacles: the challenge of electing the politicians, and then, once elected, having a politically moveable agenda with buy in from necessary players in the ecosystem such as business, organized labor, other elected officials, community groups, etc (Doussard 2015). As Doussard elaborates, the challenge of progressive cities at its base seeks to

use limited powers of municipal government to confront social and economic problems produced at regional, state, national, and international scales. This challenge of structural problems is especially pronounced for those planners determined to use economic development policy as a tool for securing the jobs and income central to materialist visions of equality (2015 p. 296).

While the power of local governments to address these structure problems is weak, the list of policy achievements is not non-existent, but is indeed modest. As Clavel (2010) has outlined, items like industry task forces, industrial revenue bonds, planned

manufacturing districts, transit access, land banking, participatory planning, community benefits and project-labor agreements, have been achieved in cities across the country from California to Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, and so on.

The tension underpinning these cases of success is two fold: inequality is significantly worse, and despite the institutionalization of some of these policies in urban areas in the United States, economic development practice generally remains distinctively neither participatory nor economically egalitarian. As the mainstream and critical literatures on economic development both agree, the results of traditional trickle down economic development approaches have been neither particularly transparent nor successful. In other words, *challenges to the orthodoxy of economic development have not been successfully incorporated into progressive municipal regimes—the governing arrangements that structure and outlast individual elected officials or administrations.*

This tension was the subject of a multi-year debate between Clarence Stone, the originator of urban regime theory, and Imbroscio in the early 2000s. While I will revisit the contours of this debate in Chapter 8, the basic outline of this debate is that proposals or agendas for a different logic of economics, such as those outlined in the “alternative economics” policy and scholarly literature, must be joined with political mobilization, particularly at a granular level, in order to connect them with the unexciting and humdrum work of urban administration.

As Beauregard wrote in a review of one of Imbroscio’s books on “local economic alternative development strategies” (LEADS), “institutional redesign needs to be joined with social mobilization” (1997). As Stone reiterated in 2004, “how local actors see and weigh the economic imperative rests partly on the political arrangements in which they

operate and through which they assess complex considerations” (2004 p. 5). He elaborates further using some of the examples of alternative economic policies that Imbroscio suggests, arguing, “one can hardly be opposed to such measures, but they do not eliminate politics. Imbroscio tells us nothing about *how* to make social-minded assessments politically compelling” (*ibid*, emphasis added). This critique is technically inaccurate but substantively true: Imbroscio does indeed often rely on an overly simplistic exhortation that “a movement must be built” to demand the alternatives he champions. Then again, he does not address the more necessary question of *how to build such a movement*. Indeed, it is not enough that economic development practice is not economically rational. Opponents must still not just point out this fact and insist on better transparency for a flawed system but articulate and agitate for a different set of institutional arrangements.

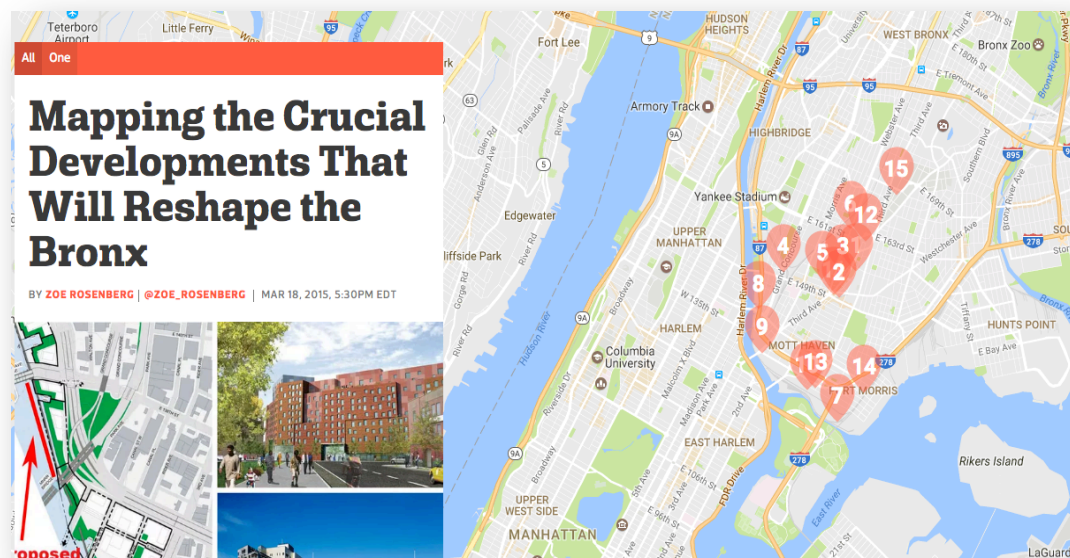
To be fair to Imbroscio, he may be deferring or delegating this task of how to do the political movement work to community organizers and movement builders—not an unwise move for a humble scholar. Yet this deferral, defensible as it is, places the same question in the lap of community organizers. As I show in Chapter 4, one of the core epiphanies among community organizers who form the leadership of BCDI was that the mainstream practice of professional community organizing was (and is) not up to the task of targeting the institutional and economic structures that they see as necessary to build economic democracy in the Bronx. While I address those critiques of organizing as they articulated them in Chapter 4, I first turn to a deeper historical overview of the racialized urban development trajectory that created the Bronx in which these protagonists found themselves.

Chapter III: Reconstructing History and Planning in the Bronx

Introduction

In 2017, in the central Bronx, two public schools tested positive for levels of lead in their drinking water between ten and sixteen times higher than in Flint, Michigan (Small and Kapp 2017). A few miles south, on the Grand Concourse a few blocks from world famous Yankee Stadium, a cluster outbreak of rare infection Leptospirosis broke out due to inhumane and illegal living conditions in buildings maintained by one of the borough's most notorious landlords (Santora and Remnick 2017). In the same month, the Bronx Borough President, an eccentric elected office particular to New York City, delivered a "State of the Borough" address high on hopefulness for the present and future of the Bronx and its residents. He touted billions of dollars in economic growth in jobs and investment in new housing stock, while also pointing to the difficulties many still face: "Services and amenities abundant in other boroughs are lacking here and, despite having world class hospitals, our borough's health indicators have been slow to improve." (Diaz 2017 p. 3). As might be expected of a local elected official, the Borough President's greatest leverages and authority lie in the realm of land use and development. In 2017 and for most of the 21st century, there has been no shortage of development and redevelopment in the Bronx, across all neighborhoods from the infamous South Bronx to the North and East.

As this 2015 map from Real Estate blog Curbed shows (Rosenberg 2015; Fig 3.1 below), and as corroborated by Real Estate trade publication The Real Deal (“The Bronx is the new Queens” Moses 2015), large areas of the borough, particularly those closest to Manhattan, are being acquired, envisioned and planned for, in some cases aggressively so, even for New York City.



Given broad perceptions of the Bronx, and the South Bronx in particular, as an area of crime, danger, disinvestment, and poverty, this might seem unusual. But as a part of New York City, the Bronx has always been a part of someone’s plans.

The formation of BCDI is bound up in nearly a century of this history of urban land and economic development politics and policy, both local and national, and their effects on the Bronx and places like the Bronx. Because of its iconic place in the history of urban development, devastation, and revitalization, it is important to get the main thematic areas of the Bronx story in order, as they help to explain a good deal of how BCDI came

to be, and the history that its main protagonists hold in their hearts, minds, and bodies as relevant to their work. This chapter proceeds in three parts. The first part outlines the early history of the borough from unification in 1898 through into the Great Depression, when major federal funding for public works projects from the Works Progress Administration began to fundamentally reshape New York and cities across the country. The second part takes on most of the middle of the 20th century, and engages with the role of institutions and individuals in planning of the built environment and post-industrial order. I follow arguments that de-center the role of Robert Moses in particular, as well as generally moving the conversation around planning and equity from one that is centered on “Moses versus Jane Jacobs” into that emphasizes structural forces above the paygrade of Moses and Jacobs and their role in shaping the fate of both the Bronx and New York City as a whole. Discussions of urban planning in New York City have revolved around Robert Moses and Jane Jacobs for decades now (Larson 2013), and this chapter aims to synthesize a series of dissenting opinions from the last 40 years to tell a more useful story about how planning has shaped the city in the 20th and 21st century. In outlining New York City’s transition from a manufacturing base to a post-industrial “FIRE” (Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate) economy in the post-World War II period (Fitch 1993), I finish with part three, which looks at the last 20 years of the Bronx, particularly the “comeback” narrative that centers the role of community development and neighborhood “civic capacity” (Saegert 2006) in the 1990s, but that has given way in more recent years to concerns about “hot market” speculation in both commercial and residential property. I use several major land use and redevelopment cases to tell this story, but the main focus is on the defining role of the Kingsbridge Armory for both the Bronx and for BCDI’s development in particular.

Constructing a narrative arc of urban planning and development for New York City and the Bronx that goes beyond Robert Moses and covers immigration, white flight, redlining,

urban renewal, arson, community development, revitalization, and gentrification is a foundational task for the remainder of the dissertation, since it foreshadows analyses in later chapters around the complex social construction of markets, political economy, scale, and urban governance.

Early Twentieth century: Immigration and European Assimilation

Unsurprising to many non-Manhattan residents of New York City, the history of the Bronx is one of subservience and extraction at the whims, control, and behest of elites south of Central Park.²⁵ Long before the imperial reach of New York City extended into the Catskills for its water supply, the freshwater of the Bronx River was far north enough to be appealing to downtown power brokers. One member of this illustrious club was Aaron Burr, whose financing outfit, The Manhattan Company, was set up in order to compete with Alexander Hamilton's banking system, which was primarily designed to finance public infrastructure rather than private interests. Burr's thirst for profit made the Manhattan Company's play for the piping work sorely inadequate, but private interests continued to play an outside role in the development of the furthest reaches of the northernmost urban frontier (Hornstein 2015, Smith 2016 "Thirsts and Ghosts"). Nearly a century later, the theme continued, but with the prime commodity at the turn of the 20th century was land more than water.

The Bronx was incorporated into the city of New York as a result of unification in 1898, tethering the only part of New York City that lies on the mainland of the United States to its island master, Manhattan. In the late 19th century

²⁵ Before urban renewal was urban renewal in official capacity, it was Central Park: Seneca Village, a community of free blacks for several decades in the middle of the 19th century until it was demolished to clear the way for the park.

as soon as the el bridged the Harlem River, suburban property became city lots. The resulting higher land prices forced property owners and builders to use land more efficiently, which meant greater reliance on attached row and tenement housing, a form of urban construction that fit well with a gridiron street plan. Bronx promoters now assumed that the region north of the Harlem River would receive Gotham's excess populace, irrespective of class, not just the upper-middle class suburbanites for whom they had earlier been aiming. A street system designed to make that possible, Louis A. Risse declared in 1891, would advance 'the important future [the borough seemed] destined to fill.' (Gonzalez 2003 p. 45)

The debate over whether the Bronx should aspire to be its own version of Manhattan, with gridded streets set at right angles in order to facilitate commerce and speculation, or a sleepy hamlet suburb with ample greenery, was a subject of contention in these early days as well, although municipal authorities and the press were not significantly involved. This left much of the early decision making to property owners and financiers either on the mainland or based in Manhattan (Gonzalez *ibid*). Many who grew up in the Bronx in the first half of the 20th century remember it as a thriving and bustling working class and middle class community, from the northwest to the southeast. The history of the thriving ethnic suburb or enclave, with a mixture of Jewish, Irish, and Italian neighborhoods is a common trope in urban history, particularly in the production of nostalgia that is used in placemaking and revitalization initiatives (see Alda 2015 for a good example of this kind of nostalgia production). The celebration of this melting pot history, for example in the New York Times, is representative of the trend:

In 1920 foreign-born residents came primarily from Russia, Italy, Austria, Germany, Ireland and Hungary. In 2000 they came primarily from the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Mexico, Ecuador, Guyana and Honduras. The principal mother tongue was Yiddish among foreign-born residents older than ten in 1920; in 2000 it was Spanish. (Collins NYT 2006)

What happened between 1920 and 2000? I attempt to draw out some of the main political economic trends of this period as they pertain to the urban built environment, and the role of urban planning and planners for the Bronx and New York City.

Post WWII—Flight, Crisis, Revitalization, Recasting History

The mid-century period in New York City is an age of historical titans: Governor and President Franklin Roosevelt, Mayor LaGuardia, and Robert Moses often play leading roles in this golden age of New Deal and post-war urban transformation (Freeman 2000; Wallace 2002). Yet even in the height of the New Deal era when manufacturing and organized labor in New York City helped to forge the “Arsenal of Democracy”, plans for New York City’s post-industrial future had already been written.

When urbanists tell the story of the era of urban renewal in the United States, some begin the story a century earlier with French man named Georges-Eugene Haussmann.

Haussmann was the Robert Moses of his day: the master builder, the main protagonist in the modernist transformation of Paris during the rule of Napoleon Bonaparte. As Mindy Fullilove notes in *Root Shock*, while Haussmann continues to stand in as the boldface villain or hero in the story of the “Haussmannization” of Paris, Haussmann’s work drew on the work of many in power before his day. Previous Kings, looking to make their mark on the built environment of the city and to make it “as beautiful as Rome” had begun applying themselves and the expertise of their courts to that task. These were aesthetic concerns, as well as the need for basic sanitation to guard against epidemics, and of course, as transportation modes evolved, to widen the streets for commerce and to prevent congestion. The aesthetic and functional elements of wide boulevards were intertwined. Haussmann’s objective, when *Napoleon hired him*, was to “apply these techniques on a scale large enough to transform the city” (2004 pp. 52-53). The story of

urban renewal in the United States, and in New York City in particular, often centers the builders and destroyers such as Moses, while placing the heavy lifting work of economic and political elites in the background, or obscuring them entirely. A minority report of sorts has shadowed this debate in the United States for decades, arguing for a more holistic and structural analysis that centers political economy and the actions and interests of capital, rather than, as Herbert Kaufman described Moses “the Charismatic Bureaucrat” (Kaufman 1975). To draw the analogy back to France, this is a telling of the history that reminds us that Napoleon (i.e. The State) and Haussmann both needed each other to serve the broader ends of modernization.²⁶

The most clearly identifiable actor in this alternative version of history for New York City is the Regional Plan Association (RPA). In the 1920s, the Regional Plan Association, an organization comprised of bankers, politicians, railroad and oil tycoons, and other local elites, began devising an “architecture of decentralization” that would modernize the transportation and economic infrastructure of New York City. The plan they produced in 1928 outlined three highways to ring the city, including five bridge and tunnel crossings throughout, three of which were conceived by the RPA itself: the Bronx-Whitestone bridge, the Triborough (RFK) bridge, and the Lincoln Tunnel. As Robert Fitch delicately put it in his tome on the making of New York into a post-industrial city, “just about every highway and bridge credited to Robert Moses was conceived and

²⁶ It is also worth noting that the reign of Napoleon III and Haussmannization came to a sudden conclusion in 1871 during the Paris Commune. By 1871 the Napoleonic/Haussmannic transformation of the city had been functionally completed, and may have contributed, with poetic elegance, to the ease of dispatching and massacring the Communards in such a short period of time.

planned by the RPA. Moses simply poured the concrete on the dotted lined indicated in the plan” (Fitch 1993 p. 59).

To the average student of planning, such a brazen denial of the power, vision, and cunning of Robert Moses might lie somewhere between unserious and blasphemous. While Fitch’s zeal makes for an entertaining read as well as a meticulously researched study of urban transformation, others before him have made similar points about Robert Moses with a bit more nuance. In his 1975 review of *The Power Broker*, Robert Caro’s seminal work on Moses, Herbert Kaufman made the case for structure over agency. He writes that individuals like Moses “did not make the changes they epitomized” but rather were bound up in larger trends in which they may have had small contributing roles. “An apt metaphor,” wrote Kauffman, “might be to depict Moses as a masterful surfer, getting more out of a wave than anyone else did.... The real measure of his power is not how much was done but how much more was done [by him] than would have been the case” had he not been around. Presaging parts of Fitch’s point on Moses two decades later, he wrote in *Political Science Quarterly* that roads and bridges were coming to New York City no matter what. “The Brooklyn Bridge was completed before Robert Moses was born, and most of the East River and Harlem River spans were built long before he turned his talents to construction.” Other roads built before Moses included the Bronx River Parkway, Holland Tunnel, Bayonne and Goethals Bridge, and George Washington Bridge (Kaufmann 1975 p. 534-5).

This effort to reconfigure and to a certain degree, dismantle the pedestal upon which Robert Moses stands in the history of New York's built environment has important implications for understanding the trends of decay and revitalization in the Bronx. While it is true that New York City was a national epicenter of urban renewal,²⁷ in the Bronx, Moses' role in demolishing parts of the Tremont neighborhood to build the Cross Bronx Expressway (CBE) is also a topic of debate among historians and planners. For example, Gonzalez describes the context for the construction of the CBE this way, fitting into the frame of an all powerful and destructive Moses: at a time when "every apartment was needed" the CBE "swept away housing that was newer and better than in the South Bronx neighborhoods..." (Gonzalez 2003 p. 116).

Without minimizing the destruction and displacement caused by the demolition and construction of the Expressway, there are other credible ways of telling this story. Bromley argues that Gonzalez's storyline draws, intentionally or not, on the historiographical framework that Caro established in *The Power Broker*. Through Caro's "single minded determination to portray Moses as omnipotent, arrogant, [and] a brutal destroyer of residential neighborhoods," Bromley writes, "I believe that Caro frequently overstated and oversimplified his case" (Bromley 1998 pp. 11).

To make his point, Bromley does not dismiss the inconvenience and pain of 5,000 evictions, the insufficient, "hopelessly inadequate" relocation assistance, or that there was

²⁷ According to Fitch, while New York City had roughly 4% of the US population, it had one third of all Title I construction between 1949 and mid 1960s. He describes this as a particularly "distinct mode of urban development in New York... 'real estate stalinism'" (1993 p. 141).

a substantial community advocacy around a reasonable alternative plan for the highway route that was never considered and “callously defeated.” He writes that Caro “went way beyond these points, however, to suggest that the neighborhood [of Tremont] became ‘a slum as bad as any I’ve seen’ *and that the demise was directly caused by Moses and his expressway*” (emphasis mine). Bromley argues that if this were true, there would have been a noticeable “distance decay effect,” in which the impacts of the expressway were most severe in the adjacent blocks but tapered off with greater distance away from the highway. If the expressway was truly influential in the decline of the Tremont neighborhood, Tremont North should have likely continued to exist as a small and “vibrant, predominantly Jewish neighborhood” (Bromley 1998 pp. 12-13).

This point is intriguing on its own, but gets stronger when placed in a broader context of Bronx neighborhoods in that era. As he notes, “there is no obvious correlation between levels of abandonment in the South Bronx in the 1970s and the proximity of expressways.” Indeed, many of the most critically devastated neighborhoods, such as Melrose, Morrissania, the infamous Charlotte Street and the neighborhood surrounding the notorious “Fort Apache” police precinct were not that close to the Cross-Bronx or other expressways, but were rather those with the oldest and most dilapidated housing stock (Bromley 1998 p. 17). Census data from the period show that while the population of the Bronx only declined 1.8% between 1950 and 1960, this was followed by a decline of 20% in 1970-1980, with *the greatest losses disproportionately felt south of the expressway, not adjacent to it.*

In other words, the expressway as a central fixture in the social destruction of the Bronx is a much weaker explanation than the more comprehensive structural explanation: that there is a stronger relationship between the Bronx's decline and redlining, suburbanization, and a racialized welfare state. The expressway is a destructive *piece de resistance* that rounds out nearly a century of embedding structural racism into the urban fabric of the post civil war United States, rather than a catalytic cause for decline of idyllic white ethnic and mixed-race neighborhoods. In this reframing of the history, Robert Moses is still an effective agent of Urban Renewal, but the exceptionally potent destructive force of his agency and the expressway are placed in a larger context of real estate, social policy, white flight, and structural racism at the heart of US urban and social policy.²⁸

What does this embedding look like in the particular case of New York City? Between 1950 and 1980, the Southern half of the borough, which has been “looked to as the premiere iconographic site from which to narrate sagas of US urban destruction, struggles with poverty and the drug epidemic,” (Tang 2013, p. 49), lost over half of its population (Gonzalez 2003). The Bronx, alongside Detroit, is one of the more iconic sites of white flight and urban redevelopment in the United States: in 1950 the Bronx non-Hispanic white population was over 90%, while in 2000 it was 80% Black and Hispanic (*ibid* p. 144). It is important to not just see white flight as the departure of wealth and capital through the departure of white families to the suburbs just to the north (Westchester County, which directly borders the Bronx to the north, is one of the wealthiest counties in New York State and the US overall).

²⁸ The birth of a racialized welfare state is chronicled in many works, but Katznelson 2005, Rothstein 2018, and Baradaran 2017 stand out among these.

Wealth extraction was also ongoing through the slum landlords who owned buildings and burned them to the ground throughout the 1970s. In 1968, for example, RPA plans for regional economic hubs were devised to make use of Urban Renewal. In the Bronx, all areas were chosen particularly because they were “adjacent to or in the center of large Negro-Puerto Rican neighborhoods” (Fitch 1993 p. 115). This was tightly coupled with the 1969 citywide plan that essentially zoned the entire South Bronx as a sacrifice zone for “major action” for renewal, setting the stage for the arsons in the 1970s as landlords, acting economically rationally, let their properties fall into decline in accordance with their brightly colored marching orders from the city. “South Bronx landlords [were] like California prospectors a hundred years ago” according to Edward Martin of the Bronx Office of Rent Control. “They rushed in, took out the gold, and left a ghost town” (cited in Gonzalez p. 126). Another housing expert also noted that landlords in the Bronx would rent to Black and Latino families with low-incomes all that the market could bear while making “high returns because repairs [were] never made” (ibid p. 111). The increasingly poor, non-white, and looted residents of the Bronx were thus subjected essentially to a double movement - a one-two-punch - of wealth extraction simultaneously with the radical restructuring of urban political economy nationwide and particularly in New York City, which faced an unprecedented municipal bankruptcy in 1975. This devastation in the 1970s was not only residential: between 1970 and 1977 the Bronx lost 300 companies and approximately 10,000 jobs (Gonzalez p. 118). Zoning for industrial and manufacturing land uses were thinned out citywide in 1961 as well, and have been declining since (Fitch p. 135).

Going forward from New York's economic nadir in the 1970s, any infusions of capital or reinvestments in the built environment would conform to the formula of the emerging "New Urban Politics", which, following Paul Peterson's *City Limits* in 1981, meant that these looted families and neighborhoods would now have to compete according to the logics of a more "entrepreneurial city" (Harvey 1989; DeFilippis 2004) rather than the kind of social-democratic redistributive framework that had helped inaugurate the wealth generating economic juggernaut from which their white former neighbors benefitted before skipping town to Scarsdale and Mamaroneck.

The responses of those who stayed and struggled are also well chronicled. Welfare rights organizers occupied government offices in defiance of austerity and dehumanization. The Young Lords occupied Lincoln Hospital in the South Bronx and blockaded streets in the "Garbage Offensive" designed to draw attention to disinvestment and neglect of their neighborhoods from the supposedly public sector. These were protests of policies of planned shrinkage and austerity that very clearly presaged the kinds of policies now being discussed and deployed in rustbelt cities such as Detroit (see Tang; Gonzalez p. 128; Wanzer-Serrano 2015).

Community organizing and community development institutions were also seeded during this period of abandonment and neglect. Indeed, the main drivers of the narrative of resilience, revitalization, and recovery 20 years later were seeded in the mid 1970s with housing and development organizations such as the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition (founded 1973), the Fordham-Bedford CDC (1978), and the Banana-Kelly Community Improvement Association (also 1978). These organizations, funded with sweat equity, public dollars and private philanthropy, continued to grow and sprout

up as the community organizing and community development fields increasingly faced greater division and tension over strategies and tactics typically referred to as the “organizing vs development” debate, or the “confrontation vs collaboration” debate in community development (Hess 1999).

The next wave of community-based organizations upon which the revitalization narrative draws were founded in the 1990s, addressing diverse range of local problems from education quality and segregation to housing quality and environmental justice. Mothers on the Move started in 1990, CASA-New Settlement began in 1991 (but didn’t develop their current tenant organizing work until 2005), the social services and organizing group Nos Quedamos/We Stay was founded in 1993, and the Point CDC, in Hunts Point, followed in 1994 (Gonzalez pp. 140-141). The growing trend of these neighborhood-based organizations was further seeded and encouraged by a targeted investment over seven years for Community Development in the Bronx from the Surdna foundation to six organizations, among other philanthropic cheerleading (Gonzalez p. 143).

While all of these organizations each have a long list of accomplishments to their names, they collectively faced similar structural deficits: the problem of deindustrialization and the degradation of the redistributive welfare state was a national, and indeed, an international problem, and their work was highly localized, even when it was effective on its own terms. In other words, the scale of the political and economic crises facing these neighborhoods was of too great a magnitude to be addressed solely by policy and politics at the neighborhood or even municipal level (DeFilippis et al 2010). As Fitch describes it, by the 1990s, New York City had an unemployment rate of over 13%, and the city had gone from a diverse ecosystem of small and medium sized manufacturing industries

across several sectors (that were not as inherently “footloose” (p. 40) as they were made out to be), to a commercial office “monoculture” supplying tens of thousands of fewer jobs for New Yorkers. This, he argues, was a “real estate strategy” disguised and “presented as a jobs strategy” (*ibid* p. 49). Furthermore, it was not merely or solely just a “response” to market forces, he argues. Economic elites and political leaders of New York City designed and initiated a broadly transformative “plan and strategy for transforming the economy of the metro region, and that strategy worked” (*ibid* p. 52; see also Brash 2011 and Davila 2004). I return to this theme of real estate and land value priming as economic development strategy in later chapters discussing scale and the elements of BCDI’s infrastructure that aim to generate wealth through advanced manufacturing (Chapter 7).

1990s and 2000s: Redevelopment and the triumph of Community Development

The 1990s began to bring out the kind of urban revitalization and renaissance that had begun to be incubated in churches and living rooms and community gardens across the Bronx in the most harrowing and disinvested era of the borough’s history. In 1997 the National Civic League recognized and commended the Bronx on its “astonishing recovery” and “tremendous community revival” (Gonzalez 2003 p. 1).

Building on the core of the Koch mayoralty’s extensive and well-publicized affordable housing investments in the borough (see Jonnes 2002) in the 1980s and the subsequent philanthropic attention outlined briefly above, there was a turn to focus on issues of environmental justice at the intersection of poverty and health in low income communities such as the Bronx. In 2005, Majora Carter was awarded a “genius grant” from the MacArthur foundation for her work founding Sustainable South Bronx in 2001,

after working at The Point CDC. Green Worker Cooperatives, founded by Omar Freilla, which focused on incubating small worker-owned green businesses in the Bronx, was also formed in 2003 after Freilla and Carter worked together at Sustainable South Bronx (Peeples 2011).

Simultaneously as the South Bronx, and particularly Hunts Point, began to put the Bronx “on the map” for environmental justice work, the early 21st century also saw a wave of large-scale development projects focused on the area near Yankee Stadium, which, as it sits in the western half of South Bronx with much more proximate transit access to Manhattan. Yankee Stadium was already a primary anchor attracting non-Bronx residents to the borough. In 2006, a widely panned deal, falsely labeled a community benefits agreement, was struck between the Yankees, the city, and local elected officials, as part of a deal to build the new Yankee Stadium (Damiani, Markey, and Steinberg 2007). In an adjacent commercial space, the Bronx Terminal Market was acquired by the Related Companies and transformed into a large suburban-style shopping mall with several large national chain stores and restaurants. The redevelopment of this site was chronicled extensively in Fainstein’s early lectures on “The Just City” (Fainstein 2006).

This development is particularly notable because just a few years later the Related Companies proposed to transform the vacant Kingsbridge Armory into the exact same kind of large retail facility, but met with much stiffer opposition (Tishman 2014 provides extensive details on this process). During the campaign to block this retail development for the Kingsbridge Armory, organizers were undoubtedly aided by having a real-life

example just a few miles to the south of what they stood against (construction began in 2006 and was completed in 2009). The Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, which led the campaign for community benefits at the Armory site, had also participated in the campaign for equitable development at Bronx Terminal a few years earlier. These campaigns, occurring in such a short time period and in such proximate geographic area, is part of the timing in which the idea around economic democracy and BCDI began to germinate. During this period of 2004-8, organizers had a strong desire to coordinate around a vision that placed their understanding of equity and fairness at the center of the debate and the agenda for planning the Bronx during this time, but were ultimately unsuccessful in convening a critical mass of key neighborhood based leaders around this vision. In the final section of this chapter, I provide a sketch of the increasing rate of speculative activity in the Bronx in the last decade (2007-2017), paying particular attention to the role of real estate investment trends as well as, importantly, the contentious and divergent *perceptions* of their significance and meaning for the future of the Bronx. I focus on land and placemaking because, as Fitch and others have argued, real estate development and raising land values, *as an end in and of itself*, is a central plank of the city's post-industrial economic development strategy.

Real Estate Boom: Prepping for Gentrification and backlash (2007-2017)

After decades on the sidelines, the Bronx finally began to acquire its share of the buzz on “the next big thing” in New York City real estate. In the box above, I show list of headlines from a 10-year period on Bronx real estate, with a particular focus beginning at the start of Mayor Bill De Blasio’s administration in 2014.

2007

“South Bronx: A Historic Section of the Neighborhood Blossoms Once Again” (Sheftell 2007)

2013

“It’s High Time to Talk About The Anticipated Gentrification of the South Bronx” (Slattery 2013)

2014

“Developer Youngwoo and Associates Buys Historic Bronx General Post Office” (Salttery 2014a)

“Four New Metro North Stations Rolling Into the Bronx” (Small 2014)

“NYCEDC Announces Vision Plan for Webster Avenue” (NYCEDC 2014)

“The Bronx is Getting a Brand New Neighborhood (Slattery 2014b)

2015

“Mott Haven, the Bronx, In Transition (Hughes 2015)

“Bronx is Booming: Real Estate Growth Leading Borough’s Surge” (Mateo 2015)

“City Housing Chief Aims to Rebut Concerns About Displacement” (Murphy 2015)

“Next Stop: The Bronx” (Solomont 2015)

2016

“South Bronx Sees Rise in Market Rate Rentals” (Morris 2016)

“The Bronx is Booming: Housing Market City’s Fastest Growing” (Clarke 2016)

“Sale of 10 Bronx Apartment Buildings Reflects Frenzy in Borough” (Geiger 2016)

“Moving North to the Bronx” (Hughes 2016)

“South Bronx Residents Fear Displacement as Real Estate Booms (Teicher 2016)

2017

“Mott Haven’s Sales Market is Becoming Comparable to Bushwick” (Rosenberg

Of course, real estate development in and of itself is not necessarily what concerns residents of the South Bronx in terms of displacement (and as Freeman 2006 notes, neighborhood opinions on gentrification are never uniform). Neighborhoods generally are defined as places in many different ways, but for neighborhoods marked by

significant landmark events, those meanings and attachments are deep and long-lasting. Place making and place framing are thoroughly political, and therefore contested, processes, as Geographers have long argued (Massey 2004; Tuan 1990; Pierce and Martin, et al 2011).

Fears of gentrification and displacement arise then not only from the physical environment, but from cultural and social meanings that attach themselves to these changes in the built environment (both their content and pace of change). This is a process that Geographer Yi-fu Tuan has described as “topophilia” (1990). As an example of this, I briefly sketch out the social media and public relations skirmish that arose in 2015 and 2016 when a group of real estate investors held a Halloween party with several celebrity guests in which the theme of the party was “The Bronx is Burning”.

The party featured luxurious surroundings and high-end food and beverage around artfully recreated scenes of urban destruction and decay. The reaction to this insensitive framing was swift, and also connected the real estate sponsors of the event to their increasingly public efforts to rename the part of the South Bronx closest to Manhattan, and thus most ripe for gentrification and speculation, as “The Piano District” from Mott Haven. As Geographers and theorists of the politics of place and space would argue, the reason that this renaming drew such strong reaction from residents of the South Bronx, still in the absence of significant physical changes in the built environment, has everything to do with what being from the Bronx and living in the South Bronx in particular, means. The Piano District concept recalls a part of the early twentieth century

history Bronx in which the South Bronx and Mott Haven were home to piano making shop floors, serving the world market for an elegant luxury good requiring skilled craftwork. Deploying historical nostalgia for an earlier, more elegant time in the history of the South Bronx was an obvious erasure of the more recent history and inhabitants of the borough, including the not-so-subtle racial nature of that erasure. This was quite quickly noted in the neighborhood response to prominent billboard advertising the Piano District concept (Small 2015).

The conflict over representations of the South Bronx, as evidenced in the Piano District, is reflected in other cultural products and events that have been marketing nostalgia for an earlier version of the Bronx to welcome those who might be made uncomfortable by the current perceptions of the Bronx as dangerous, gritty, impoverished, and so forth. These cultural artifacts are not in and of themselves responsible for the gentrification of the Bronx in a direct or malicious manner, but rather are intertwined in the politics of producing meanings of place for different groups across the city and beyond. Arlene Alda's *Just Kids from the Bronx* seeks to rehabilitate the image of the Bronx in its current state with a series of interviews of a wide range of nationally recognized celebrities who trace their origins and upbringing to the borough. The book includes interviews with Neil DeGrasse Tyson, Regis Philbin, Chazz Palmintieri, Al Pacino, as well as Majora Carter, Ruben Diaz Jr, the current Borough President, and other notable recent notables such as Grandmaster Melle Mel and Tats Cru. A heartwarming multi-racial portrait of childhoods and lives of struggle and triumph across the entire borough, the work in the context of its release contributes to an engine of placemaking

and place branding that seeks to re-introduce the Bronx to a broader public for the purposes of real estate investment and tourism—goals explicitly outlined by the Borough President himself. The national scope and demographic target of the book’s audience is perhaps revealed with jacket blurbs from Barbara Walters and former President Bill Clinton, attesting to the enviable resilience and resurgence of the Borough.

The release of the book was followed in 2016 by Baz Luhrman’s miniseries on Netflix *The Get Down*, which tells the story of the dangerous and gritty days of the “burning” Bronx of the 1970s and 1980s through the experiences of Bronx youth growing up in the midst of the birth of hip-hop. Later in the year, “A Bronx Tale, the musical” appeared on Broadway, starring Chazz Palmintieri and co-directed by Robert DeNiro. The play features a mostly white cast, set in the 1960s before the era of disinvestment, white flight, and arson took hold (which would have changed the title of the play to “A Westchester Tale”). Taken together, recurring features in the Real Estate section of the New York Times and business publications like Crain’s, combined with pioneering real estate investments from the private and public sectors across a broad swath of the borough, produce a scenario in which the Bronx’s “brand” as a place is being rehabilitated. That alone is not a dangerous event: the concern is that the positive branding of the Bronx is being accomplished primarily through obscuring the existence, work, and challenges of most of the Bronx’s current inhabitants, who have been trying unsuccessfully for years to encourage others to see the dignity and worth of the Bronx and by proxy, to acknowledge the worth and dignity of its working class communities of color.

It is in this context of what is now a decades-long process of “resurgence,” and the already contentious struggle over who will determine the future of the social, economic,

political, cultural, and physical landscapes of the Bronx, that I situate the origins of the BCDI and their framework for economic democracy in the Bronx. But the more proximate origins can be located in yet another real estate struggle, which pitted a Bronx-wide coalition of neighborhood and community organizations against the Bloomberg administration's plans for the Kingsbridge Armory, a gargantuan structure that has been essentially vacant since 1996. Unlike the South Bronx, the Kingsbridge neighborhood in the northwest area of the borough was not consumed by waves of arson, due not only to being just outside the "major action" dragnet from the 1969 plan, but also at least in part to the coincidental placement of thousands of Cambodian refugees in substandard and inhumane apartment buildings that may have otherwise been set ablaze. The payments that landlords received from the federal government to house these refugees (while making no repairs) provided the necessary financial incentives to prevent mass arsons that took place to the south.²⁹

Moving forward many years in time to 2009, when a plan with support from Mayor Bloomberg's administration for a large shopping mall (in many ways identical to the Bronx Terminal Market a few miles to the south) was sent to the city council for what typically amounts to a perfunctory approval in matters of land use and economic development projects with mayoral support. An unusual thing happened on the way to this foregone conclusion, however. The New York City council responded to a well-organized campaign from local Bronx residents and activists from labor, faith, and community groups who overwhelmingly rejected the plan. The resounding defeat turned mostly on the question of minimum wages versus "living wages" for the jobs to be provided, and was an embarrassment for Mayor Bloomberg. He called the rejection of his plan "disappointing and irrational", and noted spitefully that as a result of this rejection "There will be no wages paid at all at the Kingsbridge Armory for the foreseeable future".

²⁹ See Tang 2013 for a rich account of the Cambodian storyline

Some residents and business owners near the facility didn't see it the same way as Mr. Bloomberg. José Nuñez, a barbershop owner across from the facility, told *The New York Times*, "People need jobs, but they don't need chump change. This building belongs to the people of this area." A customer, seated in the chair, agreed and added "we're not suckers in the Bronx, we're not going to take whatever somebody is offering" (Dolnick 2009).

In December 2013, a few years after the 2009 defeat, the city council voted in favor of a different kind of redevelopment proposal. This plan, also with total costs running in the hundreds of millions, will construct the Kingsbridge National Ice Center [*sic*], a regional facility that, per the agreement of the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA), will prioritize local hiring, pay wages of at least \$10 per hour with benefits, and most notably, set aside 1% of gross revenues from the facility (up to \$25 million annually) for a fund that will be managed by a Community Advisory Council (CAC) for community purposes. The CAC contains appointees from the district's city council representative, from the local community board, and from the Kingsbridge Armory Redevelopment Alliance, which was the consortium of community, labor, and faith groups that negotiated the terms of the Agreement with the developers of the KNIC. After the initial fanfare subsided, trouble began to sink in to the development process of the KNIC, unrelated to the Community Benefits Agreement.

During the course of my research period, the city of New York proposed and approved a "massive" rezoning of over 90 blocks along Jerome Avenue in the West Bronx, running from Yankee Stadium north past Fordham road (Baird-Remba 2018). The rezoning, which was opposed by a Bronxwide coalition of organizations (Bronx Coalition for a Community Vision 2018) argued that the rezoning would add to existing displacement pressures because for a host of reasons, but primarily because the federal median income

designation used to calibrate affordable housing needs was significantly higher than existing area incomes. The slogan deployed citywide in response to rezoning proposals in the De Blasio administration has been “affordable for who?” (Savitch-Lew 2018)

This experience from the campaign against the Jerome Avenue rezoning is particularly salient because it begins to intersect in the space between the past and the present where BCDI’s leaders have to make actual decisions about how to engage with both the long-term transformational goals of economic democracy and the very urgent realities of real estate development and larger rezoning efforts in the Bronx which themselves have significant long-term impacts. Using some of my interviews and participant observation, I outline how this tension played out using a vignette from the 2016-2017 period of my research. In outlining this particular series of events below in the section that follows, I provide some additional context to the matter of gentrification in the Bronx, because the issue is so powerful as a driver of fear and urgency that it is reasonable to categorize it not just as a policy problem or issue but as a totalizing framework or existential threat to the entire BCDI vision and project.

The Gentrification ‘problem’

All of BCDI’s efforts to build infrastructure for long term planning and economic democracy in the Bronx are overshadowed by the consensus among all of the participants that a significant portion of the base that they are working with and for will be displaced in the next decade or two. This sense of impending doom and the anxiety and urgency it inspires pervaded every single discussion of the formalization process for BCDI’s work. Indeed, the looming threat of gentrification, outlined above in this chapter, is part of the entire impetus and rationale for the development of BCDI and economic democracy in the Bronx in the first place. The threat of gentrification and displacement and the promise of economic democracy are, in the context of BCDI’s work, incontrovertibly fused

together. The displacement of low-income people of color from the Bronx thus isn't just a policy or political "issue" to organize around, but a literally *existential* threat to the entire BCDI project. Leaders on the staff and board of BCDI were overwhelmingly clear on the urgency of this threat: nearly every single interview I conducted framed the question of gentrification as an urgent and looming specter facing all of the work BCDI envisioned. The following three excerpts demonstrate the theme:

*We're in a **race against the clock** to gentrify the Bronx. Will we be able to be successful, reach scale soon enough to stop the displacement of our people, the very people that we're trying to construct this with in the Bronx?*

*I have **anxiety** about what happens if the pace of our work—the pace of it being embraced by government—is slower than **the insane pace of change** in the Bronx. And so what if the moment to achieve this is also the moment of like only four neighborhoods being left [because of gentrification]. I think I see an article once a week about how people are some insane new project or some [developer group] talking about their vision for the Bronx"*

*What I **worry** about is the real estate market in New York City, you know? [Our work] is really great but **we're up against time and things happen so quickly**, you know, you look at communities, I mean four years ago Mott Haven did not look like that, with that [coffee shop]. If you look over [by Southern Boulevard], all of those brownstones...people are buying them up, you know, and there's not a \$4 coffee shop there yet, but it's only gonna take one. And I **worry** about that, because **it happens so rapidly** that if we don't start implementing some of these practices now, we could potentially lose the community.*

The urgency of this problem led to notable period of tension among the board and staff of BCDI. The issue at hand was how specifically BCDI was engaging in the present urgent context of impending displacement to support groups on the ground in 2017 and 2018, not only in five or ten years. The question of how to do both of these in the early start up phases while continuing to build the longer-term planning and infrastructure components, was a significant strategic organizational debate. To use the language of BCDI leaders, the specter of gentrification in this particular moment presented a challenge of precisely how BCDI would balance its stated aim to address both the "fighting back" and the "fighting forward" aspects of their work and their base of community organizations in the Bronx. This came up during a strategic planning retreat in early 2017, where a staffer recounted a source of clear tension around urgency and long-term planning:

we had a retreat about a month ago around an operational plan for BCDI and at one point a board member, she said 'look there are literally ten different [real estate] projects happening right now in the Bronx, worth billions, we have to coordinate. This is it, this is the moment for the beginnings of the push out. We are going to lose the people we are trying to work with if we don't do this now.' I mean, she's right but we still have to be careful we aren't only playing defensive.

A board member described the dynamic in similar language in this time period of early 2017:

Another big challenge we're dealing with now is the tension between big aspiration and the urgent needs around us. Particularly around gentrification and displacement. But rightfully so the member orgs are pushing and agitating us on that, like hello what role are we playing against gentrification.

One board member in particular was the most explicit in her recounting of this timeline to me:

They [BCDI] weren't doing any work around gentrification at all. We were working on Bronx Exchange and the fund and the factory and, you know, all those different pieces. The Jerome Avenue rezoning Steering Committee meetings are very focused in our particular area, not really thinking borough-wide. If BCDI is talking about developing a Bronx-wide strategy how do we think that's going to happen? It has to be embedded in this development without displacement strategy. So [a couple of us] invited folks who are fighting development in their own neighborhoods to come together and develop the Bronx-wide table. So [three of us on the board] were like this can't continue to happen, they don't have a choice, BCDI is gonna work on development. Because the mission of BCDI is to think borough-wide, and so, it was like, you know, yelling and shouting. I mean it had been, like, six months of yelling and shouting 'you actually have to do this,' and 'we're not gonna take no for an answer.'

The resolution of this tension between urgency and long-term vision has produced what the board member outlined above: A Bronx-wide “Development without Displacement”³⁰ roundtable, convened by organizers from across the Bronx, with operational, planning, mapping, and technical support from BCDI. The funding and staff position for this was made available as a result of MIT CoLab’s ability to fundraise from national foundations on a rapid timeline to initiate the project and sustain it for more than just a short period. Without the line of support and CoLab’s practice of listening and taking direction from local leadership, the resources would not have materialized on the necessary timeframe, if at all. As a board member noted, this work in the Bronx

...to actually align our efforts and work together in a way that hasn't existed in another borough of the city, of actually bringing together that many organizations

³⁰ see <www.wefightforward.com>

committed to supporting each other and trying to be as visionary as possible in trying to resist displacement. Not just stopping it, but what to what end? And so that is super powerful and is an opportunity that I think is a product of both the sense of urgency but also the collaboration and trust and relationship built by BCDI.

The relationship dynamics outlined above provide insights into how BCDI thinks about and executes its role as a Bronx-based and Bronx-led social justice planning body. As an initiative that seeks to, and is, working across sectors in society, where those broad values alignments are not always shared. Whether its financial institutions, labor unions, government, or philanthropy, a few friends in high places is never enough. The next section addresses how BCDI leaders have approached these challenges, particularly in the case of government and elected officials. In some ways, the opportunities and challenges track with those in Chapter 5 on Anchor institutions, but government also has idiosyncrasies that create different opportunities and challenges for building economic democracy. BCDI's relationships to government also unearthed similarities and permutations of the longstanding tensions between confrontation and collaboration in community organizing and neighborhood economic development. I outline these themes in greater detail in Chapter 8.

Conclusion

It would be reasonable to ask why it is important to reconstruct this history of planning in New York City in such a specific way, from the RPA plan to the Piano District and Kingsbridge Armory redevelopment and the completion of the largest ever rezoning in New York City. There are a few important points here to close out this discussion.

The first is that if we take seriously the fact that the RPA and titanic pillars of wealth such as the Rockefellers and others had significant influence in shaping the post-industrial future of the city, this is an argument about the power of capital and political

economy more than the power of particular people such as elected officials or even extraordinarily effective bureaucrats such as Moses. Taking Moses down a peg moves the story to the roles of powerful interests and agents actively pursuing a strategy of economic transformation, not only the passive idea that something called “globalization” or “market forces” just happened in some spontaneous and inscrutable fashion to strip New York City of its manufacturing base and the jobs associated with it. The RPA and other post-industrial elites had a plan, and it was rather successful. This plan was to dramatically downsize the amount of land available for manufacturing in New York City and to dramatically increase the land available for commercial office space and high-end residential development, as part of a plan to increase land values, or what is known in the real estate industry as “highest and best use”. This process began long before New York City collapsed in bankruptcy in 1975, and certainly before rumblings of organized gentrification sprouted up in the 1980s and 1990s.

This strategy for transforming the city in the mid 20th century was conveniently but not coincidentally paired with a federal program of urban renewal that would help cities with official plans to dramatically remake and modernize their core business districts for the post-industrial era. Fitch’s description of this process is somewhat convoluted but also insightful. Invoking the cliché about the greatest trick the devil ever pulled (convincing the world he didn’t exist), he notes that while “de-industrialization can be plausibly explained in terms of global markets and decentralization... someone and not something mapped out the transportation system. And someone did decide to level big swaths of the city. But it turns out,” he notes sardonically “that the protestant elites—the planners, the

real estate interests, the banks, the foundation leaders—who coincidentally overlapped with the biggest landowners, mortgage makers, and developers—had nothing to do with either urban renewal or New York style highway building.” Somehow, he notes dripping with sarcasm, “it was all the fault of one man: the loud boastful, obnoxious guy with the big nose and the name of Moses” (Fitch 1993 p. 149).

Fitch’s larger point is that the search for accountability about the source of these policies—the loss of middle class jobs and the rise of inequality in New York City—and reframing the role of Moses as a player in a longer and bigger transformation project for a post-industrial city, helps make sense of the twentieth century history of the Bronx and New York in ways that, while not minimizing Urban Renewal, also do not infuse it with a transformative power it may not possess on its own. This narrative places the focus on capital, ownership, and the immutability of land politics in the transformation of the city.

Unmooring the history of New York City’s built environment from Robert Moses also helps unmoor it from the tired dichotomy of the fight between Jane Jacobs and Robert Moses over the lower Manhattan expressway. What if instead of teaching the history of New York City planning as a match between Moses versus Jacobs— “The Power Broker” versus “Eyes on the Street”—the canon of planning was instead taught as the Rockefellers versus the Young Lords? The analysis offered in the history of the Bronx recounted here, asks at least that the field of planning properly calibrate the nature of the forces that stand in opposition to each other, rather than elide them, as I argue has been the case.

Finally, but still in the vein of the interplay between structures and agents: situating the transformation of New York City from an industrial and manufacturing city with a relatively diversified economy into a post-industrial “monoculture” of office and condominiums is, according to Fitch, a part of a broader economic development paradigm that is a real estate strategy masquerading as a jobs strategy—a strategy that continues to this day, across party lines in City Hall, and carried out by city agencies as well as the city’s Economic Development arm, the NYC Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC). The invisibility of economic elites in this process and the intense focus and debate over Robert Moses’ vision for cities makes it harder to find alternative visions for urban development that address structural relations of wealth and power, which is at the core of BCDI’s work and this dissertation. Reframing the argument around economic power is not meant to absolve individual actors of their responsibility, either. Rather than treat these economic development and land use visions and their failure to provide meaningful employment for the bottom half of New Yorkers as a “kind of natural disaster, for which no one need account—or what is tantamount to the same thing—simple product of impersonal market forces” (Fitch 1993 p. 149), there are real political decisions being made here, and these decisions are themselves *structuring market conditions and market trends, as well as responding to them*. As Fitch noted,

Everyone grasps that it is people who decide where highways go. But the notion that strictly objective forces, like technology and markets, the ‘logic of capital’, determine factory and office locations is disarming. Ideas count. Theories, by explaining what is possible, frame agendas and determine how wide the debate on alternatives will be. [ibid]

In order to take seriously the project of economic democracy, community ownership and the democratization of economic management (Feldman and Nembhard 2002; Unger 2005/2009; Rahman 2018), it helps to understand how economies operate as complexes of institutions and agents. Furthermore, this framing of analysis for the history of urban planning in New York City matters specifically for later chapters in which I address markets as social institutions. I return to these points in greater detail in the empirical chapters that follow.

Chapter IV: Envisioning and Organizing Economic Democracy

The idea [of democracy] remains barren and empty save as it is incarnated in human relationships. The idea of democracy is a wider and fuller idea than can be exemplified in the state even at its best. To be realized it must affect all modes of human association, the family, the school, industry, religion. (Dewey 1927 p. 143)

There has to be something more. Some grander strategy...

—BCDI Board member, former housing organizer (2017)

The preceding chapter used the history of the Bronx and New York City as a prism through which to understand the stakes for the future of urban development in the Bronx. This chapter examines the background and history of the germination of the Bronx Cooperative Development Initiative, beginning essentially in the aftermath of the 2008 US economic crisis and the election of President Obama and his subsequent “stimulus” recovery act. What political project, or projects, is BCDI a part of? What ideological lineages do they draw from or align with? Is economic democracy as BCDI defines it reducible to clever new packaging on liberal social democracy, or a politically savvy rebranding and sanitization of democratic or market socialism?

The answer to these questions is yes. The lineage of BCDI draws on national policy and political currents of green jobs infrastructure, as well as locally percolating discussions around “community wealth” (Kelly and McKinley 2015) “shared value” (Porter and Kramer 2011) and social movement-aligned ideations of “post-capitalist” or “other than capitalist” community-based ownership (Allard et al 2008, De Sousa Santos 2007; Roelvink and St. Martin 2015), as detailed previously in Chapter 2.

This chapter proceeds in three parts:

The first section introduces the background narrative formation that participants in BCDI offered in meetings and in interviews to explain their introduction to the concept of economic democracy. In this first section, I also extensively explore participants' different approaches to their understanding of the meaning of economic democracy.

The second section lays out how participants experienced and responded to their weeklong excursion to Mondragón in July 2015. This learning journey brought out alignment *and* dissension about the utility of Mondragón as a guiding inspiration for developing and cohering vision of what economic democracy could mean or look like in the Bronx. The Mondragón “experience” has been written about extensively (Whyte and Whyte 1991; Kasmir 1996; Cheney 1999; MacLeod 1997) since the 1980s with a mixture of adulation and skepticism from US scholars and activists from many points on the ideological spectrum. This section adds to this literature with voices from community organizing in communities of color, which is a perspective that is not well represented in the US-based literature on the potential lessons and pitfalls Mondragón can provide to a US audience (except for Haynes and Nembhard 1999; and Feldman and Nembhard 2002).

The third and final section details how participants concretely applied the experiences of the 2015 formalization process into a governance structure for implementing a Community Enterprise Network (CEN) in the Bronx. In this third section, there are

echoes of longstanding questions about participation, democracy, governance, and accountability in the context of community development, but also new questions about the need for reformulating the role and purpose of the Community Development Corporation (CDC) to adequately address conditions of poverty and oppression in urban communities of color in the United States. These questions will be reanimated throughout subsequent chapters.

While the language of a Community Enterprise Network is somewhat specific to BCDI's work, as detailed above in Chapter 2, community economies and regional economies such as the Quebec Social/Solidarity Economy *Chantier* and *Mondragón* have implemented certain aspects of this, with some shared components of economic, political, and social infrastructure (Menser 2018). This discussion of what would be included in the “core” vision of the Bronx Community

Enterprise Network (CEN), as well as some of the key questions of “who governs” (Dahl 1961) the network, are then further elaborated upon in the chapters that follow, which look at the specific projects of the CEN. For this chapter, I use the following graphic as a heuristic guide for discussing these concepts. In the notes scribbled on

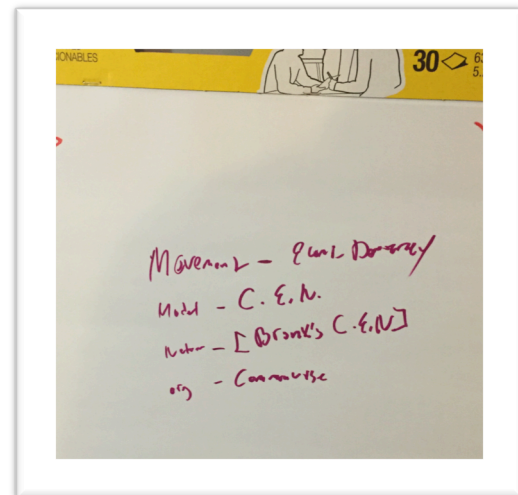


chart paper for my benefit by a BCDI co-founder, the broad ideological visions of economic democracy and their historical practices as social movements are expressed at

the top as abstractions: “movements” for economic democracy. The subsequent form of their implementation, in a set of specific instances such as Mondragon and Quebec, resemble a Community Enterprise Network (hence the term ‘model’). The specific network components in question relate to the establishment of a specific network version or interpretation of the model, i.e. the Bronx Community Enterprise Network that I outline here and in the chapters below. The organization tasked with incubating and promulgating the network is a nonprofit called BCDI, which was already pre-existing but defunct and gifted to BCDI as a shell for it to use and reanimate.³¹ The genealogy of BCDI is the subject of the following section to which I now turn, in two parts: I first build a grounded definition of economic democracy (in BCDI’s case) using interviews with its main protagonists and leaders. I then look at how those participants located and contextualized their relationship to the idea of economic democracy and its relationship to their work, which is a mixture of a form of community organizing or social justice planning (Marcuse 2011).

Background and Context for Economic Democracy in the Bronx

In this section, I look at how BCDI leaders traced their own journey with the ideas that they encountered as economic democracy. For these, I primarily rely on interview responses, which were unusually lengthy compared to some of the other questions in the

³¹ In its previous life, the nonprofit was called Commonwise Education, Inc. It was a nonprofit consulting firm that was aligned with the Jeffery Hollender, founder of Seventh Generation products, in order to advance his work on sustainable environmental and social business practices. The organization was not operational as a nonprofit when it was gifted to BCDI, and its board members were replaced with working group members from the BCDI formalization process, a plurality of whom are executive directors of Bronx-based community organizing and development organizations.

protocol. In regard to the background and context in which participants discovered or connected with in terms of economic democracy, I uncovered three core themes:

- 1) A generalized dissatisfaction with the practice of professional community organizing in the Bronx
- 2) The Kingsbridge Armory as an iconic site of struggle, over several decades, drew out particularly strong contrasts around the necessity of community ownership—this was frequently described as a desire to own not just an asset or an outcome, such as the community owning the building, for example—but also procedural ownership and control of the development process itself in the Bronx as an ongoing site of disempowerment and injustice. This dual frame of asset ownership and process ownership is a dominant and overriding aspect of how BCDI has come to define economic democracy for their work. This also relates to the theme of self-determination as it pertains both to the discussion in Chapter 2 and in the section that follows this.
- 3) Finally, I note the theme of a search for improving the quality of relationships in the borough, both in terms of organizing but also across sectors. Building a coordinating entity to hold together relationships and unlikely partnerships, and build trust, was as much a core component of BCDI’s early conception as ending intergenerational poverty through shared wealth and ownership of the Bronx economy.

As the interviews in this chapter will highlight, the motivations for establishing BCDI and using the language and framing of economic democracy, were about more than just distributional justice and economic inequality. As part of elaborating on these themes, I move here to elaborate on the origin story of BCDI, through the perspectives of its core participants. The consistency of the “origin story” narrative is perhaps an underappreciated component of social infrastructure for regional community economies.³²

³² BCDI stakeholders noted with admiration the consistency with which so many of Mondragón’s many institutional hosts described the origin story of the Priest who launched their endeavor. I show this in greater detail below from field notes taken during the 2015 Mondragon delegation trip.

The story of BCDI usually starts with the infamous “Bronx is burning” moment in time, and traces out the frustrations of community organizers and organizations occasionally credited with “revitalizing” the borough. But the revitalization narrative is of course an incomplete one, in which the “who benefits?” question is not meaningfully asked and answered, as detailed at length in the previous chapter. In the BCDI founding narrative, the story of development in the Bronx is conveyed this way: “Some rich white guy has a great idea for the Bronx, and all he has to do to make it happen is convince two people in the city government: the council person and someone in the Mayor’s office, and no matter what we think or no matter how it affects us here, it’ll happen” (Mondragón Wednesday field notes).

In the story, this oft-repeated dynamic of how development in the Bronx happens is then parlayed into a story about neighborhood and community groups fighting against each other for scraps, and being played off of each other successfully: “so when this happens every time, we get into these fights over benefits and such all the time. Think about the Sheridan expressway, the Cross Bronx, Yankee Stadium, and Fresh Direct” (ibid). The Kingsbridge Armory CBA then plays a role in this narrative as an inflection point—one in which a victory was won, but a victory that still left serious questions unanswered about how to really shift prevailing economic and political relations of power in the borough. One of the Armory organizers from the NWBCCC was applying to go to graduate school in urban planning as this was taking place, and so the other organizers and leaders from NWBCCC said to him, essentially that if he was going to do this, he needed to do something that would help people back in the Bronx to make meaningful

progress on addressing these issues of urban development and organizing. If community benefit agreements weren't going to cut it, what would be better? What next?

This decision turns out to be a critical turning point because it is part of what brings the MIT Community Innovators Lab into the role it has occupied since: as a significant technical assistance and support vehicle for BCDI staffing and resources. For MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning (DUSP), such a role is hardly new. In *Streets of Hope* (Medoff and Sklar 1994), the book that chronicles the inception and growth of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI), the very same department was instrumental in offering technical assistance, including a development and feasibility study along the lines of that which was later produced for BCDI, a few years after the publication of the Master's thesis that roughly outlined what would become the first iteration of BCDI's development model.³³

As part of the learning that resulted from the work of the master's thesis, several core organizers from the Kingsbridge Armory campaign began to learn about the Evergreen Cooperatives in Cleveland, Market Creek Plaza in San Diego, and Mondragón as “shared wealth at scale”, and how all of these initiatives took “an insane amount of collaboration and coordination to accomplish successfully. No one single sector [of society, such as community organizations or government or business or labor] could accomplish these things on their own without working with others” (field notes Mondragón 2015). Here I

³³ The Master's thesis (Iuviene 2010) was followed up two years later by the development study in 2012. The role of MIT in the Dudley Street Initiative's early work in the 1980s is discussed on p. 38 of *Streets of Hope*. I address these overlapping and shared influences, including Mel King and Phil Thompson, in greater detail in Chapter 8.

want to highlight theme #3 from above, with regard to the importance of changing the quality of relationships as an originating desire for BCDI's work. As one leader explains below, the nature of relationships and role of building trust was often connected to this broader conversation that traded more on a set of values or embodied relational practices than a clearly demarcated set of economic or political institutional structures or outcomes:

The thing we knew was that the baseline thing that we wanted to change was the quality of relationships between different stakeholders and actors. The community enterprise network idea was supposed to fundamentally switch up how folks related to each other and move from a notion of--more than just coalitions, but a permanent working formation.

In addition to thinking about the “what”—what kinds projects, what kinds of programs existed or would be needed—there was also a need to address the “who” of this idea of a more permanent formation. What would the right combination of actors be to develop the necessary enterprises or secure the political will to accomplish BCDI? A permanent working formation of people from across sectors again sounds inspiring, but how would BCDI (or anyone for that matter) think about what kinds of people are most important for developing economic democracy in the Bronx? Another leader offered these thoughts about the kinds of skills that guided BCDI's early thinking around core skillsets, but also around the kinds of capabilities that networks need to grow and sustain themselves over time:

*The other thing we're doing that maybe is new or different, that we add, is thinking about planning and systems. From a design perspective, folks should be involved in planning for the future. So there should be democratic ownership, there should be democratic governance, but with respect to development of economic democracy, like how you develop an economy, you need some relevant capacity that thinks about systems, and like how systems work, developing systems, to be involved, and in the Bronx we're thinking of those as **planners**. There should be something around community engagement and collective action*

*and how you actually get people at scale to do anything. And in the Bronx we're calling them **organizers**. And not just community organizers, but people who engage any base for collective action. Then finally I think people that have a talent for **value creation**. We're thinking of that right now in the Bronx as "entrepreneurs". Unfortunately, they're trained to think about value just as business and profit. Just like planners' skills are trained to only think about things like transit systems or whatever. And organizers most of the time, talk about or think about policy campaigns or rapid mobilization and then like implode rebuild again, implode rebuild again. The idea is that those capacities need to be there and it needs to be some level of leadership development on these as skills for all people for a deep understanding of economic democracy. We definitely don't have all the answers, we're definitely figuring it out. But what we think is you gotta have these three kinds of people, or kinds of skills: **[Planners, Organizers, Creatives]**. That's the nascent idea. Broadly, its like 'you need everybody.' But when it comes to thinking about how do you develop the economy, those people, those skills and talents are non-negotiable.*

There's plenty to debate about what kinds of skills might be missing or could be added, such as educators or administrators, for example, but the premise of a balance of skillsets for a network is the core point here. The multi-stakeholder angle for BCDI's narrative is well suited to meeting different audiences with different structural positions of power in the economy and society. The core takeaway from this line of thinking presented above about these core skill sets for developing a system for economic democracy is to state clearly that, just like business development on its own can't transform an economy, community organizing on its own cannot transform an economy. As this person says, its more transformative to approach political and economic change by thinking "you need everyone" and then figuring out what kinds of skills are most necessary or transformative in a given moment or given place. Nevertheless, BCDI is caught in a trap of its own making to a degree, being the product of so many people with a long history of community organizing. As a result of its origination in the aspirations of community organizers, the role that community organizing plays in political and economic change is

most salient in BCDI's origin story. A core aspect of BCDI's narrative focuses on a self-critique of organizers and organizing:

You can look at the effectiveness of organizing strength over the last decades going up and up and tie it directly to ongoing impoverishment, wealth going down, down, down. So there's a big disconnect between organizing victories and owning and governing the assets that drive policy and wealth changes³⁴
(field notes Wednesday Mondragón).

As BCDI continued to reiterate its communications materials and presentation of itself throughout 2017 and 2018, the point above emerged as the core rationale for the development of the initiative, more than any one individual project, even the Kingsbridge Armory redevelopment campaign. In some ways, the struggle over the Kingsbridge Armory, despite the outcome of a landmark CBA, was itself an example of the kind of organizing that BCDI participants were pointing to as too narrow to transform society. This frame also connects to the quality and caliber of relationships, as it points to the shortcomings of community organizing that feels too transactional:

When I first became exposed to economic democracy, I was working on a campaign with parents from a school who had found that the Department of Education had hid from them for six months that they had discovered unsafe levels of a toxin, like ten thousand times the [safe] level. So it was a very easy thing to mobilize around, with parents' desire to protect their children and get a just resolution. After resolving the issue of relocation to a new school, we successfully focused on passing a [citywide] bill that was about a parent's right to know about toxins in their children's school. And as that was happening I was also paying attention to what was going on around the Kingsbridge armory. And the beginnings of gentrification in the South Bronx were really starting to be felt, the tremors. And I'm focusing on a legislative effort about a parent's right to know about toxins in their school. Which was obviously important! But I was really struggling with the narrowness of the vision. We have to be looking at broader visions. There has to be some something more, some grander strategy that we're politicizing our leadership around, and co-creating with leadership with members in our community that is not just about passing a piece of legislation for

³⁴ It should be noted that one of the core BCDI partners, The Point CDC, has used an Asset Based Community Development approach since its inception, and is usually credited for bringing that lens of thinking to BCDI's framework in its early days.

something so basic and fundamental. And seeing how to connect with a more transformative vision of winning, not just legislation.

So what do we mean by 'community organizing?' In our professionalized approach it's come to mean something more narrow than what it means in communities organizing for collective, communal empowerment, it's never just been about passing laws...But that is the way that we have been trained, the professionalization of community organizing. There is a way that you identify leaders. You identify self interests, you facilitate lots of one-on-one conversations, what are the issues that are commonly affecting people, you power map, you identify targets, you develop a campaign, and you mobilize. You win your victory and then you go after a bigger victory. That just never quite seemed to translate for me into 'but actually how do we get to total transformation?' Is it just what can we win so we can win something bigger, and bigger, and bigger until BAM! Revolution?! (laughs) So there was something that I was always a little agitated about because I think I first felt moved around community organizing when I was with the Zapatistas, and just looking at the entirety of the Zapatista movement thinking about institutions: creating institutions, building on ancestral and cultural knowledge and wealth. There was this sense that I got from them of organizing being about leveraging a lot of different forms of assets, of power for the sake of reorganizing society. I struggle with reconciling the power of that way of organizing where you're practicing collectivity in all areas of your life. It's not just about a voting process, or to pass a bill, or to elect a leader, it's about how do we express a commitment to collective ownership and governance in our political system, in the workplace, at home, in our food production. It's not to say we should just throw out the whole like the organizing methodology that I trained in. But I struggle with the lack of feeling of a vision and also 'how are we changing how we can be together' in a more holistic way?

In this narrative, which others echoed in similar ways, organizers were engaged in self-critique over their own tactics and their own effectiveness as the kernel for lifting out the “something more” described in the epigraph above. This makes emphatic the extent to which BCDI is an outgrowth of a dissatisfaction with a multiplicity of *political and economic* trends and dynamics, not just economic ones surrounding inequality. In this particular moment, the ideas and frame of “economic democracy” offered something to these organizers that represented a plausible answer to the need for “something more.”

The below comment adds another layer to this critique of organizing, addressing debates and tensions within the practice of organizing as a vocation or profession. Like the words above, I quote here at length in order to adequately capture the points being made:

Economic Democracy and community organizing are not in conflict with one another. They're describing different things. Some of the tension is that people envision capitalism will not cease, it will not end. So organizing under capitalism means we're eviscerating the capitalist whenever they do something against our morals. In this thinking, the notion of building infrastructure--I think some folks are thinking deep down, whenever we [BCDI] are talking about fight and build, they're thinking BCDI means we want to get into power in these existing fucked up institutions, that we're gonna put new faces on the same old stuff. No! Community organizing, in my experience here, it just takes into account a white understanding of what leadership is. Its not necessarily wrong, it's the white understanding of it. What I mean is: they think of leadership development that starts from the place of people having no formal concrete hard skills. So you've gotta train these people who have no skills on how to use their voice to force the politicians to do things. And leadership development means then, you have a louder voice, compelling more of the other people that don't have those kind of skills, learning to be as much of a sweet talker as possible to potential leaders, and as much of an asshole as possible to the decision makers.

When I think about like civil rights and before, I think about how it was about more than that. We wanted to be the business people, we want to be the thing, we wanted to be the power, you know? We don't wanna just be the loudspeaker you know?³⁵ *I don't mean to disparage that completely. When I got into organizing, when I was able to tell something to a cop or a politician and not be arrested or intimidated, that was very powerful for me. But there's a sect in the argument, the community organizing argument against in the fight versus build that is stuck... that leadership development is this loudspeaker thing. They'll say if you're developing people to like start managing other kinds of things like businesses or housing, they'll say that's not organizing, that's business development or whatever. They may not even hate on you and what you're doing, but to them it's just not organizing anymore. And that is rooted I think in a largely white understanding of what the epitome, or even the different levels of, like, strong leadership in your community is. So I think some of it again is that some people just don't believe, even if they say it, don't actually internally believe that capitalism will cease to exist, or that like our organizing will do that. The organizing has to keep it in check but that's all it can do.*

³⁵ One approximation I found for the legacy referenced here is in an excerpt of Clyde Woods (in Feldman and Gordon Nembhard 2002, pp. 213-216

*I just did a strategic planning session with people in these buckets. There's like the pro Economic Democracy sect, there's the fuck Economic Democracy sect. And I basically framed it as like not fight vs. build, but actually **fight vs. fight**, it's not versus! We're always doing both, we have to do both. It's about knowing when it's strategic to do one or the other. So like sometimes you fight back and sometimes you fight forward. Fight forward recognizes, you have a dream, you have an agenda, you have something you've built or created, and it's organizing to make that happen, which looks like building institutions, which looks like rewarding or reinforcing good actors, and building a system for that. **But its still the same organizing tactics. We could be building tenant associations to fight back or fight forward. We could be holding meetings with associations, holding direct actions, and doing that kind of stuff to fight back or fight forward.** They're like muscles. You get better if you do it more, not at the expense of the other.*

Participation in the Kingsbridge Armory redevelopment was a critical contributing factor to these pre-existing percolating frustrations, debates, and tensions among this group of people, primarily in the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition. The paradox of the immense size of the armory and its relatively small footprint when compared to the entirety of the Bronx pushed organizers to critically engage with the meaning of impact and transformation. This was ongoing even before the vocabulary of economic democracy was available in a recognizable way from the master's thesis. As part of the strategizing against "bad" development at the Armory site, organizers realized that there was a strong need for some kind of framework "beyond extraction" that the CBA was not meaningfully providing. An organizer from the Armory campaign looked back at the campaign this way in 2017:

*The formula [we were used to] was that bad development is going to happen, and you just have to try to get something out of that. But the question for us became could we actually shape the development process and the outcome. Could we use the CBA process to get better development as well as some exactions. At the time it was the best tool we had. **But there are big questions, like if you're not owning a piece of the development process, in a very real legal structured way, that's one question.** And then over time is the other thing.... **What we said back in the day and still is that after twenty years there's only so much you can get out of a***

development deal. So the issue is does it build towards or connect to anything else.

The search for a broader or deeper framework for development that wasn't primarily driven by exactions from objectionable development projects was a recurring theme in this process, but the search for a better systemic pathway was elusive throughout the first decade of the 21st century in the Northwest Bronx's work with the armory. The same organizer continued to outline the contours of this strategic debate:

*Some of us were doing reading groups on gentrification processes with the Armory team. Our thinking was, sure it may not look like it now but if we get this wrong we're going to precipitate [gentrification and displacement], which is now part of our concerns. **We were trying to think of larger strategies, but absent that it was just a building. No matter how big or amazing, it's just a building. We had trouble wrapping our heads around how to approach it as a bigger strategy.** ... **So the other thing was if we could conceive of a bigger plan that was multi-stakeholder and different actors from across the borough, put that forward a little more coherently, we could probably get a deal with the city that could put us on a different development path.***

Stepping backwards to the years before the armory fight is also helpful for context here.

In many ways, as will be shown in this chapter, the Armory fight was the most critical proximate spark for shifting thinking of organizers towards an idea, however fuzzy still, of economic democracy. But there were several other experiences in the first decade of the 2000s that led to the idea taking hold among the people and organizations that became BCDI.

As one of the armory organizers explained, one type of proposal that kept coming up in meetings was to do something like a small worker-owned cooperative business like a bookstore or café or other kind of space in the armory. While some "people loved that and some people thought it was stupid," there was a shared sense that something

resembling a community-controlled asset framing would be useful. As the organizer explained further, not only was Mondragón a key touchstone for the thesis that would inform BCDI's development, but "so were Chinatowns, as a group with an ability to hold land. Where it has happened, they hold Chinatowns in the heart of real estate speculation neighborhoods. But with Mondragón we started thinking about networks and governance and structures....that was with MIT starting to think about these things".

Another BCDI board member, who had been a youth organizer with Northwest Bronx as well, arranged together in her narrative a similar set of events around the first few years after 2008 but before the CBA was signed:

*We'd also been doing political education and we'd developed our own training program for youth by youth, and so we were becoming more politically aware about oppression in the neighborhood and society. So the armory campaign became an opportunity to challenge power and build our own power in a place outside the school system, and engage elected officials too. So this group of us got really sunk into the fight, and developed an ambition for community control and political power. **We didn't have any analysis or label for it as economic democracy or shared wealth or shared ownership at the time but really we had a deeper understanding that the people that lived in our neighborhood needed to be at the center of this and own it in some way, if not financially then at least the process had to be owned by us and we had to have a real say.***

In her narrative, community control is firmly grounded in the legacies of progressive, participatory planning that puts neighborhoods in more direct control of development processes. The urgency and newness of encountering these dynamics during middle and high school also further seared these dynamics into the minds of young organizers in the Bronx, and led them towards deeper analysis of the limitations of professionalized nonprofit community organizations:

We were coming into our own and understanding the real limitations of nonprofit community organizing and that we needed to do a lot more with our talents and

build a broader network for different resources beyond foundations for our political work. The more work we did politically, the more we realized what we didn't have, and that we needed more skills and networks for business and politics. We ran [a BCDI co-founder] for city council in 2009 and we got into the political space that way, and realized that we needed more business skills. So we said to [another organizer and BCDI co-founder] hey we need you to go to MIT to do this stuff. He was older than us too and had more of an academic background so he was the big ideas guy, so do some big idea thing but you have to come back to the Bronx with that. ... So when we got to economic democracy, the frame was from the [MIT] thesis. We [youth at Northwest Bronx] helped him through a few drafts of his thesis too.

As can be seen above, progressive or social justice planning (or a notable lack thereof) was also a unifying experience that led many into their encounters with, and subsequent formulations of, the idea of economic democracy. Adjacent to land use and community benefits, another framework for a larger strategy that was being debated in the first decade of the 2000s was the idea of “green collar” jobs that would put people to work on energy efficiency and infrastructure to address climate change and carbon emissions (cite green jobs reports of this era). This was more of a national framework, which was being taken up locally through some funding streams that were made available through the Obama administration’s American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), often called the “stimulus” bill. One BCDI board member identified this policy arena as part of her personal desire for a bigger or broader (and more equitable) strategy or framework for urban development.

I wrote a grant for green jobs training which I had been arguing was really construction jobs with a sustainability twist. We said with four million dollars that we could impact unemployment in the South Bronx. We got some US Department of Labor money for green jobs in the South Bronx. We'd had a citywide Green Jobs roundtable, on stuff like organized labor and community and environmental justice and things like that, so people in the south Bronx wanted to do the same thing and I had been talking with partners about who could get funded for that. So after the politicians came and we celebrated the money and all that, I remember feeling really personally challenged by the [small] amount of money. Then about

a year later I'd met people from Northwest Bronx had something like an idea about coop development. I knew about coops from a long time ago, we needed more than just that, but we wanted to try something more than just job training. So maybe co-ops. We had a meeting on a houseboat! They brought the concept from the master's thesis, I'd read it probably just before that meeting.

Although I outlined the contours of the Kingsbridge redevelopment and subsequent Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) in greater detail above in Chapter 3, it is important to hear the story and its main inflection points as told from those leading the campaign for the CBA, since several of them became key leaders in developing BCDI in the 2015 formalization process. A former board member of the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition outlined how the political fight over the armory went from a living wage issue on the site of the armory to a citywide living wage campaign, and then back again, after defeating the Related Companies ("Related" below) 2011 shopping mall bid, to prompting Kingsbridge Armory Redevelopment Alliance (KARA) campaign leaders to reconsider the "non-negotiable principles" for the Armory's redevelopment going forward:

*[In 2011], Related refused to talk about living wage, so in order to push living wages for this project we realized that we had to do a citywide living wage campaign, which we did. ...Around the same time, many of us were invited to hear about the [MIT] development study, and started to understand this concept, this narrative about the Bronx of 'we are not poor we actually can build and generate a lot of incredible wealth' but it, like, leaks out of the Bronx, so what does that mean to capture that? And who were the folks who would need to be a part of this conversation? **And then economic democracy came as like: that's the vision, economic democracy as this arrangement where various community stakeholders get to decide and govern local assets and then it was: here is the Kingsbridge Armory, our local asset, who gets to govern? Who gets to decide who benefits from this?***

The simultaneity of the Armory redevelopment campaign timeline and the initial learning sessions about economic democracy clearly helped concretize some aspects of the

shifting framework for the organizing and negotiating that was happening. But this process for reorienting an entire organization's strategic vision was also an uneven and non-linear process. A staff person for BCDI who had earlier been a staffer at Northwest Bronx outlined a similar narrative from the armory to the well-timed pivot to economic democracy:

*We fought the bad guy off but [the armory] is still empty. With economic democracy, I was learning that maybe CBAs are just a drop in the bucket. That's challenging but I was open to it. In 2011 or 2012, we [at northwest Bronx] decided to **make Economic Democracy the center framework for our organization. It takes a while then to make it show up in the everyday work. It made sense because this is something we can plug pretty much all our campaigns into. Even if its not...something we can make a connection with folks to take action on this week or this month, its still provides a framework that connects everything. For as long as I was there people would talk about how frustrating it was to get these individual wins and not have them connect to a larger story for the organization or the Bronx. So this was that thing. If we could figure out how to understand it and explain it to people. So then we did the first round of trainings, we'd have about thirty or forty people in a room, we'd talk about what is asset mapping, we'd look at things that exist in the community, what is missing, what could exist. The momentum developed in those trainings gave the confidence to say it was really something that connected with people.***

Seeing economic democracy take off as an inspiring and exciting framework for Bronx organizers searching for a bigger and bolder vision and framework for their work is an important part of this story. But it doesn't explain concretely what economic democracy was offering them, or how it was to them different than what they were doing.

In order to help draw out this rationale and this thinking, as part of my interview protocol, I followed on the question of the meaning of economic democracy with one about the differences between a more traditional 'development' or 'empowerment' frame for organizing, and why it felt more resonant to organizers and community leaders who had

gone through the trainings up to that point in 2017. The responses were often useful for adding some texture to generalities:

*I think there's a strategy with economic democracy that is targeting ownership and wealth. So How? Empowerment how? Are empowerment and self-determination the same thing? I think we see economic democracy as an approach to advance self-determination. Ownership is ownership as well as decision-making, to advance your objectives, owning a process. **It is a big shift to change an economy from one dollar one vote to one person one vote.** With Mondragon you also see how some of that shifts when you change who is actually calling the shots of management. Where you reinvest, who makes the decisions, it changes a bunch of things. These are some of the strategic implications of self-determination versus empowerment. In the master's thesis, the network concept was distilled a bit by looking at Mondragon, **but it was framed in terms of being a network for worker cooperatives. The earliest BCDI stuff talks about building a network of worker owned, or community owned businesses. It was basically Evergreen in the Bronx.***

I had not yet come across such a blunt framing of BCDI's work before, so I asked at this point how something relatively concise as an explanatory and strategic framework like "Evergreen in the Bronx" came to look so different (even in 2015 the idea of describing BCDI as "Evergreen in the Bronx" was both inaccurate and inadequate). The experience of how BCDI came to shift its own thinking was incredibly useful, and often got skipped over in shorter descriptions of BCDI's origin story:

*Mondragón was always the closest thing to the model, but then Evergreen appeared.... The thesis was critical of Evergreen in some ways too. Initially we were doing procurement analysis and we had an agreement with [a hospital] that if we identified three or five businesses, two or three for new businesses, two or three existing for conversion to worker coops, if we did that, they'd work with us. **Our fear was that we'd get stuck building those businesses for ten years. That feels like it epitomizes the challenges of Evergreen.** What got us thinking differently was an RFP for an incubator attached to anchor procurement. We made a decision to go for it, rather than doing our thing with the anchors directly. But it became clear that us building generic infrastructure--as in, capacity to get at economic development from a shared ownership, shared wealth perspective, was a possibly way more useful strategy for us in the Bronx than trying to build the worker coops or the land trusts or whatever. **That got us on thinking more strategically about infrastructure building and interconnected set of infrastructure, and that's the basic story of where we are now. From thinking***

*our job was to get the businesses up and running out of the procurement deal, to building the capacity to do that. We got the RFP but then it was stolen from us. It was awarded and rescinded. So we had started to think in these ways and a mental model was planted. **Partly watching the struggles of Evergreen at that time too: the community enterprise network is fundamentally a different strategy than Evergreen.***

While the shift from “Evergreen in the Bronx” would prove to be strategically fruitful, it was not helpful in the short-term for assisting others in grasping the core vision and strategy for the initiative. After all, with a name like “Bronx Cooperative Development Initiative”, sooner or later outside observers might expect that such an initiative actually develop cooperatives. The tension between this name and the drastic shift in strategy, vision, and purpose, remains a sensitive matter within the staff and board of BCDI, as well as to outside observers who engage in cooperative development.³⁶

The shift here from direct incubation to “infrastructure” for economic democracy is absolutely critical to the future trajectory of BCDI. Using a broader lens that was about institution-building ultimately led BCDI down a path that was really finally just getting operationalized in 2017 and 2018. Focusing on infrastructure also changed the kinds of insights that the group would attempt to surface and align on while in Mondragón, which I describe in greater detail in later in this chapter.

What is Economic Democracy to BCDI?

³⁶ The choice of BCDI was a matter of last minute decision-making for the application to the incubator RFP noted in this chapter. It was a name that numerous BCDI staff have repeatedly acknowledged they do not want or like, but have yet to develop an alternative.

In the dead of winter of 2015, just over a dozen staff and working group members comprising the core of BCDI traveled to weekend long retreat house just outside New York City. This gathering in the first weekend of February was the first meeting of what would be a yearlong “formalization process” to align on the core vision and meaning of economic democracy, learn from Mondragón in Spain, and develop and operationalize the central programmatic functions for BCDI for the coming five years. The stated 2015 goals were to “consolidate the BCDI working group into a board/governing body; generate an understanding of long-term strategy and vision; and create space to talk about aligning actors and institutions into the vision and strategy for BCDI” (5/4/15 field notes).

One of the first questions the lead facilitator asked the group is what brought them to the space. Why are they there, choosing to engage in this process of deepening their analysis of this thing called economic democracy? The responses broadly shared a theme of some kind of “aha!” moment, a moment of feeling “fed up”, a “nail in the coffin” or a “straw the broke the camels back” that pushed them towards wanting a new approach or strategy for their work. Several of them mentioned an initial economic democracy training that had been conducted a few years earlier in the northwest Bronx for community organizers and neighborhood leaders as having provided a space for thinking that “economic democracy” might be the framework that would be that “something” that was “new and needed” (2/6/15 retreat notes).

A board member of a community organizing group said what spoke to her was the idea that economic democracy is “about creating not just fighting.” She understood that in that

sense the work wasn't necessarily "new", but was a part of the Bronx's collective history and memory but that economic democracy was a phrase that could perhaps give voice and new energy to that tradition for the current moment (2/6/15 notes). An executive director for an immigrant services and advocacy organization serving the Bronx said that so much of what we think of about our political advocacy work involves economic considerations, and that to her, economic democracy brought a very necessary "economic component" to the work of organizing and advocacy that everyone in the room was doing already in different ways (field notes 2/6/15).

In the section above, I outlined three broad contextual themes that BCDI's core leadership were grappling with in their personal and professional lives, and ultimately how those animated them towards wanting—needing, even—to work on developing what became BCDI. In this section now, I will present more of the voices of BCDI's leadership around how they actually define economic democracy for the purposes of their work. Spending years thinking and studying and struggling with big visions and concepts is critical, but in moving towards building infrastructure and working to end intergenerational poverty in the Bronx, there would be an urgent need to be able to succinctly and powerfully communicate in seconds or minutes what had taken years to unearth. This section identifies a few key themes that emerged when participants were asked to say what economic democracy means to them:

- 1) Similar to the above expressed desire for more control and ownership over the processes and outcomes of development in the Bronx, participants repeatedly coupled together terms like "community control" and "self-determination" as part of economic democracy, or vice versa. This fusion of procedural and distributive justice in the economy is clearly the most fundamental element of BCDI's definition of economic democracy.

- 2) Related to this coupling is the insistence that economic democracy involves expanding the definition of what constitutes the economy and economic institutions, and who constitutes an economic actor. This is expanded understanding is in some ways a bridge between the theme above, which is the most concrete, and the theme below, which is the most abstract.
- 3) This broadening out of the economy and the economic as part and parcel of economic democracy extends beyond economic action back into the discussion of relationships and “being together” differently, aligned with what has been called “being-in-common” (Hardt and Negri 2011; Schwarzmantel 2007). Protagonists of BCDI on several occasions ascribed a spiritual or almost mystical quality to the quest for economic democracy that in the previous section was described in more general terms as a desire to form qualitatively better relationships in organizing in the Bronx. This is part of the idea that economic democracy is a broader holistic vision for social transformation, not merely a system of equitable ownership of assets.
- 4) The final theme is self-determination, which in some ways acts as an amalgam of the above, similar to the description of it in the preceding section on the background and context of BCDI, in which economic democracy was described as a strategy for achieving the goal of self-determination.

In the section that follows here, I quote extensively from interviews to unearth the textures of meaning that BCDI participants ascribe to economic democracy as a framework both for thinking and acting in the Bronx.

As noted above, BCDI leaders generally identified themes of ownership, broadly construed, as the fundamental premise of economic democracy. Ownership of assets, but ownership of processes, and institutions. Collective ownership, community control, and participatory planning all were threads that collided with more “standard” themes of economic democracy like cooperative enterprise, and even adjacent topics like “good jobs” and urban economic development. Planning here is not as urban planning practice necessarily but as the act or discipline of long-term, multi-generational visioning, arose in connection with the idea of ownership. In this sense, if economic democracy would mean more ownership, then those people becoming owners would have to take on new perspectives as it pertained to the responsibilities as stewards of collective assets: they

would have to become active stewards in planning for the management and disposition of those collective assets. In these words, economic democracy focuses on ownership and governance of institutions, more than of individual enterprises. This pushes the definition of economic democracy beyond thinking about cooperative enterprise, and also towards a more expansive understanding of the economy in the Bronx. In the following excerpt, he uses the example of the world famous Bronx Zoo as a way to ground complex concepts in real lived experiences of Bronxites:

*I was thinking about self-determination and what's the political system, a new political system that I did not know what to call it. So then I was like ok, there's a name to this that I could get behind [from the thesis]. And since then we have been adding central components to what we mean when we say 'economic democracy' that really take it to a level that is relevant to our experience for real. **An expansive view of the economy** I think is one piece that we've explicitly made sure is embedded in any time we talk about economic democracy. **Economic Democracy talks about the collective ownership, the collective governance over democratic assets or institutions. So I think one thing we explicitly not just name, but focused on, is institutions. Institutions reinforce values.** They're not the whole thing, but they're the thing that drives it. So, but I don't think that's incompatible with what originally was there with Economic Democracy. What we call institutions. Schools, community based organizations, government, cultural institutions, all those things actually drive an economy and we ignore most of them. Or not ignore, but don't even think of them as economic institutions. We only think of the ones that directly involve numbers, or jobs, that's just so far from the truth. And that's why you can have the Bronx Zoo spending crazy amounts of money with no formal policies around how that shit happens in a way that is good for the economy. We are just like oh the Bronx Zoo is just a nice tourist attraction that brings people in.*

Another participant also focused on how people in the Bronx might relate to institutions differently, and how that connects to an expansive understanding of what the economy is, and also where it is and where it takes place in our daily lives. As he describes, this kind of thinking didn't always connect as necessarily "economic" in nature at the grassroots, but expanding the idea of the economic is a part of BCDI's goals for using economic democracy as a frame for their work in the Bronx:

As we understood it, economic democracy was the way that local residents could understand first that they are economic actors that are powerful, and taking ownership of that in ways that connect themselves individually and as groups to institutions. Whether they understand those institutions as economic or not. Pulling back the curtain on what the economy is and understanding that they have a role and a power that they can capture in their community. To me it boils down to what are residents' relationships with institutions beyond transactional. We need to be creating, we needed to be figuring out our own ideas for plans and then identifying people to make that happen. That's what I think economic democracy helps communities do ideally. That's what I think excites community leadership around economic democracy--it gets people in the framework to think long term, ahead of the game.

On the other hand, economic democracy could also very comfortably sit in traditional definitions of the economy, as it relates to business development or urban economic development work. For one board member with a background in the labor movement and trades, economic democracy was about internalizing aspects of business that were too often invisible or externalized: social benefits and so forth that had yet to be taken into full consideration even in some of the “good jobs” and “good development” work that she’d been a part of previously. She cited LEED certifications as an example of what can happen when standards aren’t developed with a broad enough group of stakeholders:

*I'd seen LEED come out in the building trades, but LEED doesn't say shit about the workers or the labor conditions. Nothing about community. There should be something like a nutritional label for businesses. I saw B-corps come out and I was interested in the idea of "good" business and what twenty first century business practices would look like: businesses that promote self-actualization, community control, that stuff. I don't remember when the term economic democracy came. I've used terms like solidarity economy and next system and economic democracy; **I don't think we have a shared nomenclature yet.***

This connection between “good” jobs and “good” development was mentioned by others with backgrounds in urban planning as well as workforce development and organizing. Another BCDI board member emphasized the relationship of economic democracy to the

idea of community control in community and economic development and the traditions of participatory or advocacy planning:

*The concept of community control is gaining more popularity. I came from a previous job where I was working on energy democracy so these concepts of community control was something I'm familiar with... I definitely was, like, 'this concept sounds great but I'm not really sure how this is applicable to anything that we're doing right now,' It's been almost two years, but now **for us at [her organization], it's beyond community control, for us economic democracy really means how do we take ownership, and how do we create wealth and ownership for our own community?** How do we reclaim some of that and, incorporate that [idea] into various projects that we're working on and create our projects that are different from what's happening now? That's exciting. **I think that it's really provided a framework for us and I think that there's short-term things that we're doing, that we're trying to advance economic democracy, and then we have this like long-term vision of owning our own infrastructure and property.***

In this case, what participation in BCDI, or the idea of economic democracy itself, is bringing to her organization, is a different framework for understanding and prioritizing the services and organizing and youth programming work they are already doing. This organization has to date not reconfigured their mission to incorporate economic democracy, although in 2015 this process was being discussed as possible for a forthcoming strategic planning session with their senior staff and board members.

A BCDI staff member came to the concept economic democracy through a similar dissatisfaction with the outputs of business as usual affordable housing and economic development. At MIT, she encountered thinking about “de-growth” and the “new economy” that were often grounded in environmentalist movements from decades earlier in the twentieth century. While she noted that there were some inspirational aspects of this thinking, she found that culturally there was a “white hippy” aspect to the space that did not adequately address racial oppression and justice in the economy. When I asked

her to tell me what she thinks of economic democracy, she began by reciting a definition from the Training Series curriculum binder (see Chapter 6) that describes how “socioeconomic arrangements” can be governed more democratically. As she finished the recitation, rolling her eyes in self-awareness, she continues:

It's so abstract to just say people should be in control. Sure but what does that mean? And then when you talk about development and gentrification it gets clearer. I follow up with, for example, we're building an e-commerce platform to connect institutions with small businesses, so we're building tools that will facilitate investment in the local economy in the Bronx. A different example for that would be like talking about the south Bronx, and saying lots of developers are working there and its like Brooklyn they're swooping in, but if people owned that land the property values increasing would accrue to the people who already lived there and they could also make more decisions over what got built there.

I followed up my question about the meaning of economic democracy by asking how that differs from community development as it is practiced, or just basic principles of community organizing. The responses were often very useful in getting more precisely at what a framework of economic democracy offers that is different than typical practices and discourses of empowerment or development. She responded:

They're related obviously, but the difference maybe is on emphasis? Organizing is on the political realm mostly. Yeah there are boycotts that are economic organizing. But in the Bronx the organizing is about voting and mobilizing for policy change. Of course that's important but ownership of assets at the end of the day--politics is driven by money, if you don't....they will create whatever regulations they need to facilitate gentrification if you don't also try to own the assets.

For working group members and BCDI staff with a background organizing in the Northwest Bronx, and particularly around the Kingsbridge Armory redevelopment the role of the armory as a pivot or epiphany moment was instrumental in concretizing a theory of economic democracy with its substantial consequences in the Bronx. This also directly connected to how they understood economic democracy as a framework that

offered more for their work than ‘community development’ or ‘empowerment’. This is a useful contrast with some of the above interviewees, who spoke of a somewhat common sentiment in which the idea of economic democracy “sounds great,” but was perceived as perhaps not immediately applicable to what is happening “on the ground” (participant interview).

This challenge of weighing brevity and complexity in defining what economic democracy “is” was omnipresent. A participant explained it this way:

I think what's been helpful for me is the idea of the economy writ large is a complex thing. Democratizing it doesn't make it any simpler. Its about capturing, simply capture a big question of what it means to start baking in democratic principles into the different institutions, into how relationships and flows work, within a really complicated system of the economy. I don't even think when we first started talking about economic democracy that we appreciated how much we'd need the term. It became more useful. We started off thinking about what you might call cooperative economy, or just cooperative development. We had an inkling that what we wanted was broader maybe, in a non-pejorative sense. We had a hunch we were starting to get into markets. What are we trying to say differently about markets, how actors shape markets? A lot of this got clearer when we had to build out the [training series].

The definition above passes the test for a theoretical definition of economic democracy, but still is far from landing how to connect the concept to the day-to-day work of community organizing and planning. As the participant above notes, that’s why the leadership of BCDI in its earliest days decided to move forward with a popular education curriculum to help make sense of the concepts of economic democracy to diverse audiences in the Bronx and beyond (see Chapter 6).

Leadership in BCDI described different approaches to making the concept hit home to people unfamiliar with the language. One board member said:

It took us like two years to figure out how do you make this language that people understand and that is accessible and, you know, the short version is really talking about what is a community that builds an economy that is focused around shared wealth, and ownership, and collective governance over local assets? Like that is what we use to help people understand and then you gotta break it down with examples and all that.

One of the reasons that BCDI participants also resisted brief and simple definitions was related to a fear of losing the deeper meanings that they attached to economic democracy as a vehicle for broader goals of social transformation and self-determination, which I defined in Chapter 2. While it may seem somewhat intuitive today that community organizing holds the ideal of self-determination to be central, for Northwest Bronx in particular, reckoning with the ideal of economic democracy and internalizing it as a part of its mission and vision for the future also meant using it as a political prism to analyze their own institution's complicity in failing to live up to the ideals of self-determination that are now more widely held:

*Usually the way that I talk about economic democracy, I am talking about the people most impacted being the ones that are [in control]. When I say 'collective governance over local assets and decision-making,' that's who I mean. Are folks who are actually most impacted in control and that for me is self-determination. With the history of Northwest Bronx, we have to own that we haven't always done that. And we have a history of white organizers telling people of color what to say, as if they can't think for themselves. And, that, from the outside, you can see, like, here is an organization that is doing community organizing they're doing great. But I think, how intentional were we in developing real authentic leadership for people to problem-solve and to name what their problems are and to name what the solutions are, and trusting that what they come up with, is an actual solution. **And allowing them, if they do, to fail, you know, because in the past, stuff that's happened has failed too.** And I think that became like crystal clear in this conversation with economic democracy...there was always this tension because there was like this shift that happened in the Bronx around white flight and people of color stayed behind. The Northwest Bronx still had white staff, even though it was predominantly people of color, and there was that tension there of, like, we love white people because they're here and they're helping us but at the same time, are they speaking for us and do we actually have a real place at the table? We are here, we're invited but does it matter? And are we really part of the decision-making? And I think that is a real*

challenge for all organizations that are doing community empowerment work: how authentic is that table and who is creating the strategy and doing the problem solving.

One can see here a whole set of dynamics coming out in the process of using the prism of economic democracy for an organization like the Northwest Bronx, and only some of them seem to concretely connect to what is often considered ‘economic’ even in a diffuse sense. Knowledge politics, power dynamics, and representative versus participatory democracy are all being laid out and reconfigured through this prism. In this way, what begins as an analysis of the governance of ‘the economy’ often exploded outward into individual and organizational debates about the structures of governance of other social institutions. In the final couple of interview excerpts, I turn to the more abstract and diffuse understandings of economic democracy as a way of *being*, not just a set of economic arrangements. This perspective on economic democracy as part of a search for meaning and community, broadly construed, brings out the ways in which economic democracy and self-determination become much more difficult to disentangle (and to define). The narration below is the strongest example of this kind of spiritual thinking:

Economic democracy I think in some ways offered reconnection with what I had been exposed to with the Zapatistas in terms thinking about a vision and strategy for how we could be embedding collective ownership and governance in different sectors of society. Organizing under that framework would mean a lot of different things. It would mean mobilizing people to pass new policies that would expand our ability to create economic democracy, but, in some ways it was also about—we started teaching people about asset mapping [at Northwest Bronx]—it was also about mapping the gifts and assets of people in our community and identifying ways that we could be creating collective ownership and governance in our midst. It's something that we struggle with because it's very counter to the cultural context that we exist in here. I think that what has been so powerful has been the gradual process of trust building and being inspired by each other, and coming into deeper collaboration with partners has ultimately kept us together.

Another BCDI board member, when asked about what economic democracy is, also moved into an expansive description of a more participatory society:

*We have a working definition for the Bronx. For us economic democracy is about creating an economy that actually puts people first and puts shared wealth and ownership and collective decision making at the center. And the economy exists in service of the people that are a part of the community. In this country, we're used to people being in service of the economy, the economy is this abstract bullshit that controls everything we do. But in reality its just a means to make sense of production and the way that we relate to each other financially and otherwise. So for me at the core is this belief that the economy exists in service of people. **BCDI is not about changing the law only, or creating a new policy only, its about rethinking and restructuring the ways we relate to each other and the economy in a way that's bigger than just having a policy goal or a campaign. To this day, I struggle to explain that to others in the movement, when of course our movements are exactly about this, but we just don't really articulate it in this way, in the way of economic democracy. That its really about shared wealth and ownership, ending intergenerational poverty, about actually redefining what wealth looks like in a community and how we can be interconnected in a real way. We talk about interdependence and community building, but its all very surface. We're always talking about individual wealth, that's not what organizing should be. So trying to explain to people that what we're trying to build is a rethinking of everything we've been taught to value, it is incredibly hard. And people are like 'well ok what are you trying to do?' And I explain it again, and then they say 'ok I get that but what are you trying to win this year?' So we're asking people--other progressive people!-- to think beyond the boxes they've created for themselves in terms of what is progressive and their progressive values. Its so huge and so fucking complicated.***

The complexity of this task of explaining was never far from the minds of BCDI's core leadership. In order to meet this challenge of helping others to see and to feel what they thought and felt about economic democracy, BCDI took a group of organizers and key external partners from labor, anchors, and city government on a weeklong trip to Mondragón. The purpose of the trip was to start to build the kinds of relationships that BCDI's leadership outlined in these sections above, and to communicate the inspirational quality of seeing economic democracy "at scale" in the flesh. In the following section, I describe some of the key tensions and outcomes of that excursion in July 2015.

Mondragón: Learning, Models, Vision, Governance

Mondragón is just one example of economic democracy, but it was an inspirational model to those who became the core leadership of BCDI, not only because of its worker ownership, but because of its expansiveness and the complexity of its institutional support systems for those businesses. Seeing Mondragón up close was seen as an instrumental part of the 2015 formalization process, so that BCDI's leadership could put some texture on the immense, almost cosmic complexity that describing economic democracy can carry in the United States. I often think about the comment above when attempting to describe the idea of economic democracy to a sympathetic listener only to get back a response of "ok but what are you trying to win this year?" Helping to ground Bronx leaders in a concrete vision of what BCDI is "trying to win" is what the visit to Mondragón was designed to help accomplish.

When you arrive at Otalora, the Mondragón Corporation's visitor retreat and conference center, you are given a presentation about the history and development of Mondragón that is both effortlessly inspirational and awkwardly and transparently corporate. Given the many mythologies and encomiums written about the saintly and malevolent deeds (depending on the author) of Mondragón, the real thing lands right down the middle, as one author described of visiting Communist Cuba: "neither heaven nor hell" (Lopez-Vigil 2000).

A slogan on the wall of some of the visitor materials states, “in order to democratize power you have to socialize knowledge”. Mikel Lezamiz, a lifelong proselytizer of the Mondragón “experience” provided the overview: Mondragón is a table with four legs. The tabletop are the 80-plus cooperative businesses and their inter-cooperative associations, while the university, social insurance fund, innovation and development arm, and bank (Laboral Kuxta) provide the pillars of support to the table top.

After the first day’s introductory tour and visits, the Bronx delegation met after lunch in a scenic courtyard to debrief on their initial reactions and thoughts. The community organizers and activists in the delegation were especially cognizant and critical of what they perceived to be the prevailing whiteness and maleness of the leadership of the presenters and worker-owners from that day. How liberatory could this place be if these issues were not being meaningfully addressed?³⁷ What about the factories abroad, in which there is no meaningful ownership stake for workers? In spite of these concerns, the labor union representative, a high level executive from a private sector union, was deeply impressed with the message discipline of our hosts from a political perspective: “I was amazed at the consistency of their message, did they drink some kool aid or what? How are they all so unified on the same page like this, like a good union, moving in the same direction?” (cite field notes) Another working group member said she felt shame and embarrassment for some of the cultural attitudes and biases the group witnessed, because she has Spanish heritage and family in Spain.

³⁷ Mondragón representatives responded to these concerns later by noting that over the entire Mondragón network in Spain that 42% of worker owners are women, and 30% of the governing councils, which they said was superior to what exists in the United States.

*I've heard some of the comments and felt very embarrassed... how they speak and what they say, there's **much** [emphasis hers] more work to do. The Basques have been a very repressed minority, so even though their language sounds oppressive, they have been violently attacked throughout history, Franco tried to exterminate them. So now they have a very strong sense of reclaiming their identity and even engaging in violence to gain a separate nation (field notes)*

In other words, the group was trying to grapple with the appearance of whiteness and racially discriminatory attitudes, but also needed to understand better the cultural context of the Basque experience of oppression as well, which was different in some ways than what people of color in the Bronx had experienced. The anchor institution representative, pointing out another difference in the racial politics of the region, added “when they said that they had a Spaniard as an executive, that was them saying to us that they had been inclusive” (field notes).

While issues of representation and power were at the forefront for many in the delegation, the elected official, business, and anchor representatives were skeptical of the extremely egalitarian (relative to the United States) remuneration schemes, and the fact that at higher executive levels there were slightly lower rates of retention—meaning that executives would leave for higher pay elsewhere outside of the network. An elected official noted that in the United States business culture we struggle to see a lack of turnover as a value—our “pro-mobility” cultural biases lead us in the US to see stability and security as tantamount to stagnation and atrophy, rather than stability and rootedness (field notes day 1).

Over the following three days, the delegation engaged in deepening discussions about the implications of the Mondragón ecosystem, the salience of racial politics in the Basque region versus in the Bronx, the role of grassroots leadership in such an ecosystem, the role of cooperatives, and the institutional roles for governing such a network among players with unequal power relationships, such as community organizations, anchor institutions, labor unions, and government. In the United States in particular, this question of the role of ethnic homogeneity is often applied to more egalitarian and equitable social democratic regions or countries. Indeed, many of the prevailing “best practice” examples in many works of case studies (Azzellini 2015; Menser 2018; Rubio-Pueyo 2017) focus on examples from places either with relative ethnic homogeneity or a strong history (or present context) of nationalist identity: the Quebec region of Canada, the Basque region of Spain, the Japanese examples of Seikatsu, and the new municipalist movement in Barcelona all point to a strong correlation of ethnic or nationalist cultural “glue” or cohering social capital that cannot be easily dismissed in the context of the kinds of work that is taking place in the Bronx and New York City, which surpasses all of these places in leaps and bounds in terms of racial, ethnic, religious, national, linguistic diversity.

On that point, however, the question of what a network can do to bring people of different perspectives and identities together takes on even more critical importance, and increases the risks, rewards, and stakes of BCDI’s project for the Bronx. This diversity is true both for aspects of identity, but also for institutional positions and power differentials that result from them. One working group member asked at one point in Mondragón, “what can the center hold? Who sits in the center table of the network? We know we

need a table of unlikely partners, but trust is a serious issue. We may have interpersonal trust in some cases but institutional prerogatives and tendencies can override these, as we've seen from our work with labor unions and elected officials" (field notes day 1). The equity investor/real estate development partner reacted to this statement by saying that trust is a two way street, and that good and bad actors exist in all sectors. The elected official agreed that it was presumptuous to seek investment of political or financial capital from powerful institutions without some kind of equitable or equal governance role. Power imbalances exist of course, but could be offset with governance rules that ensured full and equal power at the table being created in the middle. The anchor executive concurred, saying that a sign-on document would help to hold people accountable to the principles of the network.

The issue of accountability mushroomed out into a broader conversation at this point: a working group member with an organizing background noted that there was already a tension around grassroots accountability since the representatives of "community" in the room were often executive directors of organizations. The cooperative members present, as well as a youth member from one of the organizations in the room, both said that there was already a substantial distance in this leadership body and vision from the ideals of participatory democracy that the group was supposedly intending to address. One executive director noted that the critical role of economic democracy training would be to permeate out into the neighborhoods and build capacity for grassroots leadership of the network over time, but didn't directly address the disjuncture in the present context.

The elected official responded to this by saying that “grassroots” and “community based organizations” were not necessarily the same thing, and that there would be a need for neighborhood leaders who were not necessarily strongly affiliated with the CBOs in the room presently. At this point, the anchor executive engaged with the conversation to suggest that participation of the public overall is what we have government for, and elected officials, so what exactly is this group here trying to accomplish different from government? He argued that “This group needs to figure out how to “add value” to the government,” and create new and different spaces for participation, some of which may be more delegated than participatory. The elected official agreed that focused goals for the initiative would be critical, and that if BCDI is trying to end intergenerational poverty and build shared wealth and ownership in the Bronx and “restore egalitarian and public democratic spaces” that is a noble goal but probably way too much to do all at once.

The next afternoon, as the group settled into a conference room of SAIOLAN, Mondragón’s premier advanced technology research and development arm, the anchor representative asked the group “what does BCDI want to be when it grows up?” The group laughed but recognized the core point, that the task at hand was to develop a shared vision about economic democracy but also a concrete operational plan for undertaking that vision in the Bronx.

One of the worker owners said that she felt very uneasy with the idea of visiting Mondragón to study “an ecosystem”, because that approach was not solely “about

cooperatives.” This tension about the role of cooperative development in the BCDI network is recurrent throughout the fieldwork, dating back to the misstep in giving an imprecise name for the broader initiative that did not necessarily fit its core purposes as they shifted over time. The idea of business development and economic development infrastructure for shared wealth and ownership for low income people in the Bronx struck these cooperators as insufficiently focused on the structure of that ownership at the level of the firm, which should, in her analysis, be cooperative across the board. As I discuss later on, this tension is repeated in the way that BCDI structures its work to focus on “high-road” businesses broadly, which include and idealize cooperatives as the highest and best form of “high-road” business, but not to the exclusion of other forms of local and ethical enterprise. An executive director from a south Bronx community organization responded to the concerns by saying that BCDI is a big space, and that there are ways to plug into it that help everyone there to grow and advance their work. She noted that she was using BCDI’s infrastructure to advance her own work with public housing residents on business development, energy efficiency, and shared ownership. Another working group member seconded that to say that the point of the formalization process was to take all of the concepts and projects that people in the room were working on and to bring them together effectively to share and fulfill divisions of labor in ways that make sense³⁸ (field notes day 2).

³⁸ Ultimately, this tension was not resolved and the cooperative developer left the coordination table of BCDI in 2016. Cooperatives incubated from this organization have continued to receive benefits and training from BCDI, including contracts through the BronXchange platform. The differing strategic visions between a cooperativist-focused vision and a bigger tent vision that privileges but does not center cooperatives as an organizational form is a central dynamic to debates on scale and scalability that I address in more detail in subsequent chapters.

This aspect of the discussion was developed further the following afternoon, which began by placing the working mission and vision statement up on a white board and going around the room to get responses and reactions. The board read:

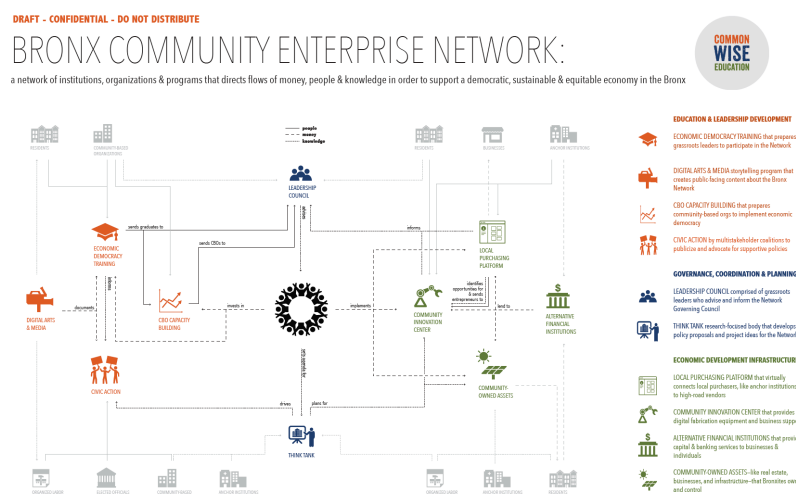
The mission of BCDI is to end generational poverty by building shared wealth and ownership among Bronx residents and establish democratic decision making at the center of planning and economic development activities in the Bronx. Based on a framework of economic democracy, BCDI seeks to establish a development model that (a) leverages existing assets to address economic, social, and environmental challenges within the borough; and (b) supports collective ownership models and to distribute wealth and decision-making equitably and broadly among Bronx residents.

One working group member immediately spoke up to say that her experience at Mondragón over the last few days was a strong reminder that the core of shared wealth and ownership are important, but that

*patriarchy and structural racism deserve explicit naming in our mission. Mondragon is such a perfect example of how we can't just address class and democratic deficits and think that these will naturally dismantle patriarchy and racism as a byproduct. That may mean unpacking what we mean as equitable and how we define it. I've also been thinking about how valuable and necessary coordination and support. Northwest Bronx has a forty year history of spinning off with successes and failures. **But of these successes we haven't even been that successful at coordinating their collective impact.** (notes day 3)*

The question of coordination, as the remark above suggests, is a critical question that has permeated community development since its inception. Community Development Corporations were designed to be neighborhood-based coordinating entities, as Bruyn and Meehan wrote in 1987 of CDCs, they are “the likely candidate to represent the overall interest of the citizenry. It is like a municipal government, except that its task is **simply to coordinate local economic development**” (1987 p. 17, emphasis added).

The conversation for this day was meant to address this core question of governance and who is at the central table, coordinating the broader network for the Bronx (Fig 4.2 below).



The question of what really is “going on” in that central circle, and its relationship to other advisory or leadership bodies, was still very open. Indeed, moving forward on those questions was precisely one of the main points of the trip.

At this point, representatives from the more powerful institutions again took up an issue with the lack of trust represented in the model as it was presently constituted: business and anchors were wanted for their money, as cash cows, but were not being seen as partners in any meaningful way. The transactional nature of that relationship was hypocritical, they argued, considering how much of the rhetoric and vision of BCDI was around democracy and cross-sectoral work among unlikely partners. “Why don’t we consider financial institutions, or alternative financial institutions as stakeholders and not just tools? Anchors and capital [here in this model] aren’t feeding knowledge into the

think tank or central coordinating circle. Or what about organized labor and financial institutions? The anchor representative noted that, from his perspective, there was a benefit to engaging anchors more deeply, but he understood where the gaps were. He said

The anchors have varied levels of engagement and awareness of how to do community work. Anchors often follow the political winds of local electeds. The four Bronx anchors have our own association. We've done quality of life stuff in theory but mostly its been about transportation infrastructure. Anchors could be so much more but they don't know how. Co-ops aren't as crazy as people think, they could do this too. Anchors could inform the leadership council and the think tank. [field notes]

The elected official added that he agreed with these perspectives: the diagram of the BCDI network in its current form “represents a disdain for elites and elected officials. There are good individuals in big elite institutions and bringing them out and engaging them can build trust. You have to try to give some space for people to do right” (field notes day 2).

This conversation came up as critical in several interviews I conducted over a year after this trip as a pivotal moment of insight for community organizers to think through how they wanted to relate to the institutions of power in the Bronx. The typical organizing frame identifies them as targets, and certainly their actions in the past were held up against them as evidence for the lack of trust. But to remain in a defensive position—for both sides of this—is a key site of political struggle in an era of urban development in which anchor institutions are being lifted up as potential leaders for workforce development and equity across several arenas of community development. I address these questions in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Building greater trust and alignment on how to govern and coordinate a network for economic democracy also, of course requires some semblance of shared analysis as to the meaning of economic democracy itself. While several core leaders had been active in generating and delivering the Economic Democracy Training Series over the previous couple of years, there was another, slightly wider circle of participants in this trip whose experience of and familiarity with the concept was thinner, or at least different. Of critical interest to the core leaders and organizers were the reactions from external partners such as the government, anchor, labor, and business partners who were on the trip. The elected official felt comfortable with the term of social democracy, and asked why bother creating a new term? “The goal of both being broadly shared prosperity, social democracy focusing on the redistributive power of the government and political institutions. Economic democracy I see focusing on creating wealth in communities democratically, and also distributing it democratically. So its more popular-based. Sort of like a labor-based version of George W. Bush’s ownership society, I think.” The anchor official agreed, and added that the focus is “on making markets work differently, less on how government can control or regulate everything, which would be basically politically impossible in a US context anyway.” The labor union representative had a broader, and perhaps fuzzier, interpretation, but one that was aligned with the “self-determination” angle that other BCDI leaders described in interviews:

*I see people taking their lives and communities into their own hands and shaping it into its best fit for themselves. Organizing around community issues and using that right of democracy to move issues. I don’t relate it to making money, I just don’t. Its about changing circumstances and people’s lives, as buildings are bought and people evicted. **I believe that government can fix these things but it isn’t. So how can we together make it happen.** Eventually that gives us more*

economic freedom: if we can stay where we are, continue to pay the rent, have utilities and safety and dignity, parks for children. Improvement of quality of life.

A core working group member followed this by adding that she wanted to see the frame of economic democracy landed more formally in her organization, as had been done with Northwest Bronx. “We haven’t done that work like Northwest Bronx has, but I am committed to it. Personally I equate economic democracy with self-determination—the transformation of the social/political/economic systems that would help that to become real or true for everyone across society.” (Cite field notes day 3) The real estate developer added cheekily that he felt very comfortable sharing since he just did a quick internet search for a definition of the term:

I googled it. Its about a shift of corporate managers and institutions to the broader public. Economic democracy to me isn’t just the definition though, its how we get there. So I think if you have the power, what convinces you to relinquish it, but also how did the power get there in the first place? Corporations get power by denying access. We wouldn’t be here if there wasn’t a shifting market in places like the Bronx. People have opportunities now because corporations want to be in the places where we are at. They’re trying to get in. We want to build a better/more level playing field so our people can benefit from this new interest in our communities. It’s important to have your own vision before someone does it for you in your space. [field notes]

The group experienced a sort of exposure fatigue from the pace of touring Mondragón facilities during the day, and then often following up those tours with deeper interrogation and debriefing in the afternoon and evenings. Despite the rigorous clip, as the trip drew down to a close, there was a lingering sense that many questions remained. This was no surprise, to be sure, but the energy needed to be directed towards next steps in a way that recognized the difficulty of the work that still lay ahead. After Mondragón, there were still many hours of planning and visioning retreats ahead in 2015 and 2016, but those had to be done in the context of everyday life in the Bronx, rather than in the

rejuvenating surroundings of northern Spain. “This is a big trust fall” one working group member said. “I’m very excited to do and dream and also even fall with you. I want to figure out how to concretely hold the space when we get back” (cite field notes day 4).

The trip in Mondragón surfaced clear tensions around power differentials and a test of a core premise of BCDI’s commitment to work across sectors of society, and to operationalize their understanding that no one, even community organizers make lasting large scale change on their own. Putting forward that analysis and aspiration is one thing, but turning it concretely into a set of working partnerships, or even a formalized legal supervisory structure like an organizational board of directors, was not something that the group could satisfactorily address or resolve in the course of one week in Spain.

As noted above, the other tension that will also be addressed more in later Chapters is the tension between a vision of economic democracy that was inclusive of cooperative enterprises, particularly worker cooperatives like in Mondragón, and a vision of economic democracy that was exclusively dedicated to the creation and proliferation of only cooperative enterprises.

Honing the Vision and Structure After Mondragon

Two months after returning from Mondragón, the core working group members met again in September 2015 to discuss how to concretely operationalize the idea of a Community Enterprise Network (CEN)—an example of which they had just seen in Spain—for themselves in the Bronx. For those in the room, the CEN was “an institution,” an “ecosystem”, a function for “alignment, coordination and co-creation,” about more

than “just enterprise as in business, but business is a key piece of building shared wealth and ownership.” In response to this, one last participant added “I see this CEN as really being about values and thought leadership, with planning and decision-making at the very core” (Cite September 30 2015). In October 2015, the key takeaways that were documented from this meeting focused on the necessity of asset-based strategies for economic democracy and the centrality of self-determination to the work of economic democracy in the Bronx. The team re-emphasized that both *shared ownership* and *shared governance* were interdependent, and that one without the other “does not go far enough to position our base to develop our economy in a way that embodies their vision and values.” This definition reflects a greatly distilled version of the main threads outlined in my interviews above, in which economic democracy addresses the complex but essential interplay between procedural justice (democratic governance) and distributional justice (shared ownership of assets). The third and final focused on the central role of community organizing for participation and for holding down core values: “democratic structures or governance on their own do not ensure just and equitable outcomes. As our bases fight for change, their efforts must be grounded in principles of justice, solidarity, self-determination, etc” (field notes 9/30/15). One could argue that it would seem obvious to include community organizing in their institutional model since so many of the BCDI leaders are community organizers by training, but as my interviews show above, even among organizers, this kind of thinking around identifying economic institutions as anything other than “targets” was often destabilizing in positive ways.

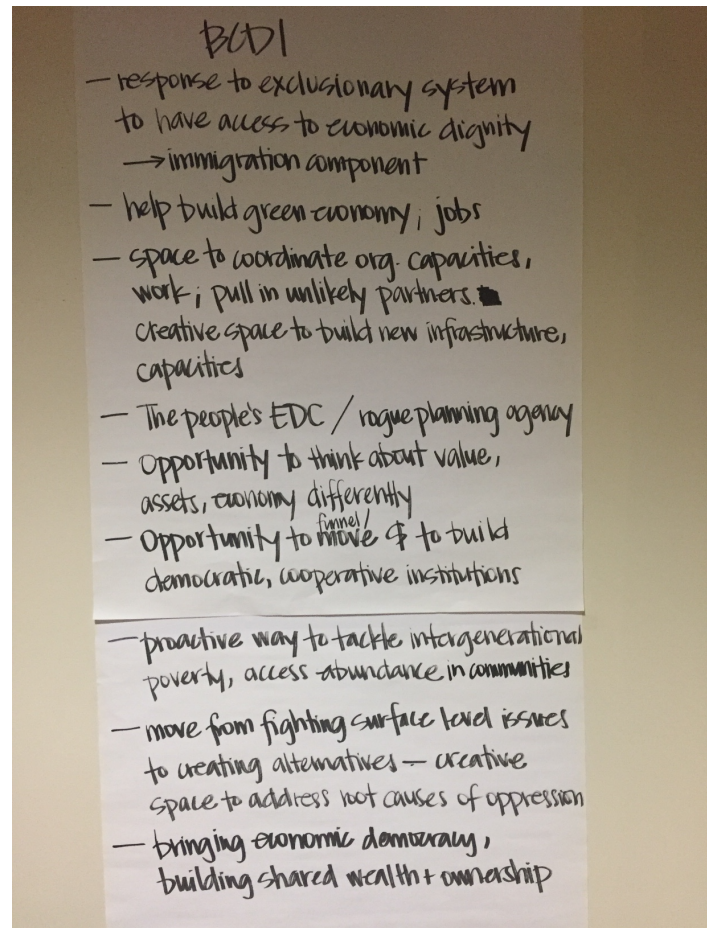
With that summary document to help the group align on values and vision, the group took another stab at the question of governing the central coordinating functions of the CEN, and also spent the day identifying priority project areas based on the “pillars” of the table that Mondragón outlined.³⁹ What was most important to work on first, how should the group decide? Generally, projects were prioritized among the group according to their state of existence and development to date. The questions of governance often felt more urgent to the group at this stage, even if they were less exciting. Who should participate as core members versus as external partners? The group had reservations about organizational membership versus individual representatives, as well as elected officials and anchor institutions (October field notes). There was broad agreement on the need for a screening or vetting process for any organization, but particularly larger anchor institutions in order to ensure values alignment and trust.

Two of the core working group members noted that their experience in Mondragón shifted their categorical block on including government or anchors in the core coordinating capacities of the CEN. Instead, they both essentially said that while institutionally suspect, there were individuals with integrity and values-alignment whose involvement would serve the purpose of the CEN in the Bronx. This shift was a substantial re-alignment, and was captured in interviews as a turning point moment of learning and growth, and suggests that the cross-sectoral model that BCDI was developing is capable of pushing the needle to change long-held beliefs among key stakeholders. There is room of course to debate the normative nature of these value shifts,

³⁹ Legs of the table in Mondragón became work area “pillars” upon the group’s return to the Bronx.

but the process, at least according to the goals that BCDI set for itself, seemed to be working.

In December 2015, nearly a year after the first planning retreat where BCDI's working group and staff discussed their introductions to economic democracy and their "aha!" moments, the group for one of its final full meetings to address the question: of what is BCDI to you? (notes 12/1/15) Answers were drafted on to butcher paper and placed on the wall (fig 4.3). The group had spent a year thinking, learning, and working through



conflict and disagreement to come to this point. As with Mondragón, there was a clear sense that many concrete questions remained unanswered, but significant progress on the organizational vision, structure, and purpose had been achieved through a collective process. In early 2016, with a revised mission and vision, BCDI introduced six core functions of the Bronx Community Enterprise Network, and by January 2017 the board of directors had approved a five-year strategic operational plan for the development of those core infrastructure components.

Since the working model of the Community Enterprise Network (CEN) that still holds today was developed in 2016 (see fig 4.4 at right), I asked interviewees in 2017 to reflect on the process of developing the CEN

hexagon and how they see the infrastructure

pieces relating together and how they arose

from the formalization process in 2015 and

2016. Respondents drew on years of their

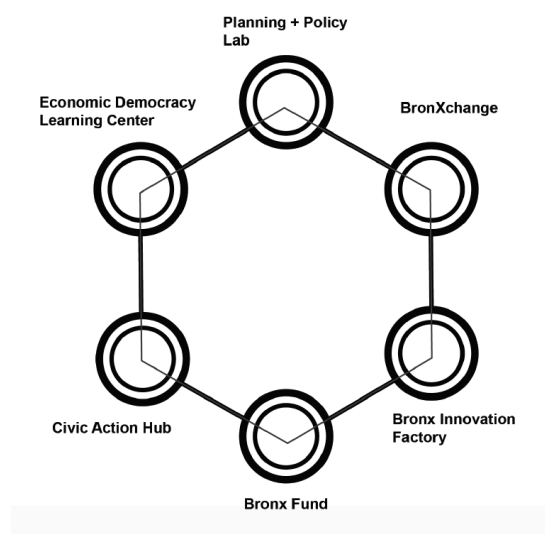
experiences and interactions, including the

formalization retreats of 2015, the

Mondragón trip in 2015, and their subsequent

work in 2016 to develop a strategic

operations plan and officially establish a board of directors from the working group that had participated in the 2015 formalization process.



On the one hand, the trip had surfaced a tension with a cooperative developer that was not able to be reconciled. Two board members noted the role that conflict played in

Mondragón around the vision and work of BCDI, particularly as it related to cooperative development:

what really is the Bronx Cooperative Development Initiative about if we, if the word cooperative is in our, like cooperative development is in our name, you know, at that time, one of like our partners was really very strongly like we are the single cooperative development organization at this table, and, um, how is our work as a—well I think there was both like this tension around, like, BCDI not taking credit for this work but also how is their work supported by BCDI as a part of their being part of the table. But I think we were in this process of recognizing that our role is not trying to duplicate the efforts of incubating cooperatives in the Bronx but actually creating these infrastructure pieces that would coordinate and

align our efforts and create new supports for this ultimate vision of economic democracy.

The second board member reflected on this conflict from a different angle, but surfaced some similar thoughts about BCDI being perceived as a ‘new’ organization, which it is, but coming out of the work of leaders who had been in the Bronx for many years. This created a communications challenge about who BCDI is and what work it intends to do, and the inherent tensions in the world of nonprofits around competing missions and program areas:

Some of the pieces are so much bigger than BCDI. I'm a connector. How do you enter a space as an effective player without acting like the owner? Are we trying to put BCDI at the center? I think it feels a little too centered or controlling, self-righteous maybe. So I'm thinking about how important collaboration would be, if [a worker cooperative developer] basically said who are you to think you're doing this? They were feeling affronted. That's a personality clash too, but it also might be something where there's a moment to do something differently. So BCDI needs really strong communications channels to facilitate consistency and clarity across the pieces.

These two interviews reflect on some of the strained relations and pain points that came out of the formalization process in 2015, but there were of course many moments of inspiration as well. Several people referenced a May 2015 retreat where the muscles of planning and coordination began to coalesce in ways that they had not previously. One participant recalled that day

We came up with a big list of organizations, we also came up with a lot of enemies, you know like, and then it was like what's missing, like if it did exist we'd be able to address that too. We put stuff like land trusts, you know, we put, you know a bunch of stuff on that list. With broad categories. We made leadership development, economic development, and finance, were the three broad categories. And all we did was put them in buckets. We had not idea how they would work together or anything like that and the retreat after that was when we did the yarn thing that actually like mapped out how the people, ideas, and money actually flowed through it and I think that's where we solidified what we have now. And people began to own what this was.

A board member addressed the strong feeling of connections and creative tensions that came from asking people doing very different work across the borough to try and see themselves and their work as connected to something bigger than their own organization:

*The one retreat that we had at Fordham where we had string and we were thinking about the 'where does knowledge come in, and where does it go out,' and just that connection I think was, literally, I remember in that moment thinking we are **actually building** [emphasis hers]. And, it was everyone weighing in and really going from all the various places they were from, whether you're a CDC or you do community organizing or you build businesses, worker-owned businesses, or you do education of thinking about what this looks like on a borough scale, and that I think was like the, one of the times where I was like 'holy shit' this is not just an organization: we are thinking about the entire borough and this is huge. Then I felt like 'oh crap are we really gonna pull this off?' We often think about the influences that are happening around us citywide, national, state, all the different things that are impacting our organization and our catchment area. **But this was a feeling of, oh we are actually doing regional planning. We are thinking about the borough as a whole and this goes way beyond any of us in the room, and it's like really us coming together. So that was I think a very powerful moment.***

She also reflected on the role of the Mondragón trip in her own thinking about who sits at the center of the network that would govern the BCDI network. Securing this alignment on the relationship of community organizations to other kinds of stakeholders on the board of BCDI was a critical desired outcome for the process, and most felt that not only was it achieved, but that they had personally experienced a shift in their thinking as a result of the collective formalization process:

*[we wanted] the majority of folks that were at that table to be the folks who would be impacted by the decisions being made. By expanding that table to other folks, what would that look like? And so in Mondragon, I was agitating and really digging about what's in it for them, why are they interested, what makes them different? **You know, what makes you different than any other developer that has fucked our community? You know, we've been fucked by politicians all the time why are you different? Um, and, same thing with anchors, I know what the Quad is.⁴⁰ So why are you here? And there was a lot of struggle, a lot of***

⁴⁰ “The quad” is an association made up of the four largest Bronx anchor institutions: Fordham University, The Bronx Zoo, The Botanical Gardens, and Montefiore Medical Center.

discussion and then at one point they were like 'you don't want us [on the board]!' You know, kind of joking but really not joking.

On this point another board member added that the group decided to create an advisory council, which would allow for input and consultative relationships but would be independent from the decision-making group at the core of BCDI:

Part of our vision is that the board will be not only CBOs, but still will have that grounding in CBOs as it expands to business and political folks, etcetera. The goal is the board will have a cross-section too, labor, and so forth. There's a tension around the limits of a 501c3 structure, and so partly we are also not just trying to create only more 501c3's. The advisory group would also be more of a stakeholder space not just CBOs, which also helps us bring in other voices too.

A staffer who is not on the board had a similar impression of the challenges that the group faced in making decisions around governance, but that ultimately the process of that struggle over the course of the year was an important building block for the kinds of challenges that might lie ahead:

*There was the debate of who else would be on the board, particularly the issue of is it just community groups or anchors too. And the community groups were like it should be us why would we give power to these institutions that already have so much privilege and power. That was a big debate. We still have a board that [has] no anchors. **But the trip to Mondragon was amazing and critical to see that [debate]. It was really important for relationship building and to be inspired about the work we are trying to do together.***

Despite the many ways in which Mondragón often fails to live up to the ideals that are ascribed to it from the United States, and despite the initial skepticism around race, gender, and class that percolated among the organizers from the Bronx, the overwhelming response in my interviews was that the trip to Mondragón was critically inspirational and clarifying for developing BCDI's vision. One board member was particularly effusive in our interview:

*Going to Mondragon was pretty incredible. It was for me like a validation that people are more important than profit and that you can build businesses that are successful around those principles. **It validated everything that my grandmother***

raised me on and that we wanted here in the Bronx but seems crazy and far away here. It was a reawakening of that possibility for me. Since the community enterprise network is meant to be an ecosystem, a Bronx ecosystem that mirrors some of the functions of Mondragón has to be built here. We want something like that in the Bronx. We don't want to mimic it because it won't work like that, but the components that we've outlined for the network are the things we think are most needed here.

A participant who was a relatively new addition to the board when she travelled to Spain, had a similar response:

I love the model and the way that it centers people, so often it is just about the bottom line and not about people. To see companies that are competitive but can move away from putting the only value on profits but they're still competing and investing more in the people. I think that is really amazing and inspiring for us to see. The way they think about 'performance' and training and education as being so valuable and important. I had an understanding of economic democracy already but seeing it play out and happen in real life, beyond just the theoretical concept, that was the really critical and incredible piece.

Aside from providing positive public relations for Mondragón, there is something worth exploring about the nature of the excitement that Mondragón causes for those who witness it. For all of its many flaws and contradictions, its immenseness and scale is itself a deeply validating, almost bewildering sight for many US based activists and organizers used to operating in a climate where “big business” is a plausible synecdoche for all that harms and afflicts marginalized communities. In other words, the immense complexity and existence of Mondragón itself, more often than any individual aspect or practice like worker ownership, is the characteristic on which many of the BCDI participants zeroed in. This was reflected in several other interviews conducted after the Mondragón trip, in which participants were asked to focus on big picture strengths and goals of their work, and what they took away from their experience in Spain. In terms of the Community Enterprise Network formation, one participant focused on the necessity of interconnection that ecosystem thinking offers, but also the challenge of its complexity:

My overarching impression is that its ecosystem thinking, all things are connected. So how do you look at the big system of the Bronx: education, banking, industry, organizing, oppression, all these things that people relate to, how do we help them all become something more democratic. Drawing it out in a way where everything fits together neatly can be arbitrary. Like there could be an infinite number of ways to draw that picture.

Another participant echoed this tension, but from a slightly different angle. She noted that the alignment on the vision of economic democracy seems strong, and that Mondragón was useful for that, but the challenge going forward remains how to determine what work BCDI would actually prioritize and implement based on that higher-level alignment. Her answer to this question came right as BCDI released its first five-year strategic operational plan, covering 2017-2021, indicating again that having a plan is necessary but not a sufficient condition for determining what actually happens.

In some ways I think one of the strengths of BCDI is that the sort of the big scale transformational goal that we have come together to work on is very clear. Whether people have their own definitions of 'economic democracy' there are some things to work out there, but there's a general cohesion around what that is. The next branch gets a little bit murkier, and so one thing that we've all been talking about trying to think through and push is how do we decide where to invest resources and people so that we don't spread ourselves so thin that we don't have the impact and the outcomes and the change that we actually want to see. ... That is one thing that this hexagon to me helps with, but I think that we've still got some work to do in terms of a process around what needs to be in place so that we're very clear about how we're choosing to spend our time. [We have] the five goals that we're trying to move and then the question is 'are we actually moving this goal? 'Is this the best way to move this goal?' The Working Group meetings were about that content, but now the Working Group meetings are Board meetings, so they also have to be about managing organization so I think in that there's been pushback, especially since the Working Group members, and I think they're absolutely right, to say like 'no! Strategy was what this space was for, and now this is getting away from us.' So we've gotta come back to that, and I think that's gonna be all the more important as we continue to grow, as the new Board members come on, as the new community stakeholders get involved: how do we continue to choose, three years from now, what's the agenda, what are we doing?

This chapter engaged with BCDI's collective visioning process and the sources of inspiration that led to the development of a broadly shared understanding of economic

democracy. I then outlined the basic evolution of the Community Enterprise Network (CEN) as the model that BCDI uses to operationalize their vision of economic democracy. Though far from being the first to use the phrase, BCDI's process for building a collective understanding of the meaning of economic democracy *for their purposes*, and *in their context* draw on aspects and histories of asset-based community development, community control, social ownership, participatory democratic governance of institutions at multiple scales, and an overarching set of values around racial, gender, and class inequities that pertain to the Bronx, the United States, and the global economy (Williams 2018). In the chapters that follow, I go into greater detail on each of the core network components as they emerged from this process. But first I offer some conclusions to this chapter below.

Conclusions

In this final section, I summarize five main threads from the discussion above and surface some of the key insights of BCDI's framework for economic democracy: 1) What is BCDI's vision of economic democracy and how are they (broadly) operationalizing that vision? 2) What is the relationship between economic democracy and participatory democracy more broadly? 3) What is the relationship of community organizing to economic democracy as BCDI understands it? And 4) what are the challenges for democratically governing the network overall?

After many years of planning and debating and diagramming, what is BCDI's vision of economic democracy and how do they operationalize it? Or at the very least, what was it at the moment of its first formal operationalization? In this period, BCDI came to define economic democracy in the Bronx expansively: shared wealth and democratic ownership

over key Bronx economic assets for working class Bronxites of color. The expansiveness here goes to the definition of an economic asset or institution: under BCDI's approach, this can—and often does—end up meaning almost anything. I address some of the potential challenges with this expansive scope a little bit further down in this conclusion.

So if that's the vision, what's the operation? BCDI is a nonprofit with a board of directors drawn from its co-founders as well as the working group of CBO executive leadership. These CBOs included the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, The Point CDC, Mothers on the Move, and Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights. Its aim is to institutionalize economic democracy in the Bronx, and place working class Bronx residents of color in control of significant economic assets in order to build democratically held shared wealth. As of 2018, BCDI accomplishing this through four core focus areas, with two more under development. The core components of this work are represented by the hexagon diagram above (fig 4.4).

Together, these six components are being called a “community enterprise network” in which the components relate to each other across stakeholders and projects to develop the shared goals of economic democracy in the Bronx. This model is intended to operationalize the expansiveness of the vision of economic democracy as BCDI's leaders understand it: not just about political power and not just about economic power, but a set of relationships that can leverage existing resources and institutions, as well as, where necessary transform existing institutions or create new ones.

Critical to emphasize here is that this is not a cooperative development network, although as Tanner (2013) and Menser (2018) both show, there are some overlapping features around research, policy, financing, and so forth, that these have in common. So in the same way that this chapter makes clear that BCDI is no longer building “Evergreen in the Bronx” it is also not building “Mondragón in the Bronx” either, but something different, situated in the assets, strengths, and gaps as BCDI understands them. The core frames guiding this network, as one participant summarized for me, are asset based development, and expansive definition of the economy, a focus on institutions, and integration of core skillsets of organizing, planning, and creation.

The last three points I think that matter most for this chapter are to look critically at the implications of expansively defining the economy and an economic institution or asset. Secondly, I revisit the implications of BCDI’s critique of community organizing in light of its focus on institutions as sites of struggle and transformation. Then lastly, I revisit the challenge of governing the overall network in some democratic fashion, which BCDI has yet to fully or meaningfully address.

The expansiveness of BCDI’s understanding of economic democracy—and the use of economic democracy as a tool for self-determination, as several interviewees described it—leads one to wonder if the idea of *economic* democracy is expansive enough to embody and hold all of the dimensions of meaning that its leaders are loading upon it. On the one hand, economic democracy is embodied in two core components: collective ownership of assets, and democratic management of those assets. And yet, as noted over

and over again, those two technical or operational structuring pillars of economic democracy fail to capture the larger vision underpinning those two components.

Contemporaries of BCDI in the academy and in the field of political practice have used Solidarity Economy to describe political-economic visions of this scope of transformative breadth (Kawano 2018), while political theorists like Unger paint a broad brush of “the left” (Unger 2005). One question that I was unable to answer to any degree of clarity of satisfaction is about why BCDI doesn’t use the phrase solidarity economy in its core language, and if that absence was intentional or an oversight. The other question about economic democracy is a bit broader, and relates to the ambiguous utility of enlarging the scope of “the economy.” When a young person in the Bronx wants to change how their school is run by democratizing the governance of it as an institution to include student leadership, or to transform the place into one that practices restorative justice rather than contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline, what does *economic* democracy have to say about this? Why and how does the word “economic” add political or analytical clarity to addressing this problem? Would not the idea of participatory democracy or “maximal” democracy be more specific and useful to some of these public problems (Menser 2018)?

In other words, we might want to think about the consequences of framing social and political transformation as necessarily underpinned by economic systems. This isn’t to say that these spheres are not of course related, but there is reasonable argument to be had that economic logics are better to be confined rather than infinitely expanded to be more inclusive of non-economic action. In a sense, this is a recognition of the expansiveness

(and liberatory possibility) of economic action, and the many aspects of daily life that have been dismissed as “noneconomic” because of who tends to perform them (Folbre 2009, Safri and Graham 2010; Federici 2004).

At the same time, the “economic” in economic democracy is so powerful and necessary because of the historical legacy of the absence of “the economy” or “the economic” from the canon of “democratic” theory. As Menser (2018) structures it, economic democracy is one form or permutation of a larger “convergence space” (p. 257) of participatory democratic theory and practice. This categorization seems essential, although as with solidarity economy, in the practice of BCDI’s work the markers about when to use one or another phrase may become more prominent in the future.

If scholarship continues down the road of this democratic “turn,” how might we acknowledge the omnipresence of opportunities for engaging in work to change the economy without having to define so much of our lives around that which is economic? If what we mean by economic is “the act of societal or collective provisioning”, (this is the definition BCDI uses to describe what the economy is), how might we adequately describe that process and those practices as social, political, and economic, without the economic dimension resultantly becoming the fundamental or most important dimension of that action? BCDI may one day have to reckon with the limitations of its choice to use economic democracy as a metanarrative frame for transformation, but it has not done so just yet.

Related to this expansive approach to defining and understanding economic democracy is the related tension around “more than just co-ops”. The process and strategic shift, switching from cooperative development as a strategy to broad-based infrastructure development as a strategy was a substantial shift that contributed to rifts with existing cooperative entrepreneurs and the developer who had been a part of the working group up until 2016. Indeed, this shift is perhaps the most defining moment in BCDI’s entire existence, outside of the armory struggle. There is a difference between not developing cooperatives as a strategy, and not believing that cooperatives are critical to developing economic democracy. Direct cooperative development is not a critical focus of BCDI’s work for a few reasons. But they are seen as an important part of a spectrum of organizational models for shared wealth and governance for housing, finance, work, energy, etc.

The problem is that, for all of the benefits of this big tent approach, if no one besides underresourced cooperativists centers cooperative institutions at the core of their political vision, then cooperatives will likely continue to be second class enterprise formations relative to B corporations or social enterprises or other “high-road” or “sustainable” or “inclusive” business and ownership models. At some point, some powerful faction in the broadly defined field of economic democracy will have to take up this challenge and center cooperatives and the economic and social value they offer. It does not seem likely at this juncture that BCDI is or will become such a champion. In years to come, cooperatives may continue to be a miniscule slice of the social enterprise universe, and by 2030 or 2040 those who spent the first decades of the twenty first century touting the

coming wave of cooperatives and grassroots economic democracy may end up wondering why it looks different than they imagined.

The additional problem here is that cooperatives are critically important everyday crucibles of economic democracy—by weaving participatory management into everyday life and democratizing (if not always fully decommodifying) the fictitious commodities of housing finance and work, they are the building blocks of a more democratic society—without which the larger coordinating institutions of BCDI’s Community Enterprise Network can not possibly sustain democracy in a substantive fashion.⁴¹

The penultimate takeaway from this chapter I think is in some ways deeply underexamined and understated in terms of BCDI’s outward facing work, despite the fact that it is such a searing and driving point that drove BCDI’s co-founders to embark upon their project: BCDI’s leadership does not believe that community organizing, as presently understood and practiced, is compatible with economic democracy. To put it another way—in order to bring about the kind of economic democracy that they envision, one of the critical and necessary institutional sites of struggle and transformation isn’t just government or anchor institutions or organized labor or philanthropy: it is the entire corpus of community organizing in the Bronx: its assumptions, its practices, its goals, its

⁴¹ In the education space, cooperatives and their direct, peer led mutual support networks would be characterized as critical “communities of practices” to refine and reinforce learning. These daily routines and practices are one critical component of what Knecht (2019) refers to as “coherence” necessary for purposive social action in educational institutions. (also Nembhard et al 2017;

values. It goes without saying that changing or transforming any single one of these is a monumental task, never mind all of them at once.

One final point on the topic of democracy and governance: the challenge of representation, institutional design, and participation that BCDI confronts is a tale at least as old as all of community development: who “represents” community and how?

Executive directors of nonprofit CBO’s sitting on a board of another non-profit entity does not necessarily constitute “community-control”—or if it does, a relatively thin version of such (Williams 2018). The class distance between professionalized leadership in all a part of community based planning and community control efforts have also been documented in similar efforts (Heskin 1991). What BCDI is doing is taking another run at this ongoing tension and dynamic, but has not yet fully addressed the question of how they might answer this governance question differently than their peers in the past.

Indeed, they haven’t even really suggested that it is a question worthy of a new answer. For this, the framework of economic democracy may again not be as helpful as simply digging deeper into the meaning of community control and self-determination (Williams 2018).

If designing an organization to democratically express and govern the will and aspirations of an urban region of well over one million people from at least half a dozen countries isn’t enough of a challenge, in the chapter that follows I look specifically at one of BCDI’s more advanced prototype projects, the BronxXchange, and its role in market

making and localizing procurement for Bronx based businesses as part of the larger BCDI network formation outlined here.

Chapter V: Market Making and Anchor Institutions

...humans have a more complex motivational structure and more capability to solve social dilemmas than posited in earlier rational-choice theory. Designing institutions to force (or nudge) entirely self-interested individuals to achieve better outcomes has been the major goal posited by policy analysts for governments to accomplish for much of the past half century. Extensive empirical research leads me to argue that instead, a core goal of public policy should be to facilitate the development of institutions that bring out the best in humans.

—Elinor Ostrom, 2009 Nobel Prize Lecture

Its tough with some of the community leaders, they say why the hell do I want to work with [hospitals], I hate them, I want to organize against them. But they have started to form relationships with these big institutions that they maybe haven't always been congenial with. That's a shift in organizing.

—BCDI staffer

This chapter looks more closely the “BronXchange” purchasing platform. As I outlined in the literature review in Chapter 2, drawing on theories of markets from the works of Karl Polanyi and others in feminist economics, and economic sociology, the BronxChange arises from a particular set of analyses about the nature and role of markets as social institutions; there is a particular focus on how markets both shape and are shaped by the actors that engage with them. As outlined in greater detail previously, the BronxChange, like the stock market or an auction house, should be considered what Callon describes as sociotechnical “*agencement*”, in that it acts as a social prosthetic for perform certain economic functions and values (Callon 1998). In a broader sense, these efforts also align with a lineage of attempts to pierce the fantastical theory of the pure free market society and the rational, utility maximizing agent of classical economic theory known as *homo economicus*.

This chapter proceeds with two main sections. First I begin by explaining the rationales and contexts for BCDI’s decision to create the BronxChange (which before it was officially named was known as the ‘vendor platform’), and situate this in a lineage of

progressive urban economic development strategies to develop and support local business through procurement policy and strategic import substitution. I connect these legacies and trends to the current prominent place that anchor institutions have come to occupy in the practice of local economic development, and highlight some of the strengths and pitfalls of this strategy.

Anchor Institutions and Local Economic Development

One of the core principles of BCDI's vision for economic democracy in the Bronx is their insistence that tremendous wealth of many kinds exists in the neighborhoods so often labeled as "needy." Borrowing from the school of thought and practice known as "asset-based community development" (Gibson and Cameron 2001; Mathie and Cunningham 2002), BCDI often frames their economic development work in terms of resources being extracted from or "leaking" out of the borough. In their July 2015 delegation trip to Mondragón, one of the working group (now Board of Directors) members, an executive director of a community based organization in the South Bronx, explained the BCDI perspective to the group, which included external partners such as senior labor union, civic, and elected officials, this way: "we have leakage in our borough. Spending is leaving the Bronx everyday. We are not poor, this is an illusion. We have anchors, we have purchasing power. We have wealth and it is being extracted" (Field notes Mondragon Day 1).

Asset based approaches can yield a number of insights for any group, of course, but the outsized role of anchor institutions in the Bronx aligned well with buzz in the community and economic development field around the "Evergreen model" of anchor-driven cooperative business development in the University Circle Neighborhood of Cleveland, Ohio. Evergreen's strategy for targeting the procurement spending of anchor institutions in Cleveland for newly incubated worker-owned businesses was a key inspirational

launch pad for what evolved into BCDI. As a lead staffer for BCDI noted in that very same Mondragón meeting in July 2015, Evergreen was one of the primary reasons that the vendor platform, targeting large anchor institutions would become one of the first and most advanced projects in the BCDI network. This was paired with a development study conducted with the assistance of graduate students from the MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning (Cunningham, et al 2012).

The idea of economic “leakage” out of inner cities is not new, as Imbroscio chronicled in 1995, the same year of Michael Porter’s trendsetting analysis on the competitive market advantages of inner cities (1995). As I outlined in more detail in Chapter 2, these kinds of localization projects have taken on various forms as part of a larger “progressive city” agenda. I return to the HEP as a model for urban development again in greater detail (and from the angle of regime politics) in Chapter 8, but what is worth noting here is that the HEP, and the self-reliance model in general, according to Imbroscio, explicitly sought to focus on “existing resource flows—form example, a concern for slowing the leakage of economic resources from the city” (1995 p. 841). While the Mayor and his team sought with HEP to achieve “a permanent and structural rearrangement of the local economy (1995 p 849), they only met with limited success (p. 847).

While Mayor Latimer announced that St. Paul would lead the way among a new generation of “self-reliant” cities, three and a half decades later, we see similar trends with new buzzwords. Resilience, equity, and sustainability have replaced self-reliance, but the principles and practices have changed only slightly. The practice of anchor-driven economic development fits well within this ongoing tradition of cities seeking to lift residents out of poverty and diversify a collapsed or dangerously monolithic economic base. Anchor institutions, as implied in their given name, are not in danger of the kind of race-to-the-bottom capital flight that led to the collapse of so many cities in the United

States in various waves throughout the 20th century. As the flagship model of Evergreen in Cleveland has attained some of the most attention recently (including my own work, see Casper-Futterman 2011), the framing of anchor-based development has been accompanied newly paired with the added 21st century twist of worker-owned business development.

It is worth noting however that procurement spending is in fact only one of a myriad of mechanisms available to anchor institutions to become engaged as place-based development actors. As the Institute for Competitive Inner Cities noted in 2010 (Institute 2016), there are numerous ways that anchors can be leaders driving place-based community and economic development, as well as

openings through which elected officials and community organizations can hold them accountable for their civic and social missions [see Fig 5.1 at right]. The Bronx is also perhaps particularly well suited to the anchor-driven model, as it contains not only the “big four” (Fordham University, Montefiore Medical Center, The Bronx Zoo, and the New York Botanical Garden), but also numerous additional civic institutions and large non-profits as well, including public colleges and universities.

BCDI’s attempts to engage these powerful institutions in their vision for building economic democracy in the Bronx is fraught with many of the same tensions and opportunities that have occurred in other cities in recent decades: do neighborhood residents, who experience the physical presence of large institutions as neighbors but may

ICIC’s Updated Anchor Institutions Framework, 2010^{viii}



not be directly employed by or benefit from their presence, trust these institutions to act in anything other than their own financial interest? As I noted in Chapter 4 above, these tensions played out in the formalization process in terms of how the group decided what role elected officials, financial interests, real estate interests, and anchor institutions would have in the governance of BCDI's core coordinating body.

The tensions outlined in the literature around mistrust but also desire to seize upon shared interests and opportunities among community based organizations and proactive and creative anchor institutions surfaced frequently in my interviews with BCDI staff, board members, and external partners. Mark, a senior staff member of the BCDI team elaborated on anchors at length in our interview:

I'm not ecstatic about any of them. It's been a real struggle. We thought it would be impossible initially, then we had some successes with the anchors, and we thought hey maybe it'll actually move a little faster. So far, the issue is whose critical path can you insert yourself into when you're dealing with partners who are far outsized in comparison to where we're at: power differentials, and scope of work. If you think about [a large private sector labor union], which has been behind us in many ways before anything existed, helping us get started, but to this day we can't get to the point of having someone from that organization on the working group, on the board, haven't gotten a rep from them to be an ongoing week to week collaborator. Despite lots of relationships and interests being aligned. It's not just about confrontation and collaboration there. It's also a question of how do you get a gigantic entity to understand its own critical path? Can you change that understanding or create an understanding when you're more in their path? And then who actually has to do the implementation once you have the sign off from the higher up?

*... So in this time period, hospitals were the most leverageable [sic] because of some of the [Affordable Care Act] requirements, but also in a risky position because of [uncertainty with] ACA, [and] the overlaps between federal, state, city stuff. But conversations with the hospitals around procurement were far easier than the conversations around community health needs. **Plenty of situations where they were happy to talk procurement but not community benefit.** The other typology is the public versus the private. Having the Quad for the Bronx, the elite four institutions;⁴² they each play differently, some responses were more helpful than others. **But getting the community college involved was amazing. They're so into it.** The former president of [a community college] even initiated an expansion of the relationship, she said to us, do you really just want to buy and sell stuff with us? Just procurement? What about engaging us as an educational*

⁴² Fordham University, Montefiore Medical Center, The Bronx Zoo, and the New York Botanical Gardens

institution? So we'd approached the elite institutions because of the larger budgets, etc. [...] So yeah the community colleges saw way more opportunities and were more expansive. The elites were more focused. They said ok you want our data, what format do you want it, what categories, etc. Can we give you this but not this. But the community colleges made suggestions, had creative, generative ideas. They had a different approach or understanding to their mission and relationships to community maybe I think. [...] So there's structure and agency. Big things, and then also individual staffers helping us... [emphasis added].

Another board member who had previously worked as a community organizer addressed both the excitement of collaborations with powerful new partners, and frustration at institutional inertia at the same time:

I was really inspired by—when I came into BCDI—conversations that I understood had been had by some BCDI leaders with leadership in [a Bronx hospital] about their desire to support cooperative generation and you know it seemed like an earnest aspiration about the Evergreen Model, an anchor institution like a hospital supporting the formation of a large worker owned laundry. My working experience with [the hospital] has been one, like, they are impervious to change and, like actually not being very good partners on one of our initiatives that we work on around the Bronx [on housing and health]. Which isn't to say that individuals in the institution haven't been great you know, they are trying to figure out how to leverage the institution's resources in a positive way. But, even just in a basic ways: as part of this grant that we entered into with them, they are required, they're supposed to match the two hundred and fifty thousand [dollars] that a consortium of funders gave, either through in-kind services or cash or a combination of both. I looked at the other collaborations, nationally they are certainly one of the most, if not the most, well resourced medical center that is represented, and yet they are one of the only medical institutions that are meeting their match through totally in-kind services they refuse to give us cash. And, you know, in some ways we have been unwilling to be agitational with them as others of our, you know, members of our community have been really frustrated some things they've done for example Mekong NYC, um, you know, participated or mounted a really direct campaigns against them, you know, for the elimination of their Chinese mental health clinic and their mental health services that service their community of Cambodian, Vietnamese refugees that were relocated to the Bronx and their descendants.

From this interview and others, a few key themes emerged in terms of BCDI's interactions with anchor institutions around procurement. As the quote above suggests, anchor institutions are themselves sprawling and fractured bureaucracies, with competing priorities and factions that arise from the structural nature of their size as well as their competing identities as both growth-oriented developers of real estate and non-profits with a legally mandated service mission. Depending on the context of the anchor

institution, they have been both engaged and cooperative as well as reluctant and unfocused. The experience noted here above with regard to the community college was also true for the leadership of another community college in the Bronx, from a different interview. This limited experience in the Bronx suggests that while hospitals and universities are being explicitly targeted for procurement dollars because of the size of their budgets, that another opportunity exists in this space to engage with community colleges beyond the silo of workforce development, which has been the typical lens that has been applied to them in the community and economic development literature.

What also emerges from this are political considerations around community health needs assessments, as mandated for non-profit hospitals by the Affordable Care Act (Hilltop Institute 2017) For example, a large private medical center in the Bronx, by far the largest private hospital in the Bronx and among the largest employers in the borough, has billions of dollars in contracts for discretionary procurement spending, much of which is wrapped up in contracts with a larger conglomerate purchasing entity, the Greater New York Hospitals Association (GNYHA), which acquires massive economies of scale for the region's healthcare procurement. In the context of large purchasing contracts that have been in place with GNYHA for years, this medical center *still* was more willing to discuss procurement opportunities than community health needs assessments (CHNAs) with BCDI. This speaks to the sensitivity and difficulty of bringing large institutions into new areas of work, even those mandated by federal laws.

Additionally, the slow speed of this work with anchor institutions in the Bronx led BCDI to expand the scope of their purchasing platform work into targeting more broadly medium and large nonprofit purchasers, including faith-based and community organizing and service organizations in the Bronx that might find local purchasing of goods and services from “high road” local businesses to be significantly mission-aligned. This expansion also provided flexibility for BCDI to market and expand the traffic of the

platform in its beta phase as they continue to work with larger more bureaucratic purchasers and demonstrate proof of concept.

Building the Vendor Platform

The Vendor Platform is designed to capture the purchasing dollars of large institutions and medium sized nonprofits in the Bronx by connecting these organizations to Bronx-based businesses committed to building shared wealth. The platform will generate economic data, relationships, and revenue that members of BCDI can direct towards developing the network (2015 BCDI internal formalization strategy briefing memo)

Over the course of three years from 2014 to 2017, the BCDI vendor platform (which was named “BronXchange” in late 2016) was one of the most tangible pieces of BCDI’s developing operations. As the vision and components of BCDI’s work evolved during the 2015/16 formalization period described above in Chapter 4, the core functions and purpose of the platform were the most consistent both in how its functions were understood, and how much priority it was given as a revenue-generating project that connected with several other core infrastructure pieces: the Economic Democracy Learning Center (EDLC), the Bronx Innovation Factory (BXIF), and the Policy and Planning Lab (PPL).

The idea for the platform began with a fellowship grant from the Nathan Cummings foundation to study barriers to local purchasing, using the Bronx as a case study (field notes BXC launch event). Barriers in this case exist on both sides of the equation between large institutions and small local businesses. In a 2015 funding pitch to New York City Council officials for discretionary public funding, the vendor platform was described in the following way:

A Local Business Procurement Platform: a new social enterprise that uses Bronx dollars to lift up Bronx residents by connecting high road businesses to new market opportunities through a digital marketplace and matching service (Local Business Procurement 2015)

The platform at this stage had defined its three core primary functions but had yet to define certain specific standards or criteria, particularly one of the most important criteria as to what constituted a “high-road” local business that would be included in the platform database for purchasers to choose from. The BronXchange has three core functions: connecting supply and demand through a sortable database of vetted vendors, the provision of online and offline business services to small businesses, and to level the playing field and raise business practice standards for businesses that operate with “sustainable and equitable business practices”. This included explicitly local and certified Minority/Women Owned Business Entities (M/WBE), as well as the implication that other considerations such as worker ownership would be taken into account.

In 2015, however, this was not explicitly communicated in materials, since worker cooperatives were not a business model that was yet familiar to local elected officials.⁴³ Instead, the focus was on general principles of local business development and job creation and retention, which were existing priorities for the councilmembers in question who were from the Bronx and one of whom was also the Speaker of the council at the time. The materials for communicating about the BronXchange to funders and other interested parties became better elaborated over time, as the group finalized the migration from a working group into a formal non-profit board of directors in 2016 and then finalized its 5-year strategic operations plan in January 2017. In 2018, after hiring a full-time director, the BronXchange processed just over \$200,000 in transactions. Taken in sum, anchor institutions are by far the largest Bronx employers and spend billions of

⁴³ During the years of 2014-2018, this changed rapidly, as the NY City Council responded to a Coalition advocacy campaign for promoting worker cooperatives by dispensing over \$5 million in discretionary public dollars to non-profit worker cooperative development entities throughout the city. Worker cooperatives and employee ownership in 2018 were included in platforms for governor of New York as well as championed by Senator Kristen Giliibrand.

dollars on goods and services annually, and the platform, when operating at full-scale, intends to capture 15% of discretionary purchasing, which BCDI estimates as approximately \$250 million annually.

So what does the BronXchange actually do, and what issues is it designed to solve?

Interviews with staff and board members showed remarkable consistency on the role of the BronXchange in the BCDI network. Representative descriptions from interviews looked like this:

The vendor platform is where local businesses get connected to larger institutions around a set of agreements on being good for the environment, hiring locally, those things.

Bronxchange is a vehicle for retaining wealth. Anchors spends billions but so much of that leaves the community, so this is about capitalizing existing or emerging local businesses that have a commitment to economic democracy in some form, that are here, owned by people in the community, that are committed to the community, and connecting to one another so those goods and services are localized, provided by people here, and the money flows through the community rather than just leaving.

Bronxchange serves the function of localizing supply chains. It'll start with certain kinds of procurement, certain organizations, but then the data derived from that and the analysis of it you'll be able to look at business-to-business deals with opportunities from that data. Where it makes sense, versus where you are just trying but will fall on your face. ...You can identify gaps with the platform data about what isn't being made here in the Bronx that could be. And organizing the relationships to be able to facilitate those deals. Have some relationships to help institutions to see that they could move purchasing to viable local businesses. That's a good way to start a business, with procurement deals on the table. More will happen with the Innovation Factory later on.

BCDI approaches the problem from the perspective of small businesses in the Bronx that could be providing goods and services to large and medium institutional and organizational purchasers but are shut out for a variety of reasons that are not at all unique to the Bronx.

From their survey of local businesses, BCDI characterized the problems facing Bronx businesses as being functionally “invisible” to institutional procurement offices and

officers. For example, senior procurement officers themselves might have very little tangible local knowledge themselves of the surrounding local businesses. Even if this barrier is overcome and local businesses get on the radar of institutional purchasers, there are significantly additional challenges to engaging in a business relationship. There are uniform billing and invoicing procedures that large institutions mandate that often surpass the level of technical knowledge and capacity for small businesses, and these larger institutions are not sufficiently staffed to provide the kind of high-touch assistance to help them conform to these billing requirements. If this obstacle can be overcome, however, small businesses still face the burden of sensitivity to timely payment and cash flow.

With public institutions and large private institutions alike, payment can take weeks or months, creating unpredictability for businesses with tighter margins or fewer clients. The table below is an adaptation of the solutions that the BronXchange offers according to BCDI (adapted from 2016 materials):

Issue/ Pain Point	Online	Offline
Connect buyers and sellers	Sortable, searchable business directory with vetted, curated businesses with tailored profiles	Relationship brokering
Streamline transactions	E-commerce functionality	Deal curation and invoice financing
Promote equitable and sustainable business practices	Marketing of high road businesses	Business Assessment Tool

There are a few critical innovations that this platform offers in its functionality to both parties. Among the most important benefits for vendors are first-look RFPs, which

provide incentives to local businesses to join the platform and meet the high-road practices that the platform evaluates, as well as invoice financing, which allows for businesses to receive cash flow assistance through the platform to cover the gap between order fulfillment and the potentially months-long payment schedule of large institutions. This transfers some of the significant burdens from small businesses, and allows large civic institutions such as the participating anchors and non-profit organizations to more actively pursue their mission of local economic development and empowerment through the localization of purchasing with high-road and worker-owned businesses. For their subscription, purchasers benefit from access to a curated vendor database also have access to a dashboard that helps them quantify and communicate their value-added contribution to the local Bronx economy through their changes in procurement practices. The use of these data and metrics also serve BCDI's goals of understanding purchasing trends and opportunities for further business development opportunities through their business incubation infrastructure.

One of the most recent pieces of this project to be fully elaborated in BCDI's own materials is what precisely they understand to be a "high-road" business that engages in "equitable and sustainable" business practices. Just prior to the first public "launch" event, the official BronXchange brochure described these metrics in broad strokes:

- *Community wealth: our businesses invest in the Bronx and build community wealth and ownership*
- *Labor: our businesses promote fair and just workplaces*
- *Environment and health: our businesses utilize green business practices to improve our environment and the health of our borough⁴⁴*

Each of these three areas could be unpacked and interrogated at great length of course, and how they are interpreted will determine a great deal of how successful the BronXchange is at achieving its mission of raising standards, building shared wealth,

⁴⁴ Lewis and Swinney 2008 (in Allard et al) dive into the concept of high road and low road more extensively, and these metrics overlap with their analysis in several points.

leveling the playing field for local Bronx businesses, and improving environmental health outcomes. As I explore in greater detail below in Chapter 6, BCDI's agnostic approach to business development that is not specific or exclusive to the worker cooperative structure was a point of tension in the formalization process, particularly during the delegation to Mondragón in July 2015. This tension remains in 2018 as a source of frustration and confusion, as many practitioners in the field take the name "Bronx Cooperative Development Initiative" somewhat literally and concretely to mean that BCDI intends to develop worker-owned, cooperative businesses in the Bronx, in the model of Evergreen. Although this strategy was reformulated several years ago to looking more broadly at infrastructure for economic democracy rather than specifically cooperative incubation and development, the name persists, adding to the points of confusion and tension described above in Chapter 4 and below in Chapter 7, where I explore BCDI's approach to production, business development, and scale, in greater detail. This expansive and agnostic approach to business is a notable component of how BCDI sees a pathway to economic democracy "at scale" in the short and medium term.

There are a few additional aspects that separate the BronXchange platform from similar interventions into localizing procurement of anchor institutions. As an independent entity, it is not directly accountable to the large institutions that it works with. For example, it is not a tool developed by anchor institutions to help them engage in more localized procurement. Such a tool might be more useful and less useful in certain ways, but the point here is that the control over the functionality and purpose of the tool is of great importance. Of course the platform needs to be useful to anchor institutions, but the issue of governance is important in light of obvious structural power imbalances between community organizations and anchor institutions. This was a key point of deliberation during the formalization process as outlined above in Chapter 4. Additionally, BCDI's theory of change does not end with local business development and job growth. As with

all the other pieces of BCDI's network, the BronXchange is connected, and accountable through its board governance structure to the larger central nervous system of the Community Enterprise Network. The BronXchange when fully operational will serve as one revenue stream for coordinating these activities, while also creating a market with more favorable conditions for local small businesses with a preference for local, high-road, and worker-owned firms. The existence of the platform will thus serve a very specific purpose for building more local wealth in the Bronx as well as indirectly fostering more supportive conditions for the development of businesses in the Bronx that fit their criteria for raising standards for social equity and sustainability.

Addressing Tensions in High-Road Business Development

The subtle shifts in the framing of what kinds of businesses would be curated for this database over time are indicative of a rapidly changing state of play and practice in the fields of business development and social entrepreneurship. Numerous corporate forms now exist, old (cooperatives) alongside new (B-corps) as representing the future of equitable and sustainable enterprise. In the case of New York City, this was additionally clarified by the speed with which worker cooperatives went from being an invisible and unknown idiosyncratic business formation to receiving \$5 million dollars in public funds for business development and technical assistance, and from being unknown to elected officials to being incorporated into the platform of the progressive caucus of the New York City Council. In 2017 alone, the New York State Assembly sponsored a bill for employee ownership research and development in New York State, and several Democratic senators including the junior Senator from New York, Kirsten Gillibrand, joined independent Bernie Sanders (VT) in sponsoring similar legislation at the federal level. All that being said, these pieces of legislation have yet to actually pass, and the state of cooperative law and business development is microscopic compared to social enterprise and small business incubation infrastructure, much less traditional small

business development support infrastructure. The elements of the BronXchange that actually constitute “market making” are the ratings systems, by which vendors can rate purchasers not only on business transaction matters like timeliness of payment, but also on how they treat vendors and how they uphold the values community wealth, labor standards, and environmental health. Likewise, purchasers can rate vendors on the same characteristics. The quality control mechanisms go both ways, but are not only grounded in purely competitive terms of the traditional business marketplace.

The BronXchange is the most fully developed revenue-generating project in the BCDI network as of early 2018. Critical to any analysis of the efficacy of the BronXchange and BCDI is that the functionality of the platform is directly tied to its interdependence on the further elaboration and development of the other core infrastructure pieces as outlined in Chapter 4. The conceptual argument for the BronXchange is that the design and governance of markets can be part of challenging exploitative and oppressive urban political economies. In this sense, the BronXchange is a “marketmaking” tool—or to use Callon’s language, a sociotechnical *agencement*, that performs markets differently. In the case of BronXchange, the assumptions are drawn from extensive focus grouping and survey interviews with community organizers, anchor institution officials, labor officials, and small business owners. Rather than being created by and accountable to large anchor purchasers and designed to primarily meet their needs, the BronXchange is governed by, and accountable to, leaders drawn from these neighborhoods and communities.

Apparent in BCDI’s work with the BronXchange is the premise that there is no single monolithic Market with a capital M that exists in some static or pre-determined fashion. Given the history of the Bronx, as fully elaborated in Chapter 3, however, there are plenty of good reasons why Bronxites have justifiable reasons to distrust both the market and the state. Part of the task before BCDI, as I will explore further in the chapter that follows, is

to shift a common understanding of the inseparable relationship between market and state, and pivot organizing and political action towards reconstructing that market state coupling in ways that support the core values of economic democracy.

Underneath the socio-technical theory is the small business organizing work that Weber might call the slow boring of hard boards. It is painstaking and also forever-taking. Nevertheless, BCDI's approach to developing community-led guidelines for what "high road" business would mean in the context of the curated BronXchange is evidence of market reconstruction in action. It meets both of the criteria set for economic democracy on their own terms, both the broader democratic governance piece, and the shared wealth component. BCDI's conceptual argument then for the BronXchange follows quite coherently and logically from their definition of economic democracy and markets: the governance and accountability mechanisms for market activities actually matters and has relevant implications for the current practice and future trajectory of community organizing and development, at least as far as the local level (this is all that my evidence will allow for my conclusions).

It is critical to note that I am not arguing that an apparatus or *agencement* such as the BronXchange is in a position of strength, or that on its own, localization of anchor procurement can be called economic democracy. Building the tool is not economic democracy. The tool itself is not economic democracy. As part of the core infrastructure of BCDI's network: *it is part of a strategy for capturing economic resources necessary to build economic democracy in the Bronx, and particularly for doing so independently of philanthropy.* The core argument that BCDI advances relates to the interconnection of the infrastructure components for addressing broader necessary institutional shifts towards economic and racial equity and justice. But this premise of engaging the ideas underpinning "the market" that motivate political action in a liberal redistributionist

society, even one that has moved beyond austerity, is a substantial difference from much of the workforce and small business development field, even in the realm of the emerging social enterprise practice (Ganz, Kay, and Spicer 2018)

Instead of taking as a given the coherence of an oppressive “market” apparatus, BCDI considers an open strategic field that includes markets of many kinds, rather than one immutably repressive one, and to focus on reconstructing some of these markets and the work that they do in the Bronx. Markets in this way are not only thus being *theorized* as open to political intervention, but being practically contested in the “actually existing” (Brenner and Theodore 2002) day to day politics of the Bronx.

As noted here in this chapter, the tension that exists here is not only about the strategic decision to engage with market-making as part of a political and economic program, but with the accompanying decision to collaborate and persuade, rather than only berate, anchor institutions as partners in economic democracy for the Bronx. In the same way that that the BronXchange, as part of a broader network, brings business owners into contact with economic democracy and moves to organize them into constituencies for democratizing ownership and combating gentrification and displacement, the approach to anchor institutions is designed to reward good behaviors and create opportunities to contaminate and infiltrate institutions with practices and theories of economic democracy. Notably, it doesn’t foreclose the opportunities to do targeted organizing hits, but it is developing another set of tools for engagement and agitation. Whether these complementary approaches can be successful remains to be seen. I delve further into this line of inquiry and its relationship to a longer debate in community organizing around confrontational tactics versus community building tactics (Saegert 2006) in Chapter 8.

It is important to conclude here with a note of caution, not only about the tensions inherent in partnering or collaborating with anchor institutions, but also the broader field of financial inclusion. Elsewhere, I have argued that the framework of economic “inclusion”, in which BCDI frequently engages for funding applications, falls far short of what is needed to alter the kinds of economic fortunes that low-income communities of color such as those in the Bronx face (Casper-Futterman and DeFilippis 2017; Newman 2009 and 2016). As the literature on the non-profit industrial complex could rather seamlessly explain (INCITE! 1994/2009/2017; Samimi 2010), of course BCDI finds itself in a situation in which some of the institutions and practices that many of its CBO partners are fighting back against, are of course some of the very same institutions that BCDI approaches and engages for funding opportunities for several of its projects, including the BronXchange. Wariness of this obvious tension arose in several interviews, with the following example being the most elaborate, from a part-time staffer at BCDI with community organizing experience:

Working on an exciting project, with good ideas...you're working on something that people know makes sense and is going to be effective, you're going to attract banks, and these are the same banks that---they definitely don't have the community's best interests at heart for the most part. So that's always something that you have to understand. I've grown to look at it as like, they money is there. It can either go to us, or somewhere else. And I don't think it should go to anywhere else but to us. At the end of the day its our money. So as ideologically I might not want to, it makes me uncomfortable to work with these people, to deliver for them, in the larger scheme of things, I don't feel like I'm selling my soul or anything like that.

Conclusions

There are two overarching points meriting emphasis as part of the conclusion for this chapter. One relates to the work of business development for “high-road” businesses and cooperatives, and the other relates to the tensions involved in the politics of these approaches. In other words, the first is about the mechanics of what is being done and

how, and the second is a broader analysis of the competing political tensions involved in this work as a tool of social and political change.

Cooperatives, and particularly worker owned cooperatives and majority employee owned companies are a form of high-road businesses in the way that a square is a special form of a rectangle. In their best expressions they represent the apex of the values that BCDI uses in its business assessment tool: for good labor conditions, transparent and open management, broad-based wealth creation, and the accountability structures necessary to minimize environmental harm (or maximize benefits) to the neighborhoods in which the businesses reside.

There are, however, simply too few cooperatives, and particularly worker cooperatives, in the United States, for them to do this work on their own. The case of Cooperative Home Care Associates is instructive in this regard. The largest worker cooperative in the United States, and also a unionized workplace, CHCA established the Paraprofessional Health Institute (PHI) in 1992 to raise sectoral standards for their industry because they saw how the higher standards to which they held themselves would make them less competitive over time in their industry unless they worked actively to raise standards to meet theirs (Bhatt and Dubb 2015; Inserra, et al 2002). In essence, by being inclusive of cooperatives in the BronXchange but not focused only on them, BCDI and the BronXchange are helping to contribute to a set of *enabling and supporting conditions* by which more existing businesses in the Bronx may choose to become more democratic over time, among other “high-road” attributes in the Business Assessment Tool that the BronXchange uses. This is in some ways the social democracy corollary to the stale

economic development practice of pursuing low taxes and regulation in the same of a “good business climate” (see MacLeod and Jones 2011 in the urban studies literature among others).

The value add of the BronXchange itself is that these businesses don’t have to adopt these practices solely on the basis of goodwill or the faith that doing so will make them more appealing to potential customers: the BronXchange creates the incentive structures and relationship brokering space for those enterprises to convert these behaviors into concrete business opportunities through the connections to large buyers on the platform. The platform as a tool operates through a combination of motivation structures about concern for business viability and concern for community that represent the holistic approach to market action that BCDI has adopted as its framework (examined further in the following Chapter on the training curriculum).

But there are costs and benefits to both a broad scope, or big tent, approach and an approach that sets cooperatives apart from and distinct from other social enterprises in both policy and funding terms. Mainstreaming cooperative development into social enterprise and employee-ownership discourse, practice, and policy, will likely achieve results along the axis of broadening ownership, as they prioritize and set out to accomplish in pieces for the Center for American Progress and Harvard Business Review (Freeman, Blasi, and Kruse 2011; Walsh, Peck, and Zugasti 2018). Cooperative development, however, is not just worker cooperative development, and the mainstreaming practice of worker ownership draws worker owned companies away from

solidarity and cooperative value value chains that sustain them both as enterprises and as vehicles of social transformation (Smith 2009; Casper-Futterman 2016; Mendell and Neamtan 2010). In other words, cooperative ecosystems, or social/solidarity economies (Tanner 2013; Borowiak 2016; Hudson 2018) attempt to unite the production oriented cooperative enterprises with consumption oriented enterprises and institutions for both political and economic power. This approach to economic and enterprise development also addresses the issue of standards, but does so in a way that creates new alignments and policy constituencies that are not easily mobilized in the US context. I address this dynamic in greater detail both on the grounds of enterprise development and the political economy of scale in Chapter 7.

The final point here returns to the orientation of the trajectory of practice for BCDI's work in the field of high-road business development and market-making. A month or so before I conducted the above interview where the participant discussed his concerns about "selling out", BCDI staff and board members were all-hands-on-deck for the first public launch event for the BronXchange, held at a local beer hall in the historic Italian business corridor of Arthur Avenue near Fordham University. With an attendance above 100 people, there were civic and political leaders, staff of local elected officials, entrepreneurs, foundation program officers, community organizers, activists, and economic development policymakers. The optics were a powerful mix of an emergent Bronx, a mix of young and old, men and women, Dominican, Puerto Rican, African, Haitian immigrants and descendants of previous generations of immigrants who were folded into whiteness in the 20th century. The master of ceremonies, a young BCDI board member, corralled the crowd to a hush with "three cheers for economic democracy!" She then introduced a representative from JP Morgan Chase to say a few words, since they are one of the main benefactors of the platform. A senior BCDI staff member then

outlined the development of the concept of the BronXchange, going back years, and how it promised to help small businesses, but also particularly large anchor institutions to fulfill their civic and social missions. This last point was emphasized with her speaking more heavily into the microphone and was followed by her looking up and pausing, as if to scan the room to make eye contact with specific people in the audience. The social entrepreneur and equity investor in BronXchange himself a black man and an immigrant to the United States, framed his support for the BronXchange project as part of a broader challenge to support building assets and wealth in the Bronx to avoid the kinds of aggressive displacement that “we’re seeing down in Brooklyn”. All three speakers remembered to thank the other sponsors of the BronXchange, including the New York Community Trust, Kendeda Foundation, Spring Bank (a certified B-corp financial institution), and JP Morgan Chase foundation, which had supported the BronXchange with a grant.

Among the critiques one could offer for how BCDI conceptually frames their work for economic democracy, of course one of the most obvious is on precisely this tension that is made plain both in the interview quote above and the tensions apparent in the launch event, which both supports and promotes a new vision and approach under the banner of economic democracy and yet simultaneously, one could argue, undermines and sabotages its own efforts by engaging with the very institutions that are structurally responsible for the conditions BCDI, and its partner CBOs seek to undo. The dynamic playing out here is by no means unique to this case, but certainly speaks to the tensions around heterodox affordable non-profit real estate development and business development that arose during the formalization process particularly around the Bronx Fund (more details in Chapter 7).

Given the acknowledged tensions in this work, there is reason for skepticism that initiatives like BCDI for social and economic transformation can somehow trick the devil

as they dance, without being corrupted, sabotaged, or coopted in the process. On the other hand, under the economic and political constraints of our moment, philanthropic grantmaking, and to some extent, public funding, is the overwhelmingly dominant form of revenue for these kinds of social enterprises, and particularly for community development work more broadly. If not from these morally “contaminated” sources, where else would the necessary funds be obtained?

Fundamental to this tension is the matter of adherence to values of economic democracy as laid out and developed during the formalization process. One of the ways that BCDI sees as critical to controlling the future of its work to promote economic democracy is through the “DNA” of training and education on the values and principles of economic democracy. As one BCDI senior staffer noted, if BCDI doesn’t properly equip the people in its broader network with the values and understanding of economic democracy through the Training Series (EDTS) and the Learning Center (EDLC), they may succeed in some technical aspects of business development or revenues generated, but fail in their broader project of substantial political and economic transformation in the Bronx (interview, cited also in Chapter 7). In the chapter that follows, I examine the training curriculum that BCDI developed and how it attempts to steward individual leaders in the BCDI network through the processes of political transformation and analysis building that they believe are required for sustaining the network over time.

Chapter VI: Educating for Economic Democracy

When self-hood is perceived to be an active process it is also seen that social modifications are the only means of the creation of changed personalities. Institutions are viewed in their educative effect: with reference to the types of individuals they foster.

—Dewey 1920, p. 196

So when we think about Mondragón, typically there's this piece that people forget: they spent fifteen years with just learning and education through their academy before their first businesses got going. And we try to remind people of that because education is important, sure. But that's a long fucking time! Fifteen years!?

—BCDI staffer (2017)

This chapter looks more closely at the Economic Democracy Training Series, a curriculum developed early in BCDI's incubation process that provides a series of workshops and readings to train community organizers, clergy, youth, entrepreneurs, union leaders and members, and other Bronxites in the frameworks and core concepts of Economic Democracy as BCDI approaches them. The role that the curriculum and political education plays in the broader vision of BCDI is critical to how participants see their vision for transforming the Bronx becoming broadly accepted and understood beyond their immediate network of organizations and leaders. In this chapter, I briefly outline the concept of popular education as the guiding principle for the development of the curriculum. Then through a series of vignettes and with evidence drawn from participant observation and interviews, I show how the economic democracy curriculum and BCDI's approach to education and leadership development for a Bronx in which the *understanding and practice* economic democracy is mainstream and widespread. I argue that the formatting and core lessons of the curriculum as a tool for popular education not only act as the political "DNA" for the BCDI network, but also that this form of codification of BCDI's values has weaknesses for its broader coherence and "scalability" as a network.

If the preceding chapter on the BronXchange examines a mechanism for shifting markets and institutions, the other side of the coin of Polanyi's "instituted process" and Callon's performative economy is the role of the agent that circulates through and enacts the economy according to the rules and norms of the institutions that are mutually (per)formatted and co-created between agent and institution. This chapter explores the core function of the Economic Democracy Training Series (EDTS) as the living and breathing guidebook for how BCDI presents and instills in individuals and groups the ideas and practices of economic democracy. The Economic Democracy Learning Center, as the name of the project area for popular education and training, is the primary mechanism for BCDI to instill in others the ideals of shared wealth and ownership and democratic management of key economic assets in the Bronx.

The principle of popular education is typically credited to Paulo Freire and its guiding assumption is that all participants are both learning and teaching. This differs from the more typical modern approach to education, in which the relationship between teacher and student is more of a customer-client relationship in which one attends classes and in turn receives knowledge in exchange (Delp, et al 2002). The power of this approach lies in lifting up lived experiences as valued sources of knowledge that can be integrated facilitated towards changing the circumstances of oppression. Ultimately one of the most significant challenges in the use of popular education pedagogy is that by design it is highly context dependent and not entirely prescriptive other than its overarching goal of motivating social action. Though empowering in its best forms, it is difficult to reproduce because different groups, even in the same communities, can arrive at different understandings about the best ways to address common challenges and circumstances of oppression (*ibid*). Of course, this diversity is part of the point: if facilitating self-determination and autonomy of oppressed groups is the overriding goal, prescriptive

designs for the outcomes of these learning spaces at a certain point would defeat the spirit of the pedagogical practice. As I note again at the end of this chapter, this leads to complicating tensions around the role of deepening the role of transformative popular education as a core function of BCDI as it seeks to maximize scale and impact on a timeframe of urgency in the Bronx. This comes out in some of my interviews as well. As the interviews also show, BCDI leaders repeatedly invoked the value of education as fundamental to the enduring success and political accountability of any network for economic democracy. This was true both before and after the July 2015 trip to Mondragón. In the sections that follow, I outline some of the ways that the curriculum was used to facilitate the formalization process, as well as note some of the main theoretical points that the curriculum organizes for participants.

Background and Context for the Curriculum

As described above in Chapter 4, the first time I joined the full BCDI group as a participant observer was on their first strategic formalization retreat in February 2015. Since this was the start of their learning and vision work together, they began with a modified version of a workshop on how to think about and define economic democracy, led by one of the lead co-facilitators on staff with BCDI and a long-time community organizer. Some of the staff and working group members present had been through some aspects of training on economic democracy, but some had not. After leading the group through their ideas and thoughts around the meaning of economic democracy and wading towards a working definition on a piece of butcher paper, the facilitator turned to the topic of markets. The word **MARKETS** is written in marker on a piece of paper at the front of the room. “What are markets?” He asks a room of fellow community organizers. There is silence at first, so he begins with a prompt. “Markets meet needs and show demand, sure, what else though?”

A working group member, then the executive director of a CDC in the South Bronx, says she associates markets with financial markets. Wall Street. Another working group member with a background in organized labor and worker education, says there are other kinds of markets too, like farmer's markets. Of course both have buyers and sellers, but clearly they're not the same. Another working group member, an executive director at a legal services agency, agrees with this point. A few others nod in agreement with these general points.

The facilitator returns to the board and turns over the leaf to the next page, which reads "Economic Democracy does not reject markets, but seeks to rewire them." He adds for clarification that this is a different approach than "some of our friends" who see markets as "the market" and as really only destructive to "our communities." He flips the next sheet, which has the same statement on markets but adds another on actors: "Actors in the economy are actually holistic actors, and economic infrastructures should incorporate this reality." Another statement is added to the paper: "ownership is not a values system." What does this mean? The facilitator gives the following example: lets say a community of folks fight for some buildings in the Bronx, they take them from the landlord and make them into permanently affordable housing, like the cooperatives throughout New York City. But then, the Dominicans, for example (the facilitator is Dominican himself) start using their power to exclude Puerto Ricans, to discriminate. Is that fair or just? Is that economic democracy? The group, which includes Dominicans and Puerto Ricans, as well as others from neither place, all note that clearly this violates the spirit of economic democracy, even though in some literal sense it aligns with the ideas of "self-determination". The CDC director says that Frantz Fanon noted that revolutions often struggle to build new societies, and have ended up embodying old structures and

hierarchies from the old society, but with new faces. This is a cautionary tale to be avoided about liberation.

What emerges from these prompts is a nuanced discussion of relationships between structures, institutions, and the agency of actors. Alternative or “community” institutions are like markets: they reflect values around them and values that create them. In other words, it is up to the people, alongside the basic structure of an institution, determine its content and values. In other words, just because something is built doesn’t mean it will always be that way. Alternatively, institutions often hold on to the original contexts and intentions of their founding, and are difficult to change. This leads the group to an understanding of the critical value of education in aligning them and their work to build institutions of economic democracy for the Bronx. The facilitator concludes by noting that in his first trip to Mondragón, he was deeply inspired by how education was the most important thing, from preschool to high school and up, the people in Mondragón had a core and foundational shared understanding of values of cooperation and participation, and that was what he wanted to see for the Bronx too.

Months later in June 2015, a small group of community organizers, youth, and faith leaders meet in a South Bronx storefront, at the office of Mothers on the Move, a tenant and community organizing group and member of the BCDI working group. At this “train the trainer” pilot workshop, we (ten people and myself) are asked to play a game called Red versus Blue. The rules are relatively simple: there are two teams, and ten rounds of play. For the first five rounds, no communication is allowed between teams, while in the second five rounds, the teams may communicate across the table (team members may communicate among themselves freely). Each team has a red card and a blue card to draw for each round. If each team draws blue, each team gets five points. If one team draws red and one draws blue, the blue team loses 6 points while the red team gains 8

points. If both teams draw red, they both lose 8 points. The goal is to obtain as many points as possible for your team. We play out the game under these conditions and after ten rounds of play, both teams were tied with 29 points, having broken ranks and played red cards once a piece before we could communicate with each other to ensure that each team would play the blue card.

We return to a circle and the facilitator, the same one from the earlier strategic retreat in February, asks us who won: everyone or no one? Since the result was a draw, we conclude that more or less everyone sort of won, but it's not a particularly convincing or celebratory victory. "Actually," the facilitator informs us, "both teams lost." Out of a possible total of 50 points for each team, we both came up short with 29 because we had tried to gain at the expense of the other team by playing the red card, rather than being satisfied to both gain slightly fewer points together (5 points jointly versus +8/-5).

The game is instructive on the logics of competition and cooperation: teams can grow together modestly, or they can engage in adversarial competition and attempt to grow at the expense of the other. Extreme aggression, however (two red cards), leads to losses for both sides. The game is, in a basic and abstract sense, a model for cooperative and collaborative interaction, rather than adversarial competition. It suggests that if we share information and resources, we can grow and establish trust, rather than attempt to gain only at the expense of others. Like any game, it has rules that are overly simplified if extrapolated to the real world of course, but the simplicity of the rules are no more simplistic than an average set of classical economic assumptions about markets, information, and competition. These are just different rules and assumptions.

The Economic Democracy Training Series is a 10-module set of workshops that introduce participants from diverse backgrounds to fundamental economic concepts such

as those outlined in the vignettes above: markets are social constructs and can be remade, the economy as it exists benefits some more than others, and that we can work together to build trust by framing our actions through a lens of abundance rather than scarcity. Not all of the workshops are so theoretical. In fact, many are deeply engaged with issues of policy and politics, such as organized labor, community asset mapping for economic democracy, economic development tools and subsidies, and neoliberal austerity in the late 20th century and examples of real world alternatives from the United States and abroad.

The Economic Democracy Curriculum and Activities

The idea for the EDTS emerged during the protracted struggle for community benefits on the redevelopment of the Kingsbridge Armory as chronicled above in Chapter 3, as some organizing staff at Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition were trying to think through how to use the opportunity of the debate over community benefits to suggest that neighborhood residents should not only benefit but actually have a say in directing the path of development itself. During this time, two of BCDI's lead coordinators, both community organizers, started to pilot some experimental workshops on asset mapping and markets with members and leaders from the organization. As a BCDI staffer and former staff member of Northwest Bronx described looking back on it,

*So then we started to meet with BCDI [staffed through MIT CoLab], we did the first round of trainings, we'd have about thirty or forty people in a room, we'd talk about what is asset mapping, we'd look at things that exist in the community, what is missing, what could exist. **The momentum developed in those trainings gave [the staff coordinators] the confidence to say it was really something that connected with people.** Good trainers could help it take off. So out of that and other stuff, the development study came out [in addition to the training modules].*

That there was initially no coherent plan for what needed to be included or excluded beyond some sense of discussions around starting from a frame of “asset-based” development, and ideas about community controlled development in urban areas—neither particularly innovative nor groundbreaking in and of themselves. But in the

context of economic crisis and with some inspiration from Spain, Italy, and elsewhere, these threads became something else called economic democracy. The pivot from thinking about “community benefit” toward “community control” and “self-determination” as outlined above, led to an educational program that seeks to move the generic actor “community” from an inert and passive recipient of benefits generated by the private market and (re)distributed by the public sector towards something else, with different actors, different markets, different flows and relationships (Simon 2001).

1. *Introduction to Economic Democracy*
2. *Markets and Economic Actors*
3. *Building Strong Local Economies: Introduction to Economic Development*
4. *Building Strong Local Economies II: Wealth and Ownership*
5. *Economies in Crisis: The Great Recession of 2008*
6. *Economics and Oppression*
7. *Worker Cooperatives and Economic Democracy*
8. *Community Asset Mapping*
9. *Government and Local Economic Development Policy*
10. *Labor Unions*

[Economic Democracy Training Series (2015) Table of Workshops]

As can be seen in the above table, the EDTS, developed over three years and released online in full in 2015, provides a set of tools and exercises for understanding economic democracy that range from the theoretical and the academic to the applied: in the first module, participants discuss basic understandings of what the economy is, using simple exercises such as the “Yesterday Survey,” which is a basic inventory of the activities that people

engage in on a daily basis to meet their needs. Participants are asked to consider which of



those activities are “economic” and which aren’t. Participants then see an image of an iceberg, which is adapted from feminist economist Hazel Henderson’s (1980) work about what is valued in our economic system and what exists beneath the surface (i.e. unmeasured, unvalued work and activity).

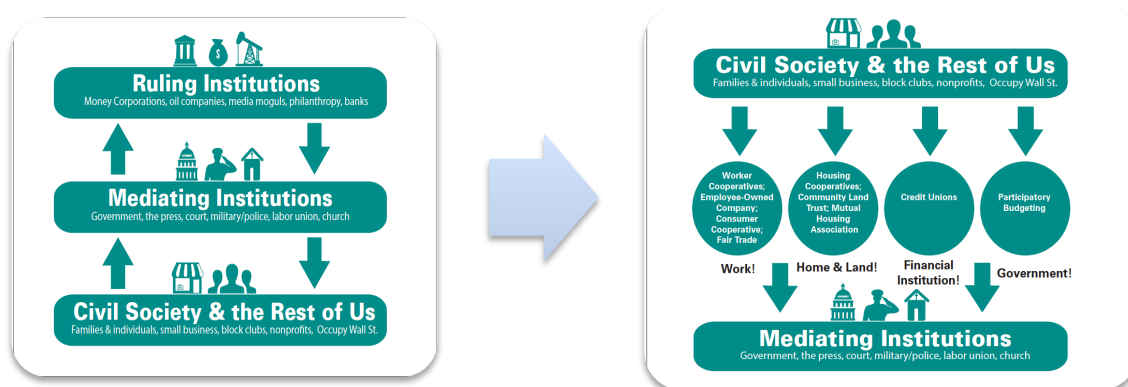
One of the first games participants engage in is a community building exercise using “Lego” blocks. They have to obey certain rules that separate control over the design of the community into hierarchical roles such as “Banker” “Designer” “Builder” and “Consumer”. Participants experience the tension of seeing certain groups treated better and given more access to additional Legos from the facilitator, who communicates primarily with those in the role of Banker and Builder. When the hierarchies are removed and collaboration is able to take place on a more egalitarian basis, participants experience both the opportunities and challenges of engaging in participatory planning processes across even a group with relatively small differences. Groups with fewer Legos see other groups with more pieces benefitting from superior treatment from the facilitators, while groups with more Legos are typically oblivious to the endowments of their less fortunate neighboring peers. In one session that I co-facilitated in April 2018, the only group to request more Lego pieces was the group that had already been given the bag with the most pieces.

As with the modified training I described above, participants are given definitions of the economy that fit these enlarged and diversified understandings that arise from engaging in dialogue and play. The definition of “the economy” that participants debate is the following:

The economy can be defined as a ‘socially constructed system that manages how we as a society distribute and exchange resources’ or ‘the way humankind copes with the problem of provisioning for itself.’

The first module further outlines the boom and bust cycles of the 20th century, outlining the differences between classical, Keynesian, and neoliberal approaches to economic management, and outlines the basic frameworks of alternative formations such as state socialism and social democracy. The definition of economic democracy here, echoing some of what was described above in Chapter 4, begins from a “ruling institutions” framework for society, and then reconstructs those power relationships along the lines of how economic democracy would function. Two separate categories around assets and governance are discussed, and then merged them together.

[From EDTS Module 1 p. 48]



From this reorientation of who should govern and be empowered in society writ large, economic democracy is defined in the following way

Economic democracy seeks to reorient the relationships in the ruling institutions framework. Under economic democracy, the rest of civil society aren't separated from the 'ruling institutions' that control resources. All members of society exert control over resources—land and labor—and therefore do not need separate institutions to 'mediate'. Rather, they create institutions that support democracy decision-making and collective ownership. There two fundamental aspects of economic democracy. The first aspect is collective ownership. The benefits of an asset, such as a business, land, and financial institutions, accrue to the owners. When an asset is collectively owned, the benefits (and the losses) accrue to its owners. Second, economic democracy is rooted in democratic control of the assets. Democratic control means that everyone who collectively owns the assets also makes the decisions over how those assets should be managed. This can take many forms from representative governance, to direct democratic control [p. 25].

From this definition, participants are introduced to Mondragón in Spain as the world's largest worker-owned conglomerate, as well as to local Bronx examples including the largest worker owned business in the United States, Cooperative Homecare Associates (CHCA), Amalgamated Housing Cooperatives, and Bethex Credit Union. Notably, these institutions focus on the ownership and democratic governance of mostly fictitious commodities of land, labor, and money, as Polanyi outlined in his work. The market socialist framework is elaborated upon for an urban and communitarian context, rather than a national macroeconomic framework. When placed in context of the BronXchange vendor platform, one can see how BCDI is attempting to enact and reconstruct new economic agents through education and learning—the multiple self-hoods described by Dewey, Gudeman, and elaborated upon by Callon above in Chapter 2—but also to simultaneously enact new and different economic rules and norms through the social enterprise of the BronXchange. The two pieces work together to reinforce and support the work they do to develop awareness and understandings of how the Bronx might produce, consume, exchange, and live differently.

Most critically, however, these interventions are not left only to individual choices like starting or joining a cooperative or credit union, but are consistently and explicitly connected to collective action, and the role of institutions in forcing and incubating change. This is analogous to the difference between addressing climate change by encouraging individuals to install energy efficient light bulbs and to recycle more, and calling for and pursuing large-scale economic and political action. Doing both is good, but one approach clearly has more potential for impact on its own than the other.

All of the other workshops are similarly elaborate in their work to build on this core definition of economic democracy as outlined in the first workshop, and they each do so by addressing different pieces of economy and society: better businesses help but not

only better businesses, better policies can help, but not only better policies, labor unions have a critical role to place, but again, not only labor unions on their own. The reinforced message in its totality is that no one group in society, not even community organizers and activists, can achieve economic democracy. A better Bronx will need all kinds of people and talents to move effectively towards the vision outlined in the EDTS.

This “we need everyone” approach echoes the point from Chapter 4 describing how BCDI’s goals for developing its Community Enterprise Network focuses on three core skillsets or critical capacities: planners, organizers, and creators. This thinking around cultivating these different skillsets for economic democracy in the Bronx is reflected in the curriculum’s design for different stakeholder groups, not only for organizers.

Learning from Practice, the trip to Mondragón

The delegation to Mondragón in July 2015 provided useful insights in this regard as well, particularly to the centrality of having a shared vision and narrative that is promoted and perpetuated within the network and for outside communications. While in Spain, several working group members strongly emphasized how the role of education was foundational to Mondragón’s project, and underpinned so much of their work. An executive director of a South Bronx CDC saw a similar role for the curriculum in the BCDI network, advocating that EDTS should form a basis for “permeating out” into communities across the Bronx to build “capacities and knowledges” that would be necessary to bring grassroots leadership into the core functions of BCDI’s projects [July 2015 field notes]. Another working group member with a background in labor and worker education said she was heartened to see how deeply integrated workplace education and social and community education were in the region:

I'm excited to see how important education is here at Mondragón, and also in the model we have. There's a broad range of educational institutions where training for economic democracy can occur [in the Bronx/NYC]. It is really important for us also to remember how important learning and reflection are for this work, and for innovation, not just of products, but ideas too [ibid].

An executive director of a community organization in the South Bronx added that what EDTS does for her is work that she would want to do with her members and organizers, but its better to have it being done across the whole Bronx, not only to get folks on the same page but because each organization may not have the money or capacity to do it on their own. This added capacity and connection to other neighborhoods in the Bronx, she concluded: “that’s what this BCDI thing does for me” [ibid]. A participant from another South Bronx community organization, made a similar point after her return from Mondragón:

*I would also say that learning about economic democracy is so valuable because thinking about **replicating Mondragón is difficult and isn't really the goal actually, but the value is in the mechanism of thinking in similar ways, the way they think about supporting elements and integrating the principles of economic democracy into different areas of life, into businesses, education, technology, and having people working at all different levels of those things understand it more.** So for us in the Bronx, getting staffs in our organizations trained and our youth programs across the Bronx, that lots of programs that community organizations are offering already could shift their thinking to the framework of economic democracy, they wouldn't necessarily have to change everything or start new programs or whatever. Understanding and integration, so moving forward the new things that happen can come from that place too.*

At a November 2015 strategy meeting, project prioritization workgroups met for a full day to decide which infrastructure projects were the most important and pressing to move forward on. As noted at the start of this chapter, EDTS and the BronXchange were the most developed projects at the time, and received nearly unanimous support as core components of work for the CEN for the next five years. In the fall of 2015, this is how the EDTS function within the network was described:

EDTS is a grassroots leadership development and training series designed to build strategic capacity among community residents and organizations to better understand their role as pivotal actors in the Bronx economy. This project ultimately aims to build significant education infrastructure for our community enterprise network [CEN], enabling a broad base of residents to understand the plethora of ways they can engage and build shared wealth.

As the group continued to review and formulate their first strategic operational plan in 2016, the EDTS program became expanded out into an Economic Democracy Learning Center (EDLC), which would serve as “community education center” that “supports Bronx leaders as they work to apply economic democracy in their respective communities and work.” Expanding on the first 2016 pilot, each cohort of around a dozen trainers receives a payment stipend of around \$20 per hour for the trainings, which are modified to 5 modules, or 40 hours over five months (for the sake of comparison, a full credit class for one semester at the City University of New York is approximately 45 hours in four months). The 2017 series continues this compressed version, folding the core concepts from the ten original modules into five full-day workshops. The condensed version is outlined with descriptions in a 2017 informational sheet this way:

1. Intro to Economic Democracy

This session introduces the concept of “economic democracy” and encourages participants to challenge the economic paradigms that currently govern our society.

2. Markets and Actors

This workshop introduces participants to markets, different actors in the economy, and the behavior of these actors in the marketplace. The workshop does not support the traditional classical understanding of markets as self-regulating, but instead emphasizes that markets, like the rest of the economy, are socially and politically constructed. The workshop asks participants to consider their roles in the economy and the ways markets can be used to harm or hurt communities and the environment.

3. Intro to Economic Development

This workshop introduces participants to local economic development and provides space for participants to critique current strategies. Using the economic democracy framework, this workshop asks participants to brainstorm proposals for economic development.

4. Community Asset Mapping

This workshop aims to introduce an asset-based approach to community development. An asset-based approach identifies a community’s assets, rather than its needs, to develop social and economic strategies.

5. Wealth and Ownership

This workshop connects participants understanding of concepts previously explored, such as the market and economic actors” to concepts of economic development, capital, and wealth [2017 EDTS Study Guide].

While the above descriptions may seem rather quotidian to scholars of urban planning, geography, or sociology, those who have studied Alinsky-inspired community organizing tactics (which were the foundational tactics deployed by the Northwest Bronx Community Clergy Coalition in the 1970s) might see how different tactics, strategies, and campaign targets and goals might arise from a community organizer or organization trained with the above.

When placed in their context within the larger network, the education and training components serve as a guiding framework for individuals and organizations from different sectors of society to share common language and some basic analysis of the values and vision of economic democracy—as *BCDI* understands it. The participant below focuses on the role the learning center has for both internal and external training and leadership development, as well as a larger institutional focus on the role of education in advancing economic democracy for the Bronx:

The EDLC is targeted for all of the leadership of the core infrastructure of the network. It will be doing the education and leadership development and training and curriculum cultivation, and the training and stuff is targeted internally and externally. When we're talking about EDLC, we're still talking about how we wanted to impact the economy. The functions are familiar, basically what exists now: teaching, training, you know like all that kind of stuff. But we are envisioning it from our perspective, the framework of economic democracy. What's it would be to move us to a new economy. So we're talking about how we want formal education systems to shift-- the kind of shifts that will be needed in the education system for that system to support economic democracy.

A staff member with a community organizing background described the Economic Democracy Learning Center plan as being part of a civic and political action pipeline in ways that fit with established leadership development approaches in community organizing:

EDLC is about absorbing and learning and relates to how you see the world now versus how you could see it. Then the civic action hub would be to activate leaders who want to take what they've learned from EDLC or their own work and

kind of figure out where it fits in with the political realm in terms of building political power. That's about political landscapes, the laws, the elected officials. That would be like a next step after the EDLC, once you have the framework you work to develop power. You take a question or idea or problem [from EDLC] there.

A BCDI board member also with community organizing and advocacy campaign experience elaborated further on that, and described the EDLC as a necessary component of a broader “culture shift”, towards changing “fundamental” attitudes and relationships to the economy. This was a more expansive perspective on the role of the learning center and workshops, though these are not mutually exclusive:

*Another piece is the EDLC, the learning center is for education and training around economic democracy, both the practical and the learning stuff, the best practices. There is the need to do a culture shift in the Bronx. **We need to change the way people relate to the economy in a fundamental basic level.** A lot of that takes time, sustained commitment and education of people so the vision for EDLC is that its a hub for people to learn, to do critical thinking and create different ideas and experiment around the learning pieces of economic democracy in its working forms.*

The idea of culture shift that the participant raises here was a phrase that popped up in a few interviews, but was difficult for participants to define. In contrast to measurable objectives and outcomes, the desire for deeper spiritual and moral transformation as part of the ethos of economic democracy was never really given much texture beyond the yearning horizon of a better world and something that I can perhaps inadequately describe as resembling the ideal of a “beloved community” that arose in civil rights discourses of the 20th century. One of a few BCDI leaders who openly connected her spiritual practice to her organizing, approached the idea of culture shift in terms of larger and more totalizing approaches to organizing:

I started talking to other leaders about a broader conversation about development beyond just the Kingsbridge Armory, this one development site. So I, and at the same time I knew in the sort of like early incarnation of BCDI had talked about how we really need to get our organization behind the vision of the Bronx Cooperative Development Initiative, and the vision of economic democracy was a toolset, like a training series that would actually engage our leaders around a deep conversation about our economy, our political economy. And not just for the purpose of mobilizing people towards legislative efforts to tax the wealthy, which

you know like we've been very much a part of those too. But actually that [approach] doesn't require a deeper knowledge of how local economy comes to be and operates and the relationships within that and how we can create models in our midst of a different kind of economy.

This idea that, as she said above “there has to be something more” than just mobilization for campaign work, is a part of what economic democracy brings to organizing: a different way to “*be together*” (ibid, emphasis in original).

Even in the absence of this spiritual angle, getting the analysis “right” was described as fundamental. A participant framed the matter of political education as a challenge of efficacy for the initiative’s work overall. Not only is the work fundamental in its structural approach, but to not adequately land that analysis with a core group of constituencies would be a critical defect, damaging BCDI’s overall effectiveness:

It's for economic democracy writ large, so not just grassroots leaders but labor, electeds, anchor institution leaders, small business, so forth. Whatever the full plethora of stakeholders in BCDI, they should all be targets for EDLC [and the trainings]. It's also critical because it holds the DNA. If it holds the training of what economic democracy is, it holds what underpins everything together. So its activities need to be focused on the infrastructure pieces to ensure that the innovation factory is giving its participants a deep education in economic democracy while also doing the prototyping and business development. Because if we don't get that political education piece right, there's a very good argument that we'll create some businesses maybe that'll be cool but we'll miss the strategic objective and alignment. [emphasis added]

These two points above demonstrate clearly the centrality of the role of training to the overall network objectives to promote and advance a culture and economy of economic democracy in the Bronx. While this commitment is evident in the interviews I conducted, there is a structural tension that underpins the relationship of EDLC as an accountability mechanism or north star for BCDI’s work: unlike the business development infrastructure projects, it doesn’t generate surpluses that capitalize the network. In other words, even if training activities cover their own costs, in the current conceptual design framework that BCDI uses, the education and training activities are funded through a combination of general operating philanthropy, and in the ten year plan for the future, are capitalized by

surpluses from the other pieces of the network. This structural challenge of funding education and training work is not at all unique to BCDI of course, but it does pose an external threat to their declared intentions to centering the role of political education particularly in relationship to potential investments in projects that would be revenue generating for the network. I address this challenge and these funding relationships in greater detail in Chapter 7 on scalability.

On a related note to this tension about the centrality of economic democracy education is also about communicating that commitment consistently to economic and racial justice and equity to the base of CBOs to which BCDI holds itself accountable. One staffer in particular raised this as a question of trust as it pertains to coalitions and community organizing. He framed the role of the EDLC and the values that it espouses as critical to keeping BCDI accountable to its base in neighborhoods and to other groups doing community and tenant organizing and advocacy:

*...the relationships that BCDI has with local groups has to continue to be a priority. As we get bigger and more sexy and more well known, that idea of credibility is the only reason, the only thing holding negotiating tables together, that can get an agreement to move forward. Once a group loses credibility with people, or any kind of collection of powerful people, even if they come from the community, if they lose contact with the group they represent, they won't be able to sit at the table. if they say we need to do this because ABC, but it doesn't get us XYZ but we can get there if we do this first---that gets frustrating for people because those incremental steps, for people on the ground who have not been engaged in that kind of way, in those structures or roles, aren't gonna trust that process. They shouldn't trust it really. You have to build that over time. That's been built with Northwest Bronx and BCDI, that's been built with MOM [Mothers on the Move], with The Point [CDC]. But its gotta be built with CASA [Community Action for Safe Apartments, a large tenant organizing group in the Bronx], others. The Jerome Ave rezoning may help us get there. **That's not something you can just do once, you have to keep doing it. Organizations bring in new people so those new people have to always re-learn the relationships and the process to keep accountability and trust. The EDLC and the civic action center really are key in having that happen for the entire network. Those two will need to be really effective to keep that kind of trust together.***

Similar to the BCDI staffer who described the Economic Democracy Training Series as holding the “DNA” of BCDI, this staff person sees the role of EDTS and EDLC as supporting trust and transparency as to what BCDI is “all about.” This statement was also

made in connection to this staffer's statement about how the BronXchange being a "sexy" project has attracted the attention and funding of banking institutions that he doesn't believe generally act in the best interests of his communities in the Bronx.

For BCDI to maintain the trust and credibility among the community organizations that comprise a core piece of its base in Bronx neighborhoods, the work the EDTS and EDLC do is critical to navigating the difficult spaces of allegiances and opposition to powerful institutions and interests that often are more frequently the target of community organizing than partners in it. As this staffer is saying in his description of the difficulty of explaining a rationale for doing "ABC" to get to "XYZ" the role of the curriculum and the EDLC is to help communicate how these partnerships are used to fulfill strategic objectives *despite* ideological and political differences, not because economic democracy means being friendly with big banks or elected officials.

This balancing act is made particularly difficult because of the key difference around the relationship to markets that is outlined above in the first vignette: unlike some of "our friends", as the facilitator said above, BCDI believes markets can be "rewired"—the consequences of this difference lead to strategies that push some community organizers and activists past their comfort zones around broadly understood divisions in society between market, state, and community. What this staffer is suggesting is that if BCDI cannot make the case both that economic democracy offers a better path forward, and that the tactics and strategies that BCDI is articulating will help the Bronx get to that place, then it will not be able to sustain relationships of trust in neighborhoods.

Sustaining critical relationships and trust is of course important, but also made more challenging when trying to balance between *institutional* relationships and buy-in versus *individual* relationships and buy-in. How many people constitute organizational buy-in?

A single senior executive? Rank and file members or staff? The nature of relationship building, and its critical value to organizing and fostering a culture, practice, and understanding of economic democracy, is the most intimate, *and least scalable*, aspect of BCDI's work. Addressing this tension between relationship-based organizing and the urgent need for institutional participation and buy-in for BCDI to "scale up" in anything resembling the short or medium term future was addressed from several angles. A BCDI staff member said

There's risk is investing so much in individual leaders. That deep work is necessary but these people are in their own organizations and the whole organization may not even know about BCDI except that one person. Right now if [a top level executive] left their position at [a large Bronx anchor institution] we'd have nothing and no one there. And we don't yet have tools for the individuals to be change agents and bring in others from their organization to the vision in an exciting and clear way. The BronXchange will be one way, sure. But we need them to be purchasing and then use that as a way to engage the whole institution more deeply about being involved in the BCDI network. And then their peers in the Bronx beyond that. If we're gonna build a movement here that's a priority.

The chain of events that this participant lines up as a hypothetical here begin to get at the complexities and challenges of organizing any single organization or institutions, whether by infiltration or external nudging. In other words, the process she is outlining is a process of organizing for economic democracy in a diverse range of organizations and institutions, both public and private. This "long march through the institutions" (Marcuse 2014) seems to adequately grasp the challenge at hand, but BCDI often talks about the urgency of their work, particularly in the context of real estate development and gentrification, as was outlined in Chapter 3. This dueling tension of patience and urgency notwithstanding, the more immediate point to make is that BCDI takes the organizer's mindset and mentality and applies it not only to the vocation of community organizing but to each of the institutional and professional fields in which it seeks to engage and infiltrate through its framework of economic democracy. In fact, one of the few staff and board members at this stage without any background in community organizing, made a

special note about the effectiveness of this approach compared to what she had been taught in her master's program in urban planning:

I've seen more how integral community organizing is to actually implementing [economic democracy]. In theoretical discussions it's just like you do something and then people want to be owners! But then when you spend three years developing EDTS and over a year formalizing and all that stuff, plus the investment of bringing people to Spain, that's a big investment. People outside BCDI might think well that's a lot to spend on a trip. But the education, the relationships, moving people's thought processes, is really where you need to spend so much energy. Eventually maybe you can implement something together but there's so much groundwork to lay first. So that's a shift in my thinking about how you get to [building] economic democracy.

This discussion of organizing and marching through institutions prompts the obvious question about the challenge, feasibility, or possibility, of transforming an organization or institution that was not created to promote and advance an analysis of economic democracy. In the section that follows, I look at how BCDI reconciles this tension in its approach, and how participants balanced the desire for deep and full transformation with incremental steps and achievable goals. This is particularly evident in the path that the Northwest Bronx took in adapting economic democracy as an organizational frame for their work, shifting decades of organizing practice towards a new aspirational horizon.

Economic Democracy and the Transformation of Community Organizing

It is bold to assert that a training curriculum can transform not just individuals but organizations. For this bold claim BCDI draws not from theory but rather from evidence and experience working with the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition. The Coalition, founded in the mid 1970s, is a longstanding Bronx community organizing institution that has trained leaders and organizers for decades, and was a lead organization advocating for the Community Reinvestment Act in the 1970s, as well as predatory lending, tenant harassment, school-to-prison pipeline, environmental racism, and many other issue areas (Tang 2013, Groarke 2004). Over the course of several years,

their engagement with what became BCDI and what became the EDTS was instrumental in providing a political framework that led them to change their mission statement and pursue economic democracy training for their staff, board, and member leaders.

The years between 2011 and 2013 were filled with organizational transformation for NWBCCC, occurring alongside the major Kingsbridge Armory campaign:

so in 2012, we were going through a strategic planning process and in that strategic planning process we really, and since the [first economic democracy] training was in 2011,...we decided that since we just went through this transformative [training] experience that, how do we incorporate that into our strategic planning process? So that's when we changed our mission, and the next four years our focus [was] on continuing this traditional organizing, but also creating new models, alternative models, that incorporate economic democracy both embedding in our campaigns but also creating actual models. Which we weren't really doing before. We did it back in the day, I mean that's not true, we were building institutions but we were building them to, like, go off and do their own thing, like Fordham Bedford Housing Corporation, University Neighborhood Housing Program, like there's a bunch of different groups that we were creating but then they would go off and do their own thing."

There is an association occurring here between how she envisions the relationship between NWBCCC and BCDI, and how she connects that relationship to the historic lineage of spinoff entities and projects of the Coalition's four decades of work. Several other interviewees with past or current affiliations to the Coalition also made connections between the current work of BCDI and the previous successes and failures of the Coalition to build out additional community-owned institutions such as schools, credit unions, and affordable housing. The mixed track-record of success and failures of each of these efforts was occasionally alluded to as cautionary tale for BCDI but also deployed in a hopeful manner, suggesting that what BCDI was doing was both new and exciting but also had precedent and was therefore also a logical step worth the risks and effort involved to see it get off the ground. As will be detailed below the key difference,

emerging from the lessons of Northwest Bronx's history spinning off other community institutions, is that BCDI's projects would all continue to be governed under the same community-based accountability structure, rather than spun off with separate governing bodies no longer accountable to the same organizers and neighborhood leaders that control NWBCCC.

In the midst of this institutional transformation is also a series of individual ones as well. As two BCDI board members recounted to me, their attachment and desire to pursue the framework of economic democracy was grounded in the kind of relational approach that BCDI took to leadership development, as well as a more sophisticated analysis of the economy, and the role of everyday people in it:

*We went through Economic Democracy 101 and looked at models at other parts of the country and the globe, we did asset mapping, and a deeper dive into economic development and sort of theories that govern business as usual—economic development as usual. There was a real, challenge and opportunity, an excitement but also a real struggle. **There was a role for people beyond just their mobilization power, their power to convene other people for the sake of doing collective direct actions. There was a tension and excitement too about markets and economic actors. You know, it was very empowering for people to be seeing 'this is how markets and how economic actors are constructed in our current context and these are how elsewhere they have been deconstructed, reconstructed in a system that actually serves the collective in a more powerful way.'** But it was really hard for people to think about where do we begin here, and also like where we could get on our campaigns, how do we actually even start to do that? And it's something that we're still struggling with now. I think we very much see our leaders continuing to be formed by the training.*

A second board member added more in this vein of connecting learning to action, and particularly, how the EDTS framework provided opportunities for acting in different ways than other forms of training have typically done:

*We're in conversations now with BCDI about wanting to do a series with our staff as well--we have twelve organizing staff, so to do it with we people I think would reinvigorate that back into the organization and allow us to deepen the work that we're doing on our campaigns. And then I think there's been a real challenge in getting people engaged beyond one or two people versus our entire organization being invested. I guess if I had to synthesize **I think the framework has really made clear that we are actually really responsible for the economy, not just to change bad behavior but to actually create and build the economy, and that is a***

shift that I think before our people didn't think there was a place for us in our economy. We didn't understand it, we don't know how it works, you know, you don't have the capacity to engage in it meaningfully. And I think the economic democracy training series, that allowed us to understand it and engage with it but also there's one step after that there's responsibility for you to, like, you can't complain about our people being poor and not dig in and do something about it and build the alternative that you want.

Having worked with Northwest Bronx on the first piece of an organizational transformation, the question for the training series and the Learning Center as a core project is not just how to deepen the analysis of core partners but to expand the reach and scope of BCDI's analysis of economic democracy for the Bronx. As one board member said:

I think the question [for the Learning Center] is scaling it up. How does it go from community partners that are staffed permeating out to members, how does it go to broader community, how do we also move it into the people that are some of its decision makers now. So that means do we think about doing EDLC with elected officials and agencies and their staff? And also what political pressure would it take for them to go through that sort of thing, or is there a way to do the it that [elected officials] could potentially absorb it without having to go through four weeks of training, and what would that mean? But I do think it has the ability to help people shift. The question for me is then how do we permeate that further out as opposed to keeping it within the people who have been touched by it currently.

While I address the challenges of scale in greater depth in the following chapter, it is worth pausing for a moment to consider what scaling up a training curriculum might look like in practice when so much emphasis is placed on relationship building, the sophistication and depth of the analysis, and a pivot away from transactional relationships across diverse stakeholders. These values are in tension with the need for scale and the urgency of the challenges and task at hand. In the following chapter I delve into these dynamics in much greater detail, but here I offer concluding thoughts on the role of education and training in the BCDI network.

Conclusions

Just as the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative began, like BCDI, with the help of an MIT urban planning studio class, so too does BCDI follow in the footsteps of its forebears with the development of its curriculum for economic democracy. As was outlined in Chapter 2 and will be referenced again in Chapter 8, the Chicago-based Local Industrial Retention Initiative, which began as a partnership of community development and economic development organizations aligned with Mayor Harold Washington, developed a training curriculum as one of their first steps towards building a mobilized base for more neighborhood development and equity (Rast 2005). The connection of the training to projects beyond organizing and agitation for policy change helps differentiate BCDI from other popular education curricula for economic justice. Embedded in the mission and vision of BCDI is that the training is not only for organizers and grassroots leadership, or only for organized labor, or only for any one stakeholder group. As several of the interviewees noted, the project of economic democracy needs people from all walks of life. The curriculum is designed so that it can move diverse groups of people from where they are at towards a common set of languages and understandings to engage in a project of building economic democracy in the part (literally and metaphorically) of the world where they already live and work. In this sense, the EDTS serves an internal “DNA” function as described above, but also an external function for building a more supportive environment for the ideas, cultures, and practices of economic democracy as BCDI understands it. If the BronXchange is primarily business development infrastructure, then EDLC is primarily cultural and ideological infrastructure.

Addressing the role and function of training and education also brings up the broader strategic and tactical questions of how to shift institutions. Several interviewees noted that the strength of any organization’s analysis or attachment to pursuing greater understanding of economic democracy as a framework for their work was directly linked to the extent to which there was a broad base beyond one single champion. As the

participant noted in the final interview excerpt above, this makes for difficult decisions around who to prioritize for workshops and trainings. Do you pursue a broad but shallow base in diverse arenas, or a deeper engagement with one stakeholder group, such as the grassroots base of BCDI's core membership organizations? For each set of institutions—for example, organized labor, local government, community, business, and workforce development practitioners, business, anchors—there are some overlapping opportunities and challenges, some different.

Training a cohort of leaders in each of these areas of society is powerful as a starting point, but BCDI's role going forward clearly will have to include walking those initial catalytic change agents through the ongoing process of pushing their own institutional contexts towards understanding and practicing economic democracy. This reaches well above a technical assistance role and into organizing partnerships across varying levels of seniority, tenure, and vision that those individuals hold in their organizations and field. This means that selecting for participants based on a priority of maximizing strategic impact may develop a tendency towards vanguardism and elitism: in other words, that the training is only good for certain kinds of people in certain contexts or institutions and with relatively high power positions or influence. This tension of scarcity and strategy could plausibly come up against values for training that focuses on the “grassroots” of the Bronx and building out a more visible base of non-elite validators for the language and frameworks of economic democracy.

As noted in the methods section of chapter 2, in January of 2018 I was hired by BCDI to be the Director of the Economic Democracy Learning Center. This was after I had “completed” my data collection but before I had finished writing up the entire dissertation. While I address the reliability and methodological dynamics of this change in Chapter 2, it is worth expanding in this chapter on the practical implications of this

event for BCDI's work, particularly for the Economic Democracy Learning Center. In early February 2018, I spent about five hours in a strategy session with BCDI staff and board members learning more about the current status of the EDLC, and where some of my first tasks would take me. In addition to leading a training for about 25-30 CBO staff within the first few months of taking the job (this is the staff training referenced in the interview above), the other core responsibilities for the first year were to develop a program design for how the EDLC, now under my direction, should interact with the rest of the network components, and lastly, to collaboratively redevelop and revise the economic democracy curriculum from top to bottom with the other staff and board members of BCDI. Joining the staff of BCDI was an active invitation to become a key protagonist in attempting to balance, address, and reconcile these above tensions of strategy in practice. For the foreseeable future, the relationship of how the EDLC engages with these questions of who to train and why, have now become a part of my daily life in a new and different context than only as a participant-observer of these activities.

This chapter picked up on some of the themes of organizing and the vision and understanding of economic democracy that I discussed earlier in chapter 4. In the next chapter, I turn back to more of the business development infrastructure of that BCDI is developing, and in so doing revisit some of the tensions around scale alluded to in Chapter 5.

Chapter VII: Enterprise, Capital, and Scale

This dual status of thriving but marginal is not sustainable, and sooner or later, the new institutional framework that these organizations are building will eventually need to confront the hegemonic political economy if it is going to construct an alternative to that hegemony. -- DeFilippis 1999 p. 986

All these big things, the big things that are gonna go to scale, whatever, they can't do it without us, you know, down here, the little organizations. If we're not good, they're not good. They can't do what they're gonna do. The big stuff up there is not healthy if we're not healthy down here at the grassroots.

–BCDI Board Member (2017)

This chapter builds on BCDI's approach to, and analysis of, the economy in the Bronx. I outline and analyze two additional pieces of BCDI's core infrastructure plan, the Bronx Innovation Factory (BXIF), a digital fabrication and business incubation and innovation center, and the Bronx Fund, a multipurpose philanthropic, real estate, and business investment fund designed to capitalize other pieces of the Network over time, providing independence from philanthropy and financial sustainability for the network's growth and operations. Thematically, I tie these two infrastructure pieces together through the framework of "scalability," a concept that has gained increasing traction and deployment in the field of social enterprise, community and economic development, cooperative enterprise, and philanthropy (Powers 2018).

In this chapter, and in BCDI's work, scalability applies both to the ability of individual businesses to grow, but it also more primarily refers to scale and scalability as elements of organizational form and their relationships to capital and state formation and legibility (Latour and Callon 1981; Tsing 2012; Dinerstein 2014; Vasquez 2011; including gendered divisions, see Hudson 2018). This includes scale appearing in various permutations as noun and verb indicating characteristics of transformation and/or growth, as well as the array of spatial, prepositional, organizational, and topological metaphors I outlined in depth in Chapter 2. BCDI leaders, in interviews and written materials

consistently reference to building a network for “at scale,” and “scalable” infrastructure and business models. My interviews with BCDI staff, board, and partners, detailed below in this chapter reveal a diversity of viewpoints on the nature of scale, its feasibility, its desirability, and what its observable or recognizable characteristics might be. This chapter shows that these understandings of scale are critical to how BCDI envisions and implements these two projects, since in the current iteration of BCDI’s operational plan, these two pieces of infrastructure are the most capital intensive components of BCDI’s infrastructure. Along with the BronXchange vendor platform outlined in Chapter 5, they are also the components most necessary for capitalizing the entire network through the surpluses that they will (in theory) generate. In this chapter, three core points emerge:

- 1) There is an implicit and explicit understanding across BCDI’s leadership that scale and democracy are inversely related. In other words, scalability is *simultaneously necessary, desirable, and dangerous*.
- 2) Secondly, as suggested by the epigraph from the board member at the start of this chapter, there is an uneven but prevailing understanding that the success of BCDI as a project for economic democracy and broader social and political transformation rests on the maintenance of a healthy balance of power between the scalable and nonscalable components of infrastructure in its network. Again, restated, this means that the components of infrastructure that rely on standardization, economies of scale, and uniformity—*nonsoels* such as policies and regulations, enterprises formations, and financial products and entities—can successfully coexist with the components of infrastructure that derive strength and power from their uniqueness, local knowledge, diversity, creativity, care, and patience. This includes things that cannot be easily packaged, replicated, and quantified: popular education, leadership development, awareness of need for change and reform within the network, and the cultivation of a deeply shared vision.⁴⁵
- 3) The third and final point flows from this second point: there is a shared sensibility that operating “at scale” for BCDI necessarily means impacts that are broadly distributed across the arenas in which BCDI is working: economic development, finance business, real estate labor, politics, and community organizing. If BCDI obtains results or impact in one of these areas but not the others, there seems to be a clear sense that this is not scale. In this understanding, scale is thus emphatically both a *process* and a *relation*, and not

⁴⁵ It is worth noting the gendered division of labor between these forms of infrastructure: the maleness of quantitative and replicable and “real stuff” of the economy and production, counterpoised with the feminized patience, nurturing work of developing and sustaining relationships and education of individual leaders. A fuller and interrogation of the theoretical and practical of this dynamic would be its own chapter, but see Hudson 2018 for an example of this kind of analysis of cooperative development and gendered politics of the solidarity economy.

necessarily a quantifiable destination point or percentage. To be clear, it is not necessarily exclusive of these characteristics either.

Below I begin with the BXIF and follow with a section on the Bronx Fund, followed by a synthesis and conclusions about scalability and economic democracy in this case.

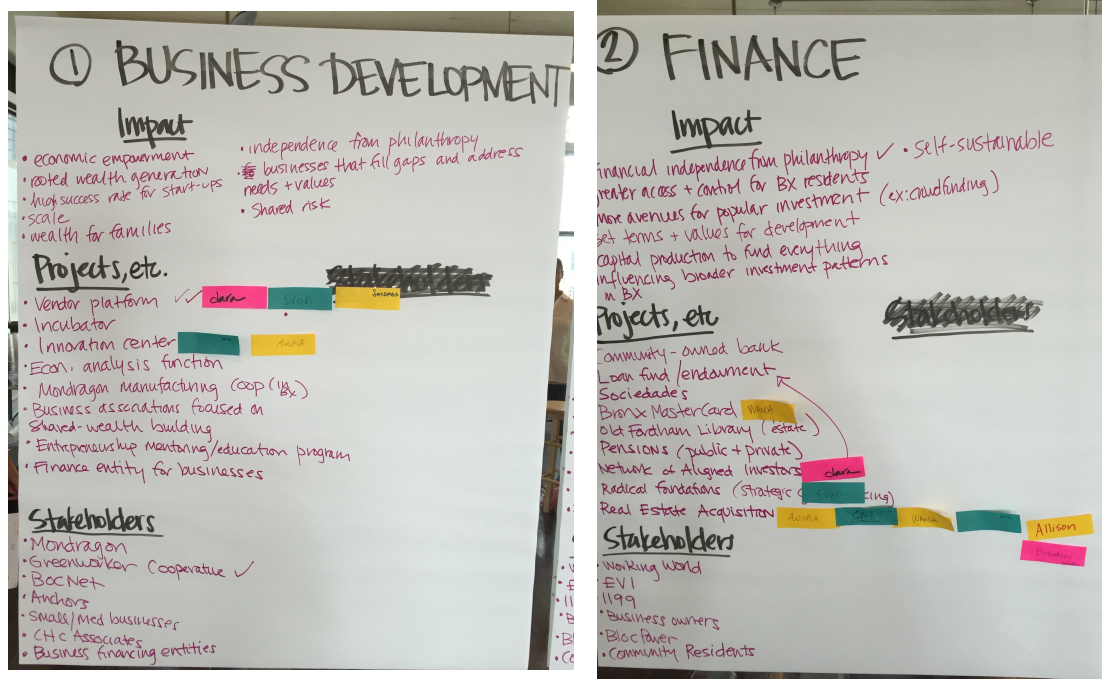
Business Development and the BXIF

The idea for the Innovation Factory, or even more broadly, a space for incubating and launching new businesses, was so fundamental to the vision of BCDI from the beginning that its place within the network changed periodically only slightly but never disappeared or changed or was challenged in any meaningful way. So where did the idea for this space originate? An advanced technology space for youth and entrepreneurs came about in a period well before the first iterations of BCDI began circulating, in the context of youth organizing in the Northwest Bronx.

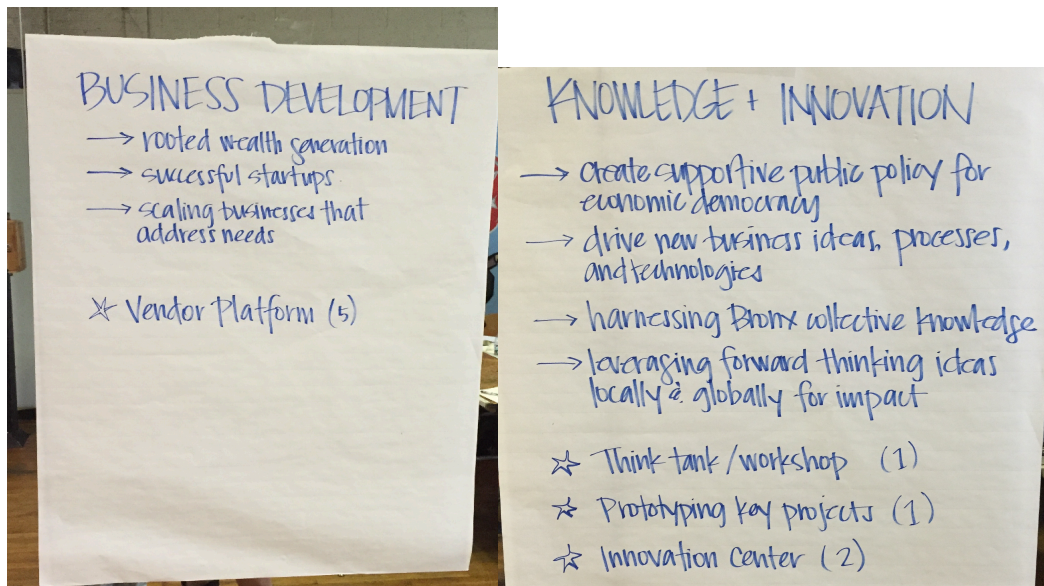
The innovation center honestly started as a dream of young people in [the northwest Bronx] around creating, creating Bronx exchanges—much like the name that was chosen for the platform [laughs]. They created a youth program called Bronx Exchanges that had a larger vision for our Tech Lab that would be a space for young people to come and learn and experiment with all of these different skills around art and technology, and was actually a project that [several BCDI board and staff members] were deeply involved in when they were youth leaders. So it's grown from merging with the visions of our other partners and being inspired by the [Bilbao] innovation factory of Mondragón. So I associate it with young people but I don't think it was inherently limited to that, but [a place] where folks can come and experiment with different sorts of technologies and be able to incubate new businesses and have a collective space to share resources and become inspired and [have] the technical support and the tools to be able to innovate.

From an experimental and ambitious dream of Bronx youth, the conceptual framework for the Innovation Factory evolved over time to draw on several existing models for social enterprise incubation and development, and digital fabrication spaces in the United States and globally. In the 2015 formalization process, the goal of developing business incubation and development capacity took a few different forms, particularly in the fall after the group returned from Mondragón having seen several of the main Mondragón

institutions for business development. BCDI formalization meetings were filled with ideas and projects in the months following the trip, as the following collaboration boards show from the time (fig 7.1 and 7.2 below).



The two posters above, made during the September 2015 retreat, demonstrate a push towards the integration of business development and finance projects, particularly with the aim of generating and controlling revenues for the goal of gaining independence from philanthropy. This goal is echoed repeatedly in strategic retreats and in interviews and cannot be overstated. As the October retreat posters show below, scalability of business development is also a key driving focus of the work, with the vendor platform being seen as the main infrastructure component to support those goals (photo left, below). In this period, the Innovation factory was categorized separately under the “knowledge and innovation” section, thereby connecting the Innovation Factory more to long-term planning new ideas both in terms of business and policy (Figs 7.3 and Figs 7.4 below).



By November 2015, near the conclusion of the formalization process, the Innovation Factory and Vendor platform were connected as core business development infrastructure for the network. As I show in the next section, the understanding and theorization about the role of the Bronx Fund changed throughout this process as well.

In 2016 and into 2017, after the formalization process concluded, this was how BCDI described the Innovation Factory concept and its implementation:

In five years, the Bronx Innovation Factory will be a fully operational community center, functioning under the principles of economic democracy, dedicated to the unfolding of Bronxites' talents, capacities and aspirations in the areas of entrepreneurship, product design, and manufacturing. In addition, the first BXIF alumni will be working in the Bronx, building a community with common values, thus changing the landscape of innovation and manufacturing in the borough. And finally, the Shared Manufacturing Space will be in the planning phase. This facility will lower the costs of operation of manufacturing enterprises by sharing digital and physical Infrastructure, providing opportunities to explore synergies between small manufacturing enterprises and cooperatives, and offering a home for Bronx enterprises after their departure from the BXIF. (BCDI Operational Plan 2017)

The ultimate product here is in many ways a synthesis of the themes of innovation, creativity, and business development and revenue generation outlined during the 2015 formalization period. The inspiration for this kind of multi-faceted business development and social entrepreneurial space draws on a few contemporary trends in urban economic

development, including specific spaces that exist in cities around the world. These projects include the MIT Fab Lab model (Stacey 2014), Chicago's Manufacturing Renaissance Council (Lewis and Swinney 2008; Sirkin et al 2013), New York City's Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center (Muessig 2013; Freidman 2009), and Bilbao's Innovation Factory (Learning, Innovation, Entrepreneurship 2018). The Bilbao Innovation Factory having such a similar name is no coincidence, as it was one of the sites that the Bronx delegation visited in July 2015. Similarly to the description of the BXIF concept, the Bilbao Innovation factory describes itself as

A pioneering learning, innovation, and entrepreneurship project in Bilbao, Spain, managed by Mondragon University and in cooperation with the Municipality of Bilbao. It brings together in one space and in complete coordination, university education and a community of people who provide innovative business initiatives. It creates the necessary conditions to allow learning, creativity, and collaboration between them to occur in a natural way. The enabling environment thus promotes the development of new business projects (BBF n.d.; translated from original Basque).

The Innovation Factory in 2018 was still in pilot stages, with only about 10% of its interim goal of 15,000 square feet of space and equipment. Nevertheless it does have a few promising foundational components. BCDI has executed a memorandum of understanding with LKS, the management consulting arm of Mondragón Corporation to develop plans for the innovation factory, bringing resources and technical knowhow to the project. There are also capital funds in the six figures from the New York City Council in the pipeline for fiscal year 2020 to procure the initial technology and equipment for the built out version of the digital fabrication space.

In this context, what does it mean to build principles of economic democracy into the foundation of a business incubator if the businesses themselves aren't necessarily going to be uniformly structured as cooperative, worker owned enterprises? As one BCDI external partner noted after the visit to the Bilbao factory on the July 2015 trip, the mechanism that makes it different is that the value created doesn't just accrue back to some venture capitalists as in a traditional accelerator or incubation space. Like the

nonprofit steward that GMDC in Greenpoint, the idea, he said, for the Bronx Innovation Factory is to be “Sort of like a building or ladder that helps move pieces along or up, particularly in the business sense. You’d also be signing an agreement to deliver back some percent of profits back to funding more pieces [of infrastructure]” (Mondragón field notes). In this case, the value capture from successful businesses launched would be distributed throughout the network not only to seed more businesses but also to contribute to Economic Democracy training, tenant and community organizing, grassroots policy development, and the other infrastructure components throughout the network. There is also a governance component, in which the center’s governance structure is intentionally designed to represent the leadership of those traditionally underrepresented and excluded from advanced manufacturing and digital fabrication spaces: women, youth, and people of color (“BXIF - About” n.d.)

BCDI’s approach to business development, like their approach to economic democracy and to procurement through the BronXchange platform, is somewhat, although not entirely, agnostic towards the specific organizational or legal formation of the business. This agnosticism arises as a point of tension with some in the cooperative business and solidarity economy movements in New York City and nationally. There are legitimate concerns about the prominent role that the “fetishism of organizational form” (Harvey 2010) plays in cooperative and community development in the United States.⁴⁶ Instead of

⁴⁶ The full quote here is valuable and reflects back on the shadowboxing debate between Harvey and Springer outlined in Chapter 2: “Anarchists, autonomists, environmentalists, solidarity economy groups, traditional left revolutionary parties, reformist NGO’s and social democrats, trade unions, institutionalists, social movements of many different stripes, all have their favored and exclusionary rules of organization often derived from abstract principles and sometime exclusionary views as to who might be the principle agent sparking social revolution. There is some serious barrier to the creation of some overarching umbrella organization on the left that can internalize difference but take on the global problems that confront use. Some groups, for example, abjure any form of organization that smacks of hierarchy. But Elinor Ostrom’s study of common property practices shows that the only form of democratic management that works when

fixation on any specific formation, such as a worker cooperative, to the exclusion of others, BCDI focuses on a broader set of shared values and outcomes that are inclusive of cooperatives but not exclusive of traditionally structured corporate forms—if those enterprises share core values of equity and democracy and return revenue and/or profit shares back into the network. As outlined in Chapter 5 on the metrics for “high-road” businesses, this can include individual sole proprietorships, especially in low-income and immigrant communities in the Bronx, as well as businesses that provide training opportunities, promote the health, wealth, and dignity of their workers and their communities, and pursue ecological practices that actively promote physical and environmental health.⁴⁷

Additionally, the structure of the services and the Business Assessment Tool (BAT, described in Chapter 5) that the BronXchange provides help businesses see the advantages to converting to employee ownership or mutualizing into a cooperative, and connect them with financing and other technical assistance partners to do so. Of course worker cooperatives can meet many if not all of these benchmarks, but in the absence of critical mass or coherent enabling legislation for their existence in New York State (among many other states), BCDI’s prioritization of building out a network of economic infrastructure “at scale” meant, in their perspective, that pluralism and an agnostic approach was necessary for growth and scalability in the short and medium term.

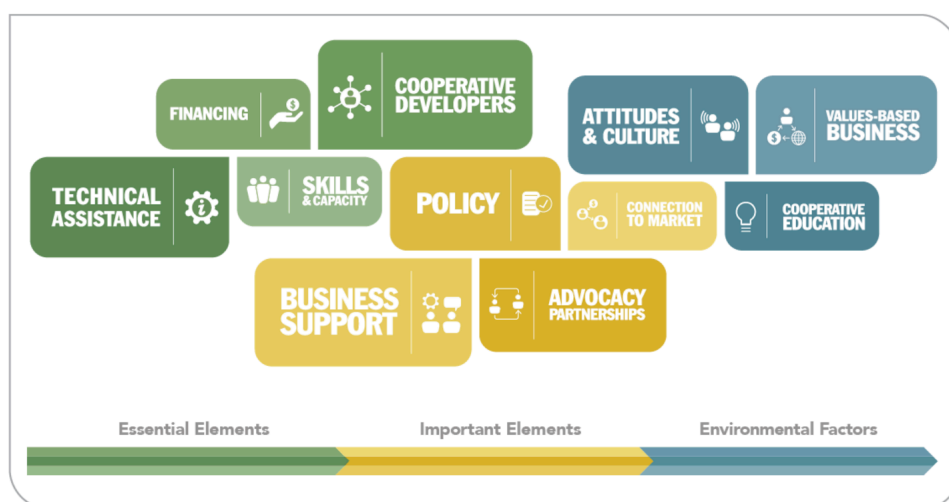
Yet as many cooperative business and development advocates will argue, cooperatives are not only a certain type of business structure but actually an alternative enterprise formation that doesn’t just distribute resources more equitably or operate more

populations of more than a few hundred people are involved, is a nested hierarchy of decision making.”

⁴⁷ Weems and Randolph (2001) note, many of these principles have been conflated with varieties of “black capitalism” for decades in urban economic development practice.

democratically, but also contributes to human and social development (Majee and Hoyt 2011; Nembhard 2014). The existing state of cooperative development in New York City however, is in some ways a mixed bag of expanding opportunities and potential, alongside missed opportunities, lack of coherent strategy, and mediocre results. As Dawson notes, “so far, most of the resulting jobs [from the New York City Council \$3 million investment] are part-time with few benefits—with incomes averaging \$12,000 annually” (Dawson 2017 p. 1).

In light of these results, practitioners in the field have deployed resources into research and mapping the field of small business development and social entrepreneurship onto the world of worker cooperative development in a group of large and mid-size cities across the country where a new burst of public and private resources have been mobilized to support worker owned businesses—specifically and particularly in low-income urban communities of color. I reviewed these dynamics in Chapter 2 in greater detail, but a few key points emerge again here with reference to BCDI’s approach to business development. In New York City, Hoover and Abell “ecosystem factors” map (2016) looks like this:



This Ecosystem framework is somewhat different as a path to worker-ownership at scale from a framework developed in Massachusetts by the Solidarity Economy Initiative (SEI), which again, I reviewed and contrasted with the ecosystem report in Chapter 2 (Loh and Jimenez 2017).

These two reports, published approximately one year apart, take different approaches towards “scale” and scalability but they share a commitment to dramatically increasing the number and demographic characteristics of owners of cooperative enterprises in the United States—values that BCDI shares through their framework of economic democracy. They share a general set of assumptions about what is required: knowledge and proficiency in basic business practices, access to market opportunities, an advocacy environment for favorable conditions, and a broader social milieu that tolerates, accepts, or encourages enterprises that have other motivations besides profits for owners and investors. Certainly, in one respect, by prioritizing the political education through the economic democracy learning center and training curriculum, BCDI could be seen as tacking more towards the Solidarity Economy/political economy framework of the SEI in Massachusetts in terms of placing business development in the context of political mobilization for economic transformation.

Alternatively, by prioritizing the BronXchange as a market facilitator and business support service to level the playing field for small and local businesses, BCDI appears to be tacking closer to the Broad-Based Ownership Ecosystem approach, but in a slightly modified form. Rather than focusing on incubating businesses directly to connect with anchor institutions (the “Evergreen” model, as described in Chapter 2), they are back-loading infrastructure that is more intermediary than “essential” (at least according to the Ecosystem framework). Building the market facilitating infrastructure of the BronXchange and the educational infrastructure of the training curriculum before the

innovation factory amounts to flipping the directionality of the arrow in the Ecosystem diagram above—practically a reversal of the logic model and theory of change outlined in the Ecosystem framework. This approach acknowledges, even relies upon, implicit and explicit interdependence with other cooperative business development entities being available and interested in seizing opportunities for conversion and incubation work with Bronx based entrepreneurs and business owners. As of 2018, BCDI has engaged in such a technical assistance and financial assistance relationship with The Working World, an international cooperative developer and CDFI based in Central America and New York City with a successful track record of cooperative enterprise development.

Yet BCDI's approach to building shared wealth and ownership in the Bronx by focusing on outcomes while adhering to relative agnosticism about the specific formation of the enterprises in question also tethers them closer to the more *realpolitik* perspective of the "Broad-Based Ownership Ecosystem" framework from Abell and Hoover. This approach recognizes that in anything resembling the short or even medium term, worker owned businesses *per se* will continue to occupy an infinitesimally small corner of the universe of small and medium businesses in the United States. The Ecosystem approach, like BCDI, promotes a big-tent of business structures and formations that attend to the quality and quantity of equity stake and voice in the enterprise in conditions that exist presently. As such, some deeper aspects of transformational potential and cooperative values is foregone in the interests of building capacity and an advocacy coalition with partners in the existing political infrastructure of cities, rather than a prefiguration of a solidarity economy political coalition.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ It should be noted that there are some examples of this pre-figurative approach in existence around the US, often modeled on the examples of the Montreal workshop for the social/solidarity economy. One such example, though by no means the only one, is the Cooperative Economics Alliance of New York City (CEANYC), a solidarity

An illustrative moment for these tensions occurred during the July 2015 Mondragón trip. As elaborated on in Chapter 4, there was tension and debate about the significance of the trip not being focused exclusively on supporting and growing worker cooperatives in the Bronx—the idea of an “ecosystem” was understood by some of the worker owners of small and micro-businesses as a dilution of the idea of economic democracy, not a broadly strategic approach to its growth and promulgation in the Bronx. The debate also took on the issue of scale, in which fears arose that the smallest businesses that are worker-owned in the Bronx would be rendered invisible by a focus on scale and scalability. “We all start small”, said a cooperative entrepreneur from the Bronx, referencing an interpreter’s cooperative that was incubated by Green Worker Cooperatives in the Bronx and had gone from three to eight worker owners in recent years (field notes). Another worker-owner from a small cooperative in the Bronx said in a facilitated session for thinking about the Mondragón model in the Bronx that she didn’t see

*where worker coops fit as they exist right now. Because its different from a **five hundred person factory**. So yes lets talk with existing business owners but there’s no way that a small worker-owned co-op can compete with bigger firms. A bakery of five people or cleaning company of eleven women can’t clean a hospital (field notes; emphasis added).*

This critique on one level makes sense: it is true that the plethora of micro and small cooperatives that currently exist in the Bronx and in New York City are not readily equipped to grow to providing institutional goods and services. They may never be, either by choice or because of the nature of their business. And yet this is precisely the point of the ecosystem approach: to focus on what is needed to lift existing businesses to that point, or to help create businesses that can and will serve those larger purchasers if the smaller cooperative businesses can’t or won’t. By design, the ecosystem and

infrastructure approaches of DAWI and BCDI don't preclude assistance for small and micro cooperatives. The concern from the existing stakeholders, however, is about the implications in *practice*, not design. In practice, the choice to pursue scale and scalability is seen as a rejection of the social and economic value of small cooperatives, and a personal affront to the efforts of those entrepreneurs to succeed in the competitive small business climate of New York City. While these businesses clearly do not have much economic impact by virtue of their size, they are quite impactful to the people who sustain them as their livelihood.

This tension between neighborhood-based-and-serving businesses designed to meet a local or neighborhood need on one hand, and scalable enterprises on the other hand, relates back to the theoretical discussion on the coexistence between scalable and nonscalable worlds, and how often they are seen as exclusive or oppositional rather than interdependent. As it appeared in several interviews, attempting to bridge this divide is in some ways one of the purposes of attempting to incubate the BronXchange and the Innovation Factory in tandem with one another. A senior staff member of BCDI explained the Innovation Factory this way:

The innovation factory is about localizing production. Again, doing that in a viable way. Taking advantage of technology, of the best in entrepreneurial teaching and business development, while deeply baking in community wealth building, shared wealth frameworks. Besides the overall capstone of building out local production capacity, it is also bringing together the toolsets around tech, business, and political education. Those two then play together [BXIF and Bronxchange] quite explicitly. The idea is that the platform is up and running, localizing supply chains, you are doing some things that are helpful for the innovation factory as an incubator. You can identify gaps with the platform data about what isn't being made here in the Bronx that could be. And organizing the relationships to be able to facilitate those deals. Have some relationships to help institutions to see that they could move purchasing to viable local businesses. That's a good way to start a business, with procurement deals on the table.

The relative clarity of the connection here in some ways dispels the concerns of the tensions that arose in Mondragón, but not completely. For example, the vast majority of micro cooperatives incubated in the Bronx, and indeed all of the worker owned

businesses in New York City, are in services not manufacturing (unless manufacturing is generously expanded to include food processing enterprises and meal preparation). While this allows for some of these businesses to grow and intersect with procurement and nonprofit purchasing, services generally are not yielding the kinds of surpluses that can meaningfully contribute to business support networks and the kind of political economic infrastructure that BCDI envisions (see also Dawson 2017 for this as well). While cooperativizing service industry jobs results in better workplace conditions and wages, the improvement in these also necessarily lowers the margins of surpluses generated. This means that as a whole, consumer-related services alone cannot robustly contribute to capitalizing a broader enterprise network with budget trajectories in the millions of dollars like that of BCDI. This is also disconcerting because of the high costs of operating a large-scale economic development network in New York City, where costs of land and labor are significantly higher than many other regions in the United States. Yet at the same time, at the intersections of automation and offshoring, these kinds of service jobs are precisely the kinds of jobs (services and care work in particular) that are on the rise in the United States (Comen and Stebbins 2019).

When this concern about manufacturing vis-à-vis services is incorporated, it does raise the question as to where the existing micro business, social entrepreneurship, and cooperative development infrastructure fits in with BCDI's vision, if it does fit in at all. To recall the discussion earlier on scalability, what is the envisioned relationship here between nonscalable businesses and scalable businesses? If you want to grow your cooperative, BCDI has ways to help support that growth, and indeed already has on a few occasions for pest management and cleaning cooperatives in the Bronx. But if you don't have a vision for growth, not much of BCDI's business development infrastructure is designed to help you just because you're a cooperative business or want to start one (unless its in advanced manufacturing through the BXIF). While BCDI's network

incorporates nonscalable components, the core business development infrastructure does not have an explicit place for nonscalable service enterprises in them.

This leads to another complicated matter in the realm of production and consumption. As manufacturing and heavy industry and the more frequently unionized jobs that went with them depart from core urban areas in the United States, particularly in the Northeast, the attempts to localize *production* (not merely procurement) can seem especially quixotic. Yet without tackling the question of production and the creation of significant surplus value, any attempt to tie business development to a new political-economic system or project, at any scale, will not succeed. This is as true for the mayor that wants to develop local business as it is for the community organization that wants to facilitate independence from philanthropy by diversifying its revenue streams. What will be produced and will there actually be enough revenues to generate surpluses necessary? Only one interviewee brought this up. Yet the issue is fundamental to not only BCDI's contingent success or failure in this regard, but to the broader nature of what the future of urban and regional metropolitan economies will look like in the coming decades. For this staffer,

it goes back to, what is economic democracy? There are underlying questions about how markets behave, what we can do to change that stuff. Unwrapping production and the need to dig into and get our hands around production if we're really gonna get at shared wealth creation. There are lots of different kinds of wealth of course, but the kind that puts food on the table and buys housing, there's a need to dig into that deeply, and I don't know that there's a sense collectively of how critical getting our hands around production is. I think it feels the furthest away for most folks...and I also think that the people who would pay for it, capitalize it, finance it, would say, you want poor people to build advanced technology businesses? So that conversation will need to happen then.

[Pause]

Producing is the core of the economy. It is the core of value creation in an economy. That needs to be unpacked a lot. That and shared wealth together is an engine that then precipitates the ability to do a bunch of other stuff but if we can't crack that. ...Right now the cooperative stuff is frustrating because--and I understand why---but its all focused on services. So to not take an honest look and ask, if we really want to do shared wealth economic development, we have to understand our approach to production. Or else we aren't really talking about it. [

A number of issues arise in this comment above. In the Bronx, in addition to the typical philanthropic hurdles, BCDI expects to contend with skepticism that that low-income people of color can develop, launch, and own businesses bigger than micro-enterprise. This quote also elaborates upon a critical element in the social enterprise and “makerspace” (Cohen 2017) field, particularly as it pertains to worker-ownership. As Dawson notes, the existing field of worker cooperative development social enterprise has focused intensely on low-capital-intensive businesses in low-income urban areas, particularly in home services (Dawson 2017). Not only have many of these businesses struggled to provide better than part-time employment and slightly better than average wages, they are not generating surpluses commensurate with the aims of the rest of the “good jobs” field: with health benefits, opportunities for training and advancement, retirement packages, and so forth. As the interview quote above suggests, what kinds of businesses can shift an economy or can compete in an existing market economy? Capital-intensive firms in manufacturing (as manufacturing is understood presently, i.e. heavy industry) are not considered viable in urban areas because of land costs, labor costs, and density. They are also often eschewed in favor of services because low-income communities generally do not have lots of capital to contribute, so it falls to public/private to cobble together low-capital start-ups. What seems to be emerging is that many of these social/cooperative enterprises cannot meaningfully contribute to networks that shift the broader outcomes of the economic system. They can and tend to improve individual living conditions, which matters to those whose lives improve, but in a manner that does not produce the kind of scalable economic consequences that developers, governments, and social enterprise philanthropy are typically desire and prioritize (Dawson 2017; Tanner 2013).

Typically in the US context, “makerspaces” and the “maker” movement incorporating advanced manufacturing and digital fabrication are brought up as a potential solution for

this, but evidence to date tends to show a fair amount of prototyping work getting offshored for larger scale production purposes. There are further concerns that so far, the use of advanced technology in the US maker movement has focused on nondurable and relatively trivial consumer goods (Wolf-Powers et al 2017; Shrock et al 2018; Cohen 2017). While this concern over what exactly will be manufactured in the Innovation Factory has yet to be fully addressed, BCDI's vision for a scaled up facility with over 15,000 square feet, as well as their partnership with Mondragón, suggest that they are at least considering the possibility of engaging seriously in advanced manufacturing production within the greater Bronx and New York City region.

Finally on this point is the issue of land and space in the Bronx and New York. In order to develop the kinds of facilities for advanced manufacturing that will be required, significant changes in urban zoning codes will need to be modernized and updated to allow for the kind of advanced and digital fabrication technologies that constitute “manufacturing” to be allowed in mixed-use buildings, commercial storefronts, and other forms of built environment with different Floor Area Ratio (FAR) configurations than are typical for light, medium, and heavy industrial zoned land (that which remains) in New York City (New York City Council 2014). These are issues not just for BCDI, but for the larger urban manufacturing movement in the United States in this historical juncture. Having discussed the dynamics of production and cooperative business development, I now turn to other component of the scalability infrastructure in BCDI's network: the Bronx Fund for Economic Democracy.

The Bronx Fund: Finance and Scalability

This section of the chapter turns to the planning and development and ultimate conceptualization of the Bronx Fund as a component of BCDI's network. As has been

noted throughout the chapters above, one of the overriding goals of BCDI is to obtain financial and political independence from philanthropy for non-surplus generating work, especially political education and community organizing. This is a problem decades in the making (INCITE! 1994) with few solutions that have successfully materialized in the US context. As will be explored further in Chapter 8, there is a critical disconnect in urban politics between the progressive political base in underserved neighborhoods and an economic base for those same politics. The lack of a large-scale economic base outside of organized labor and real estate in New York City politics has placed a death grip not just on the elected officials of the Democratic Party in New York City, but the ideas and policies that they champion, particularly through a network of party-aligned organizations like the Center for Popular Democracy, Make the Road, Working Families Party, New York Communities for Change (formerly ACORN), and others. One goal of the Bronx Fund is to inject into this landscape a new set of actors and ideas with the power to compete on the level of electoral politics in a global megacity.

Beyond the arena of politics, however, the Bronx also has no independent community foundation, which on its own terms is perhaps surprising, even if the desirability of such an institution is debatable. As noted in regard to the BronxXchange, the development of a Fund necessarily means engaging with capital, even mission-aligned capital, on decidedly unequal terms. At the level of financial management in the tens of millions, the requisite specialized technical knowledge and political sensitivity of controlling such assets of course places a tremendous amount of strain on the idea of a “community-controlled” endowment for Economic Democracy. As the epigraph at the start of this chapter from DeFilippis outlines, the institutional framework of initiatives like BCDI can often obtain some success and grow up to a certain point, when political and economic networks that sustain the existing system determine that they pose a threat and should be sabotaged or coopted.

All of the organizations participating in the BCDI board of directors have a combined century-plus of experience fundraising and wrestling with philanthropy and city government for funding for services, community organizing, and workforce development. Their contempt for the indignities of the philanthropic hamster wheel were the starting point for several conversations about projects in the network that would form realistic opportunities for alternative revenue streams that could replace private philanthropy and even supersede it.

These issues came up throughout the 2015 formalization process, but received a structured opportunity for discussion in May 2015, when the BCDI working group and staff met in a church basement on Fordham University's campus. The question of alternative sources of capital was raised for discussion by writing "Key Issue: \$\$\$\$ (Revenue Streams) on a piece of butcher paper taped to the wall. Suggestions offered included looking to anchor institutions and organized labor more broadly as capital partners, not only as purchasers (anchors) or as political and education partners (labor). Specifically, the point was raised about accessing *venture* or risk capital from these actors, rather than the kind of philanthropic capital that is typically involved when anchors support community groups for service provision or the catchall term "community engagement."

A senior staffer who had been in conversations with a large Bronx anchor institution relayed to the group that senior executives from the medical center asked him if what BCDI was really trying to do was to start a Bronx Community foundation, and if that would be a more linear and legible (if still challenging of course) objective than the array of projects and infrastructure components they envisioned in a broader enterprise network.

Members of the group expressed both intrigue and alarm over the idea of starting a community foundation for the Bronx, for reasons of complicity in the very same “non-profit industrial complex” (INCITE! 1994) that they sought to evade and undermine by seeking alternative funding sources for their work outside of philanthropy. There was also a question of specific kinds of capital for different purposes: business development and real estate an community organizing attract different kinds of investment, and given the diversity of work encompassed under the umbrella of BCDI’s envisioned network, one working group member suggested a “menu” of investment options, from philanthropic gift capital with no return, to small returns comparable to CDFIs and Mission and Program Related Investments from philanthropy (around 1%-4%, see Beyster et al 2017).

The idea of controlling large pools of capital to coordinate and deploy to mission-aligned work for economic democracy, however, gained greater traction and appeal when members of this same group travelled to Mondragón two months later and saw some examples of what they might be able to fund and control with such a fund: affordable housing, an innovation factory, community owned energy facilities, and urban industrial space were among the most attractive and inspirational sites for participants on the 2015 excursion. From external partners such as elected officials and anchor institutions, the trip helped them see that at a certain scale and size, these kinds of infrastructure and institutions could become plausible investment sites for public and private sector union pension investments (Field notes July 2015). It was also noted that these investments would actually allow partner organizations and institutions serve their respective missions better: public value in the case of the public sector, and local economic health for the nonprofit and civic actors.

Upon their return from Spain, the idea of philanthropic money being gleaned from interest from invested capital or from an “endowment for economic democracy” was floated as a way to ensure non-revenue generating activities like education and organizing were kept as a strong part of the network infrastructure. (Field notes September 2015). A board member described the basic outline of the purpose of the fund as it relates to philanthropy and government, but also to broader needs for values aligned, risk tolerant, patient, low-return community development finance capital:

we have an interest as an organization and in pursuing the Bronx Fund just for the vision around wanting to have an endowment so that we could continually sustain our organizing and make our organizing less attached to foundations so that our strategy and our vision can get a lot more [laughs] radical and independent of the, constantly-shifting tides of philanthropy or government, you know, the good favor of government funders.

By the end of September, a few key lessons emerged with regard to enterprise funding and development and scaling network infrastructure. The support for the creation of a fund for economic democracy informed this broader systemic analysis. The integration of a fund into the core framework helped participants to think through the differences between business development, economic development, and organizational capacity building and technical assistance. While these things are often treated as the same thing, the group obtained greater clarity that what generated actual economic development, rather than just economic growth, were the networks in which each of the Mondragón institutions was embedded. The conceptual frame for the Bronx Fund would crystallize in 2017 and 2018 into a \$90 million dollar, 10-year “capitalization strategy” for the entire network. This included:

- Sixty million dollars for an endowment for economic democracy, the interest from which would act as a basis for supplying community organizations with stable general operating support within the network, as well as paying back parts of the initial endowment as a low interest loan over a long-term period;

- Ten million dollars for a business investment fund for the BronXchange and Innovation Factory, both for helping to grow existing businesses, help them convert to democratic ownership, and provide venture funding for new enterprises incubated for advanced manufacturing or procurement purposes;
- Twenty million dollars for a real estate investment fund to acquire property for the network's core operational infrastructure as well as for flexible investment capital for community organizations interested in managing and growing Community Land Trusts, Limited Equity Cooperatives, Mutual Housing Associations, and other forms of permanently affordable housing for those making 30%-50% of Area Median Income and below. As of 2018, the first stage of site selection had been completed on a central Bronx site for 100% affordable (at 30% AMI) rental housing, as a demonstration project to contest the prevailing narrative from 2016 and 2017 during the Jerome Avenue rezoning that building 100% deeply affordable housing (in other words, affordable to current Bronx residents) was not financially feasible.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the most common first response to this nearly \$100 million dollar plan is to ask incredulously who exactly BCDI thinks is going to just *give* them that kind of money? The response to this is that it actually would be paid back, like a mortgage or on a mortgage-like amortization period from portions of returns generated from business and real estate investments, and portions of the interest that the principal itself would generate over time. In a national context of a burgeoning conversation of “impact investing,” especially for entrepreneurs and in communities of color (Reddy 2019; Swan and Walker 2019; Hamilton 2019), this mechanism of surplus generation that at once capitalizes the network and returns funds to philanthropy endowments instantly opens up opportunities from CDFI as well as PRIs from some of the larger national

foundations. For context, the loan from the New York Empire State Development Corporation *just for Phase one* (of three phases) of the Kingsbridge Armory redevelopment was \$138 million. For another even more relevant example, if we compare the Ford Foundation's \$2 million dollar investment in the Dudley Street community land trust in 1992, and adjust the number both on a per capita basis (the Dudley neighborhood catchment area was approximately 50,000 at the time, compared to approximately 1.2 million Bronx residents) and for inflation to 2018 dollars, the amount comes out to around \$86 million.⁴⁹

When placed in such a context, BCDI's plan to approach government and foundations looks a lot simpler: not only could the Ford Foundation *alone* fund the entire ten year strategy, *they essentially already did once before*.⁵⁰ Ford's focus on only a neighborhood scale investment strategy, rather than a larger urban regional investment strategy, could be seen then as the source of the problematic of thinking too small, rather than the community groups. Not only does the build out of the Bronx Fund seem more right-sized in this light, one actually starts to wonder if the numbers are still too timid. This is the kind of larger-scale vision that one BCDI staffer said in 2013 is too often lacking in the field of community economic development:

It is hard for people to think on a large scale. There is a concern about bigger things, which is about figuring out how to not lose democratic decision-making and all that. But people have to think bigger. Folks have got to make a decision: either we are fine staying small but not having a transformative impact or, if we want a bigger change, we have to think bigger. We're still thinking small. (in Tanner 2013 p. 110)

It is precisely to the consequences of this scalar argument that I now turn in the following

⁴⁹ Calculations by author based on factoring 50,000 people into 1.2 million (24x) and using an inflation calculator for 1992 dollars to 2018.

⁵⁰ This statement comes on the heels of a Ford Foundation grantee conference call in June 2018 with the Foundation president Darren Walker and Vice President Xavier Briggs, informing their grantees that the Ford Foundation would be winding down their giving in cities, housing and regional equity campaigns, dramatically altering the trajectory of the institution that essentially founded the community development field.

section.

Meanings and Metaphors of Scale and Scalability

Having described the form and function of the Innovation Factory and the Bronx Fund, in this penultimate section I outline the mixture of excitement and anxiety that BCDI staff and board members expressed in interviews conducted in 2016 and 2017 around these infrastructure pieces most associated with bringing BCDI “to scale”. I begin with examples of insights that highlight what scale means—what it might look like to be “at scale”, and then move towards the kinds of concerns and reflections that participants had on the implications or consequences of that scale.

For reasons I outlined above in the conceptual framing, much of the discussion of scale in interviews revolved around notions of broad impact and change in material conditions. One participant was perhaps most forthright about scale being about impact. But his definition of impact below creates more breathing room around the meaning of impact, and how BCDI can address scale and scalability in ways that do not compromise aspects of the transformative vision of economic democracy:

*Scale is about impact. To me it's not about size, and how you get to the impact is how you get to scale. Scale to me is shorthand for critical impact. I think it comes from, for people, you know, industrialization. Everything has to be mass produced and the bigger the corporation the more impactful it is or whatever, which isn't necessarily true. But to me scale for BCDI is about diversity, not number. So like when we have a foothold in politics, business, organizing and within politics? We think business systems, and finance: it doesn't have to be a big foothold. A foothold in each of those things means we've achieved scale in my opinion. We now have the impact that we want. **Even if we did represent the majority of the financial sector, and not these other pieces, I don't think we'd achieve scale. We might reach the impact as far as like lending money and raising revenues and stuff like that, but not in transformation. Not in leadership development, not in like planning for the future. Although the finance piece is a pretty powerful thing, in and of itself it's a worthy endeavor to try to just catch that piece. But when I think of economic democracy at scale the way we've been thinking about expansive economy, asset-based development, integration of***

planning, organizing business, I think of scale as like diversity. And we have a defined universe of what that diversity should be. Having a foothold in each means we then achieve scale, and can begin having the impact we want on a lot of people in a lot of different situations.

Another participant also thought that the focus on scale-as-impact might mean different things for different aspects of BCDI's work, but broad impact was a common denominator:

I'm still learning a lot about what scale means. At this point, getting things to scale depends on what project or infrastructure component we're talking about. In the case of something like Bronxchange, scale is about how much money is being facilitated in transactions. How much money are we keeping in the Bronx that otherwise would have left? At scale, that should be billions! [laughs] its hard to wrap my head around that. It's hard for other community folks too, but that really is what the scale is. For [education], scale for me means every local organization has access to, has people in the training center in some way. They're connecting the learning center work to their own organizational work. It helps them do their work better, they are doing it independently without hand holding.

So if that was scale for different aspects of BCDI's work, what about scale in the Bronx more broadly? He responded:

*Getting it to scale means that a lot more people work in the Bronx above the poverty line and are investing back in the Bronx. What are the implications of that? But its really hard for me to think of the Bronx to not be---to be solidly middle class or upper middle class communities, **of over 1 million people that were not poor anymore.** Because I've seen it so much and heard it so much. That many people stabilizing personally or economically, **what's stopping them from leaving?** The network tries to begin to answer that by saying well why would you leave when you have the connections to all these things, like employment opportunities, cultural communities, good schools, all these things, if they actually happen people are gonna stay. If we're able to keep people here and stabilize their living situations, **then its gonna be a fight for who fits, when people wanna come.***

This line of thinking about scale also led him to thinking about the "scale" of impact beyond the Bronx, as well.

*Getting to scale means when the Bronx agrees we want to stay here. We love it here, we want to do good. Getting to scale means that we're being replicated elsewhere. That some version of a network and the basic tenets of economic democracy and leadership development, that is being done all over the place. **That's when I would know we've reached the mountaintop.***

As the invocation of the "mountain top" suggests, scale here is both process and destination. There are textures of moving upwards and outwards, but also a limit to what

scale can offer. As this staffer did, BCDI cites in its mission the goal of ending intergenerational poverty. Yet as the interview above shows, even people within BCDI, much less the rest of the Bronx, have difficulty grappling with what that Bronx would look like, and whether that would in fact represent a successful “scaled up” version of BCDI’s work. I think that part of the reason that ending intergenerational poverty feels fuzzy and incomplete as core destination point is that so much of BCDI’s infrastructure, unlike Mondragón, for example, focuses on racial and economic justice, not just making low-income people middle-income or middle class. Thus, while the language of ending intergenerational poverty is appealing to philanthropy as a core BCDI goal, BCDI leaders themselves see larger social and political transformation as goals of their work than only changes in income and wealth metrics.

The difference in goals—purely economically verifiable or much more diffuse and difficult to quantify—also has clear consequences for approaches to scale, and indeed, whether scale is even a core goal at all. This tension was not always addressed directly, and instead the normative desirability of this kind of scale—of the Bronx no longer being predominantly a borough of poverty--was occasionally assumed as an uncomplicated good as part of a broader aim of social and economic transformation. Looking towards the 20th century ideals of progressive and New Deal infrastructure, one staffer opined that:

*I think scale comes in one way from the idea that to change patterns of intergenerational poverty in the **Bronx takes a very significant impact at an order of magnitude we're not used to seeing. Not used to seeing in our own experience [as organizers]**. Public housing looks like scale to me. When I think about scale, I always think about large infrastructure projects. I think about when public housing, when you look at some of these complexes--not that that is what we want to create, but it hits me that way. Can we get to the harnessing of resources that is at that scale, the scale of what it took to pull that off when that was done. Its connected to an underlying notion that really changing trend lines and altering the course of what it feels like we're on, of increasing poverty and all the negatives, scale is when you can actually move those trend lines, when you can substantially alter the trajectories of where people are going. And do that through changing how the local economy is organized.*

At this point, I asked if what he was suggesting would require something resembling a state in scope and magnitude, and he responded “Yep.” The above thought process suggests that scale at some point or another is not only about what BCDI does, but about a broader set of institutional actors and forces that may only be indirectly related to anything anyone in the Bronx does. The invocation of public housing suggests the kind of replicable-but-liberating *nonsoels* that the power of the capitalist state, in compromise with labor, can produce outcomes that materially improve people’s lives.⁵¹

There is however also a fear of even supposedly liberatory political and economic activities originating from actors outside of the Bronx, such as the federal government. This tension between the progressive or egalitarian power of the state and its oppressive structural bias seeped through as described in Chapter 4 (and again in Chapter 8). The memories of urban renewal and the racialized development trajectories of 20th century urban spaces in the United States continue to haunt communities of color and social movement activists, leading to skepticism and fear of “bigness” and “scale” *per se* as a tangible and ongoing result.

Suspicion of, and disdain for, the misuses and abuses of state power are not the only framework governing scalar thinking in BCDI. The desire for systemic change was also framed as an implicit and explicit critique of the *Lilliputian strategy*—the idea that many small efforts can become more powerful through replication, confederation, and coordination (DeFilippis 2004). A board member told me

Part of what scale is supposed to capture is that we're not just about incubating a few co-ops. We made this conscious decision that we're not going to be incubating coops to start with because in some ways in the US we've seen that limits what's possible later. Not just about creating a few dozen jobs. Its more about the culture shift work, and how that is embedded in political spaces, business spaces, and that feels---well, so ok this scale thing, it sounds amazing right? It's a great thing

⁵¹ Notwithstanding the racialized and gendered axes of the New Deal programs in housing, social insurance and education in the 20th century examples in this case.

*to claim it and we believe in it too, we of course want economic democracy at scale. Its kind of like the north star, the most aspirational thing. Even Bronxchange, and the EDTS, the two most live projects at the moment, we've only trained a few dozen people in a couple years. And I'm super big on this, I am like a hammer with this--**we are trying to specialize people so intensely, build such deep leadership and knowledge, that we are losing some scope and scale on the education front. That's a tension.** With the launch of the Bronxchange, there are still just about twenty businesses so far, and we don't know how many more months or years it will take to scale up. We understand that to get there we need some fundamental pieces in place. **Having only [some] of our pieces up and running makes it hard too because we know how interconnected all the infrastructure pieces are so how can they get to scale without the other things?***

The board member above is naming and attempting to reconcile a tension between the promise of transformational change that emerges from grassroots initiatives while also addressing the imperative for broader systemic transformation that cannot always be achieved from these same initiatives. The idea of system change or “shift” or “moving trend lines” is the kind of impact thinking that operating “at scale” suggests, but doesn’t always clearly identify how to get there, and particularly, what compromises, if any, might be necessary to unlock that achievement. The process of replication and standardization beckons social enterprise and community development for specific reasons, often originating in philanthropic “shadow state” (Wolch 1990) imperatives. Additionally, her allusion to the tension between specialization and depth of knowledge on the political education front is directly and inversely related to the ability to scale that knowledge up to a mass or broader audience. In the bolded portion above, as in other instances below, a political critique and a scalar critique are bonded. Another staffer described these issues in particular as they relate to philanthropy:

*Scale is intrinsically important because we are talking about systems failures like the reason that the Bronx was disinvested and now faces gentrification, the reasons are national, are international, these are then manifested in particular places. **So to talk about changing the Bronx it doesn't make sense unless you're getting to a place where you're talking about reorienting larger systems.** So given that we can really just start at the local scale because how else can you take on the international banking system, so you start with a kernel and grow it incrementally until it reaches the point where it can shift markets or decision making. Why we include it in everything we do I think is because of those reasons then **but also for funders to be real, they don't want to fund anything unless its going to be replicated and brought to some other place.** They're funding*

prototypes for something larger they want to do. So unless there's 'at scale'--they don't care about the Bronx. These are national funders I mean. But even New York funders don't really care about the Bronx. There's no foundation I know of whose only territory is the Bronx. So like that relates to the fund piece also. I think it grew out of the idea that there are nonprofits getting resources here [in the Bronx] but not enough, so the idea of the endowment is about supporting these groups here more from the Bronx. Like New Orleans.. New Orleans has three hundred thousand people but they have their own community foundation. The Bronx [with over a million people] doesn't.

The mechanisms for going “to scale” or “reorienting larger systems” as described above also relate to capacities for not only reactive or defensive actions and strategies. Linked to the vision of economic democracy as a framework for participatory planning is the idea that achieving scale means the capacity to be a proactive agent of pushing positive changes to occur, rather than only reducing harm. A board member linked these in her response to the question of what scale looks like for BCDI:

*And so, and I think at scale what that means is, we know gentrification's a problem, **instead of waiting for rezoning to start happening for us to just react to that, you know, what are we gonna do proactively to make sure that our neighborhood is secure?** For us, we feel like one of the solutions to that is how can we start owning things and empowering other people in the community to start owning things as well? ... But I think just moving more towards those kinds of processes where **community members are decision makers, where they're owners, where they're operators, where this type of work is generating employment opportunities, training opportunities, ownership opportunities, decision-making opportunities**, like those are just small examples, but framing any of our future projects and looking for opportunities for that to happen, I think is, what 'at scale' means to us.*

One of the key reasons for traveling to Mondragón is precisely to witness the potential for what can happen when a regional community network takes proactive steps to grow and harness its own economic power. In many ways, this approach to scale, as noted directly above by the board member, is analogous to implementing a policy agenda.

Another board member made a similar point about policy and scale:

My mind thinks more in terms of like policy and community development frameworks—so for me, I think of scale as the ability to put in place policies, initiatives, and laws that are different than the existing traditional economic development systems that have been in place in New York City for so long. I would say the other piece of that is also creating the organizing base and the grassroots call for economic democracy as different from and distinct from existing economic development. I think that those two things are part of what I look for in scale. Is there a commitment from three city agencies, or three city agencies' departments to spend ten million of their dollars vis-a-vis the platform?

I think that's the direction to head in gradually over time. I think there are some questions about what at scale looks like when it comes to not necessarily BCDI, but what at scale looks like when it comes to New York City economic democracy, because we have not yet had the conversation about what this work and what economic democracy and BCDI as an initiative means to the Bronx in relation to other boroughs in New York City. What does it look like to call for economic democracy in all five boroughs with a Bronx-based initiative?

Here, this board member hits upon several themes that others addressed in slightly different ways. The implicit argument of scale here is the power to advance a political vision that reaches “the public” at large in some meaningful way. This also links back to an earlier discussion of the implications of scale as they reach out further beyond the Bronx, to New York City and beyond. How does progress and “more” economic democracy for the Bronx translate into less inequality for the communities BCDI is working for, rather than simply changing the scalar or spatial experience of that inequality, as DeFilippis (1999) argued?⁵² The other issue, of the coalition politics of shifting economic development practice and policy in urban areas, is a decades-long challenge of the progressive cities literature that I address further in the next chapter.

While a staff member above talked about scale in terms of the concentrated power of the state to produce social infrastructure on a massive scale (the example of public housing), another board member thought more along the lines of the rhizome, as outlined in the conceptual framing chapter above (Chapter 2). She discussed the power of scale in terms of distributed networks, not large-scale hierarchical or bureaucratic organization. There was a spatial metaphor to her description as well, not only an organizational one:

*Mondragon created a bank. We have different options there. We have Amalgamated [bank], we have Spring [bank], we have The Working World. All these people with money could be in these institutions. So I don't know that we need "one" university or "one" bank [quotes for her emphasis], its different. The nineteen fifties in Spain is different from where we are now. ... **I don't think***

⁵² The full quotation: “First, why should we assume that local control is going to mean a diminution of unequal and unjust power relations? [...] If the market continues to act as one of the primary sets of relationships in society, then there will continue to be those that benefit and those that suffer. All local ownership might do is transform the how ‘winning’ and ‘losing’ are experienced” (1999 p. 987).

things are always better when they're bigger. If it was smaller and could be scaled out this way [she expands her hands outward horizontally] I think it might do well. I think about all the stuff like networks... My paradigm is nature's laws. A tree doesn't get big ad infinitum. It lays or spreads seeds and then there's more of them. So to me scale is more, not bigger. That's why education is so important, not necessarily just an edifice in the Bronx, but in some way that we can take curriculum packages and get them out there in as many ways as possible. Scale to me is about replicating. Some are big. Mondragon is criticized for being too big. Yes the bank helps. The university helps. But the ability to put things out in smaller pieces many, many times is how we're gonna scale this. The 'this' is the scaling of the path to justice. Scaling often means the cellular structure of all the things that are happening, are changing and sometimes are next to each other but aren't aware of each other. You want them to be independent so if one is squashed or goes away or disappears that the other cells can go on and it'll still be happening. I think that's our scale. Networks, distribution.

This vignette closely parallels the arborescent/rhizomic tension outlined above, including allusions to the strengths and weaknesses of the two ideal-types. It draws the distinction between resilience and flexibility, the contagion and virality metaphor of the rhizome that is often associated with contemporary social movement formations like Occupy and Black Lives Matter. The question of how to wield that kind of distributed power effectively in the face of a capitalist state/market nexus remains unaddressed here. How do the many small “cells” as she describes them, through sheer force of coordination, activate themselves to act as a *macro-actor* (Latour and Callon 1981)? This question leads somewhat ominously to the concerns over how to hold transformative political values and practices in scalable structures, or if there is *necessarily* a tradeoff between elemental scalability and broader transformation. Is what is lost in scaling greater or lesser than what is gained? Another board member worries precisely about these tradeoffs in core values for the temptation and impact of scalability:

We're not yet at the scale where it's possible for us to do these things but yet it would be irresponsible for us to create something of a large scale where these things aren't a commitment in our community. And so what are we creating? We're sacrificing our whole mission if we're invested in creating a model, in creating things that actually are not meeting any of the, the collective wealth-generating components or social benefits [of economic democracy].

Here again, the political and the scalar critique are fused together: anything large-scale is inherently worthy of suspicion. Of course, concerns about scalability and integrity of

purpose and mission are not unique to BCDI. There is in essence, an inverse relationship between transformative goals and the speed with which these practices can scale up, as well as their ultimate goals of “bigness”. To become “big” and achieve scale of a certain size or scope entails assuming the risks of bureaucratization and rigidity that participatory democrats and communitarians argue foreshadows the decay of their political content. These concerns are embedded in politics of social movements, community development, and social change. The role of an innovation factory and a fund in the BCDI vision is, above all, a statement that the power of these institutions to bring economic and political power to marginalized communities of color such as those in the Bronx outweigh the concerns that these institutions will become coopted in service of the same power structures that built the oppressive political economy of the Bronx and beyond. That is a very debatable theory. Equally debatable, however, is any competing theory that sets out to achieve large-scale political, social, and economic transformation *without* harnessing the productive and coordinating power of business development and financial institutions. Mechanisms for addressing this tension were discussed in Chapter 4 in terms of how to structure the governance of the core infrastructure of BCDI, as well as in Chapter 5 and 6 in terms of the role of the training curriculum in cohering and maintaining political alignment in the network about the substantive ideological imperatives of economic democracy, and in the structuring of projected profits and revenue sharing from the BronXchange. Two interviews directly addressed this tension in terms of the role of the fund and the innovation factory. The first, a board member

The Fund I have a lot of hesitation and skepticism and concern about sort of, like, recreating what I think are many of the, many existing things around community development as in housing development that are already there in the Bronx. Now they may not be being done the way they want or done with an economic democracy model, but I don't necessarily know if trying to recreate that, is the best use of limited resources, I also feel like there's a lot of that that's sort of—on the one hand I understand it on the other hand I feel like there's a bunch of it that's sort of like feeding into and furthering and fostering the, like, insatiable capitalist appetite towards the Bronx. You know? And it's also feeding into the capitalist system as a way of building funds in general

although I'm not sure you can get away from that. I just also think it's incredibly risky in this moment in time given how much property is going for, how stagnant people's incomes are, and where a lot of people think real estate, the real estate market is headed in New York City. Having and owning property as a non-profit is a full time gig and I don't think there's the recognition of how much time, space, thinking, staff resources, etcetera that could take up as its own thing. And there are people who do that as a full-time job and they still, and still do not do it the way that they want to, are not successful at it.

In the same vein as her concern and skepticism for the fund, she discussed this in terms of the innovation factory.

Innovation! I think this is one where I sort of struggle a little bit and this might be more the language piece just because so much of the framing around innovation and incubators and hubs is so anchored in the creative class and building a segment of the economy that seems very, very restricted and inaccessible. So I know the expectation and the intention is to not make it that but I sort of struggle in having a clear understanding of the path to not make it that, and I don't think it's enough to just be like we have an incubator hub and it's in the Bronx. Because you can put pretty much anything in most neighborhoods now and it can be a spark for gentrification and displacement if they're viewed as like, um...[trails off]

[Interviewer]: “Revitalizing” in some way?

Yeah exactly. So how is that set up to not be a part of that system and be a part of the economic democracy ecosystem [instead]? And I also think, it's also a little bit unrealistic for us to think that the framing and the phrasing and the, the public discourse around these things and these words and how they have been marketed historically will not impact what we do. Even if the structure and the design is that you can't use it unless you make less than \$25,000 and you've been a Bronx resident for three years, the framing of an incubator hub in and of itself might create something [unwanted/unintentional]. That's not necessarily a reason to not do it, but I do think that's something you have to be very thoughtful about, and something that always gives me a lot of pause.

Below, a participant frames the issue around the fund similarly—acknowledging the threats and dangers in the strategy, and directly pointing to the structural tension between large-scale financial resources and capacity and the issue of “community control” and governance: BCDI is attempting to invest in altering the trajectory of the field of practice of advanced urban manufacturing and innovation, and social impact finance by engaging in it with its principles of racial and economic justice, equity, and democracy. Others might choose to remain outside of the space and attack or sabotage it for being inherently incompatible with those values. Either way, a coherent theory of change of how to create

better lives for people remains the shared end goal, and the difference is about relationships to tactical pathways. This conversation about values and design is a core part of how BCDI understands the threat that comes with engaging with capital and production. These comments below from a staffer state this awareness and the telegraphing of this concern plainly:

*We know we're not gonna get to scale on the foundation dime as the primary source of funds. But we don't really know how to get there. Most of us don't. We have a capitalization strategy but the biggest question is whether we can do it--capitalize this work. I think the governance question is gonna be really big. The structural piece is one thing but also we have to figure out how we scale the space of leadership so there is a bigger and broader set of bodies or a body that creates more participation while ensuring coherence in strategy and implementation. **And if we do get -- and when we get big, as we figure out the challenge of capitalization, that's when governance has to be tight.** And leadership development and education, so there's internal coherence and strength among the leadership to keep people looking up and keep the ship upright. So that design is important for that. [*

These concerns about the dangers of the most scalable infrastructure broadly track with the concerns over the amount of power that would be consolidated in these institutions in a vision of BCDI as “successful” in the future. In the best case, these infrastructure pieces are values-aligned through the training curriculum and the Economic Democracy Learning Center and a board of community organizers with deep suspicions of concentrated financial and political power (that in this case they would be governing). This is a fascinating admission from these leaders within BCDI: on the one hand, the desire to achieve a complex large-scale operation, while also on the other hand holding onto varying levels of deep structural suspicion of the awesome power of the capital/state nexus to the project of economic democracy, even just at the scale of the *Bronx*, never mind New York City or New York State. In a reprise of the concluding vignette from the chapter on the BronXchange, how does BCDI avoid the fate of creating the infrastructure that will consume and corrupt it from within? BCDI’s response to this incorporates both structural design and agency: by building and developing leaders with a deep well of sophisticated skepticism of concentrated power and an abiding respect for the values of collective decision-making. In addition to putting trust in people, there are structural

components of the network designed to place a check on the more powerful, revenue generating components like the Innovation Factory, the BronXchange, and the Fund. The structural balance of power between the component parts of the network returns us to the interrelationships between scalable and nonscalable worlds. While no one in their interview used these words specifically, one board member (quoted in the epigraph above) alluded to the concept in different language. In answering the question on the role of scale, she said

you know, all these big things, the big things that are gonna go to scale, whatever, they can't do it without us, you know, down here, the little organizations. If we're not good, they're not good. They can't do what they're gonna do. The big stuff up there is not healthy if we're not healthy down here at the grassroots.

This analysis suggests what amounts to a conflict-laden and contentious but necessary scalar division of labor—the same kind described by Robnett in her analysis of the history of SNCC and the SCLC that I outlined in Chapter 2. This theory of scale and scalability suggests that there are strengths that scalable and nonscalable organizations possess that cannot be reconciled if they are to effectively serve their purpose. The answer is not found in them alone, but in networked relationships that mutually reinforce their shared vision, and diminish their gaps and weaknesses. In the case of BCDI, this relationship tension between scalable and nonscalable components is—to an extent—structurally built into the network, linking surpluses from activities like the BronXchange, the Fund, and the Innovation Factory, to infrastructure components like planning technical assistance for community groups and political education and leadership development. Whether these structural relationships can be productively stewarded over time remains to be seen.

Conclusions

This chapter covered a variety of thematic areas of theory and practice under the broad framing of business development, finance, and scalability. The conclusions from the foregoing discussion are not simple or clear cut, but provide some additional insights to ongoing tensions and debates in urban economic development, social innovation, social movements, and community development.

The goals of the innovation factory project are to harness the kinds of value-added wealth generating capacities for marginalized urban communities that have thus far either eluded urban areas since 20th century deindustrialization, or have come with the costs of inequality and displacement in the form of tech hubs and incubators. This contemporary iteration of urban economic development as “smokestack chasing” has in 2017 and 2018 seemingly reached its most egregious, orgiastic apotheosis in the form of a nationwide auctioning off of the commons and public wealth for Amazon’s second corporate headquarters campus.

Place-based and community-owned advanced manufacturing, digital fabrication, and business development infrastructure such as Bilbao’s innovation factory seek to coopt the powerful wealth-generating potential of these capital-intensive sectors to reduce inequality rather than exacerbate it. It also suggests a possible future trajectory of urban economies in which services are not the only growth sectors. This has less to do with the inherent nature of the quality of service employment⁵³ than with the kinds of profit margins that advanced manufacturing can generate over time. Furthermore, these advanced production facilities are able, through the kinds of digital fabrication and 3D printing technologies that they employ, to take place in high-density urban neighborhoods

⁵³ Doussard (2015) notes that before unionization, manufacturing in the United States was not a middle-class job, suggesting that denser unionization in service sector employment could be part of the solution for wage inequalities endemic to so much of the urban service sector.

zoned for commercial and even residential uses such as mixed-use street and ground-level storefronts and commercial office buildings. This creates opportunities for commercial and industrial space in places like the Bronx and New York City generally that have seen massive losses in industrially zoned land in favor of residential and commercial development over the past four decades (Fitch 1993). It is this trend of advanced manufacturing and digital fabrication that BCDI is seeking to capture, own, and capitalize on for the Bronx Innovation Factory (BXIF).

The wealth generated from these businesses serves two purposes: first, in the form of social and cooperative enterprises, to generate wealth and ownership in low-income communities of color in the Bronx; and second, to build an economic base for high-road business more broadly, including the distribution of surpluses to an endowment for community, worker, youth, anti-incarceration, environmental and economic and racial justice organizing.

Presuming these efforts are successful beyond the current pilot stage, a series of operational tensions arise in the execution of successfully scaled business development and financial infrastructure. The dilemma here mirrors the diabolical problem that public sector union pensions currently face. Because of how federal law governs public employee pensions, fund managers are forced to seek out the highest returns possible in order to reduce the need for public appropriations to fill the gap or difference of pension obligations. The recent trajectory of lagging public investment in pension funds has further pushed unions into high-risk, high-reward mutual funds and venture capital funds, some of which are directly and indirectly responsible for the predatory equity investments that, in cities like New York, are displacing working class (Lerner and Livingston 2019). In other words, in a moment where unions are in an historically weak and marginal state, that which remains of their collective wealth are being used to economically marginalize

and politically weaken their own base of members and their families and communities in the pursuit of (in)adequately funded pension obligations. This is not merely a coordination problem. It is an existential and institutional crisis at the highest levels, well beyond just the Bronx or New York City.

If the Bronx fund for economic democracy funds community organizing from its dividends and growth, why wouldn't its managers seek to maximize returns? If they forego maximized returns, the broader deregulated capital markets will outgrow and outmaneuver them politically and economically. This recalls one of the oldest debates in socialism, in which Rosa Luxemburg argued that even an entire national economy composed of cooperative enterprises would still grow less exponentially than adjacent capitalist economies on the international stage, and thus could never fully compete on terms set by capital (Gasper 2014, quoting Luxemburg).

This is a problem that pervades the deepest core of the BronXchange and BCDI's work overall, but the problem is not limited to BCDI. Nor, however, would I argue, is the existence of this problem *necessarily sufficient on its own to preclude the strategy BCDI is pursuing*. It also is not to suggest that BCDI's leadership and participants do not understand the risks that inhere to these strategies. As the interviews above demonstrate, they do, at least in sufficient capacity to name them.

On a similar note, the problem of the concentrated scalable power of deployable capital creates a challenge for governance in accordance with BCDI's own vision of economic democracy. If one of the foundational animating premises of the economic democracy visioning process was to cement alignment on the idea that "participation" in politics, planning, and the economy of the Bronx was insufficient to change power relations without meaningful ownership and control of assets, the discussion of a BCDI fund for

economic democracy draws the inverse concerns: of ownership and control of assets without participation. With the power of potentially tens of millions of dollars of investment and philanthropic capital in the control of the core BCDI network, what mechanisms would be in place to ensure that capital was being deployed in ways that did not contradict the founding vision and mission of the work? What would serve as a backstop against the kinds of professionalization and political degeneration that has haunted community economic development since its inception? Again, these concerns arose in discussions, but no concrete plan for addressing these challenges exists beyond the implementation of majority board control for CBOs.

The challenges and danger of controlling and deploying capital also apply to the tensions of scalable infrastructure. Perspectives on scale in BCDI outline a spectrum of relationships to the concept, suggesting a mix of hope and belief in the transformative and liberatory power of scale, as well as its major threats to economic justice and democracy as BCDI defines them. Rapidly scalable infrastructure is seen as directly and essentially inversely related to the integrity of the vision of economic democracy as a liberatory framework for the Bronx (see also Tanner 2013 for this discussion with Iuvienne and Weber, p. 110).

The engines for scale that exist presently (capital supply, business formation and growth, and policy frameworks) are simply too deeply out of alignment with BCDI's values. Yet the immense power of liberatory scalability and systemic transformation is not possible without engagement with this same machinery. To make this project of world making for economic democracy transformative will take tremendous resources and a lot of time. The dictates of philanthropy for short-term replicability and scalability may or may not move towards greater alignment with a plausible route for shifting the Bronx or New York City (or beyond) in that direction. Presently, they absolutely do not.

How might these challenging and inhospitable conditions be changed? The question moves our discussion from the realm of economics and a political economy of scale to a discussion of politics, and particularly the politics of urban regimes. In the next chapter, I pick up on the thread of political coalitions for economic democracy, and posit the framework of an “equity regime” in formation as the logical outcome of BCDI’s political and economic infrastructure network.

Chapter VIII: Economic Democracy and Urban Politics

The left needs to devise its own version of the public-private partnership.

—Fainstein (1990 p. 42)

“...Alternative economic ideas have been around for a while, but have failed to claim a reshaping role in local politics. We need to ask then how they will come to be seen as in the unitary interest of local citizens or how they will be integrated with political practice.

—Stone (2004, p. 6)

“You guys how is what we’re talking about different from a government?”

—BCDI staffer (May 2015 field notes)

In the previous chapter, I analyzed the role of the Bronx Innovation Factory (BXIF) and the Bronx Fund for Economic Democracy as part of the core infrastructure for BCDI’s network model. These two projects, combined with the BronXchange vendor platform, together contended most directly with the question of how to “scale up” equitable enterprises and the model for broader goals of economic justice and equity in the Bronx. These economic development projects align well with the tradition of “progressive city” business incubation and economic development approaches that seek endogenous strategies of local equitable development. A core purpose of these strategies is to counteract some of the inherent structural vulnerabilities of localities, particularly those predominantly inhabited by people of color, in a system of global capital flows and networks (Haynes and Nembhard 1999; Imbroscio 1995; Fainstein 1990; DeFilippis 2004; Clavel 2010). This chapter pivots from the question of scalable and enduring economic power to the related question of scalable and enduring political power. More specifically to Stone’s point in the above epigraph, the question of how alternative conceptions of a desired vision of the economy (such as reduced inequalities of wealth and income) come to be integrated into daily practice. As Klosterman (1985) argued, this is not just the domain of politics, but very much the domain of planning as well.

Of course, politics and economics are deeply intertwined. The distinction in this chapter revolves around a decades-old question of urban politics and regimes: if these ideas—of economic democracy, of community control, of alternative economic policy and strategies—are both desirable and feasible (Imbroscio 1995; Haynes and Nemhard 1999; DeFilippis 1999), why are they so rare and/or nonexistent in major urban centers in the United States (also Spicer 2018)? The question of how this state of affairs ought to be challenged or changed is not I argue, as Badiou suggests, primarily the domain of economics, but rather the domain of politics.⁵⁴ For this chapter, I draw on literatures of urban planning, urban politics and policy, particularly a critical debate across the 1990s and early 2000s between regime theorist Clarence Stone and political theorist David Imbroscio around how to make real the promises of progressive political and policy alternatives.⁵⁵

BCDI's vision and approach began with Bronx community organizers engaged in self-critique of their own work: a critique of prevailing community organizing practice, as outlined in greater detail above in Chapters 4 and 6. It also is firmly grounded in a tradition of equity planning (Krumholz et al 1990) and the quest for "social justice planning" (Marcuse 2011) as a response to planning's complicity in racist, (hetero)sexist, and ableist urbanization processes of the twentieth century (Sugrue 2005; Brenner, Marcuse, Mayer 2012; Hirsch 1983; Fainstein and Servon 2005; Dávila 2004).

In this chapter I describe the outlines of BCDI's vision of political change in the context of existing political opportunities and constraints in the Democratic Party machine of New York City. I pay particular attention to the final two of the six pillars of BCDI's

⁵⁴ "There can be no economical battle against the economy, only a political one." (Badiou 1998 p. 117).

⁵⁵ Described in much greater detail in Chapter 2.

infrastructure schematic (as outlined in full in Chapter 4): the Civic Action Hub (CAH) and the Policy/Planning Lab (PPL). I address the ways in which these pieces of infrastructure are continuations and innovations in the realm of progressive urban politics, and outline their relationships to the other pieces of infrastructure in BCDI's network model. In this chapter I also trace BCDI's relationship to the tradition of progressive and "social justice planning" (Marcuse 2011), by outlining how they negotiate tensions around race, class, gender, and participation not just in the outcomes of their policy proposals, but in the process of their work.

From this discussion of the relationships of process and outcomes in planning in the case of BCDI, I move to a broader discussion on the role of planning and coordination of urban regimes. This chapter argues that the BCDI's network model is a deliberate response to Fainstein's 1990 exhortation that the left produce a viable version of the public-private partnership. I argue that when examined in full, the BCDI model represents a comprehensive proto-typical "equity regime" formation that attempts to seriously confront and address the structural challenges to, and shortcomings of, decades of progressive urban politics under neoliberalism and austerity. Following Menser's (2018) grounded analysis of participatory economic institutional governance, the concept of an urban equity regime might also adequately be characterized as a "social-public" partnership, given the different values (equity and democracy, rather than efficiency and profitability) and actors involved. I conclude by noting that the model's relative comprehensiveness does not necessarily mean that it will be successful, and consider the consequences of adding yet another well intentioned project to the memorial cemetery of progressive urban politics.

It is worth noting here that while the PPL has a well elaborated and designed set of functions in the BCDI network, the Civic Action Hub is the least coherent piece of the

BCDI network. As of 2018, BCDI considered four projects active, and two in the conceptual stage: the fund and the Civic Action Hub. But in 2018 the Fund had some conceptual design and plans for its functions and its relationship to the other infrastructure components. The Civic Action Hub, as can be seen in some of the interviews and other document excerpted below, did not quite reach that level. Unlike all of the other pieces, it remained vague in ambition, and nonexistent in practice. Despite this, the CAH as a conceptual component still merits inclusion into the chapter not only because it is part of BCDI's full design, but also because of the strong connections between civic action, policy advocacy, and the work of the PPL. The purpose of this section, and ultimately the chapter, is to outline how BCDI's planning process developed a model for sustaining an interdependent network for an urban equity regime. I elaborate further on this in the sections that follow.

PPL and CAH rationales in the context of the CEN model

In his 2006 book on black politics and the Dinkins administration, Phil Thompson relays a story about a meeting between Basil Patterson, a powerful Harlem political player and “the only black leader to have served in a senior level at city hall” and Thompson's immediate supervisor, Bill Lynch, then Chief of Staff to Manhattan Borough President David Dinkins. The subject of a prospective mayoral run by Dinkins came up, and Lynch asked for Patterson's advice on what one of the best first steps for such a possible run might be. “Set up a think tank,” Patterson replied, according to Thompson, who was present in the meeting (2006 p. 193). Patterson continued to argue that “it takes a different kind of power to implement policy than to win an election”, and that black mayors often do not have sufficient time or political resources to complete significant portions of their agendas. For evidence, Thompson cites in the subsequent paragraphs examples from Washington's Chicago, as well as Cleveland mayors Stokes and White

and Philadelphia mayor Goode (2006 p. 194). My own previous work also makes the case for adding the first black mayor of New Orleans, Ernest “Dutch” Morial, to this list of time-and-resource-constrained first wave of black political leaders (Casper-Futerman 2010).⁵⁶

Of course, participatory planning and policy organizations exist in significant quantity in New York City, so what is the logic behind BCDI attempting to develop another one, with all of the challenges of a start up? What are the shortcomings that a new entity in the Bronx would be able to capably address while also avoiding the pitfalls of broad participation and representation along lines of race, class, gender, and other axes of identity that have bedeviled advocacy planning and equity planning for decades?

In brief, there are two ‘problems’ that these infrastructure pieces are designed to address: a self-critique of community organizing,⁵⁷ and a pointed critique arising from the experience of Bronx community organizations with a legacy of a well-intentioned white liberal technical assistance planning apparatus in Bronx communities of color. The solution, long posited by the social justice planning school and from community organizers and activists working in marginalized communities was to build capacities for planning leadership that was reflective and grounded in the Bronx neighborhoods themselves. In a few sentences that reinforce some of the points made about community organizing in Chapter 4,

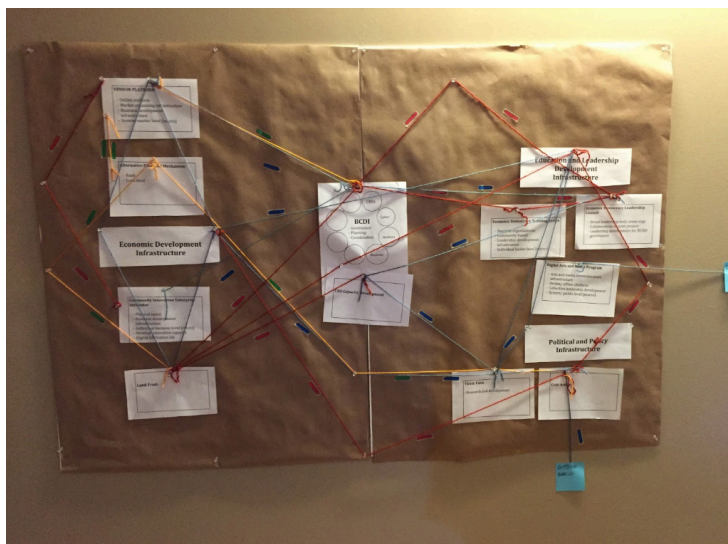
One of the starting points was critiquing community organizing groups. As the organizing writ large has gotten better and more sophisticated, material conditions of people aren't improving. So in outcomes, there's some disconnect. Positive organizing impacts aren't connecting to better living conditions in aggregate. Part of scale, our argument is that our approach is trying to correct

⁵⁶ See also Preston et al 1987, p. ix

⁵⁷ This is part of the rationale for the Economic Democracy Training Series, and serves as a useful reminder that the different components of the network are themselves attempting to respond to multiple and interconnected problems, as the BCDI leadership team understands them.

that, change that. We can alter the way that organizing is done and match it with some toolsets with how development happens. To bring back the integration of development and organizing. The premise of that is to actually and seriously improve the conditions of people's lives. And not only that but we want folks to be largely in charge, have more agency in that.

This recollection is reflected in my contemporaneous notes from throughout my participant observation period as well. At a staff meeting focused on policy development processes for BCDI, the key problematic was described as the challenge of developing “grassroots leaders in policy development processes” (meeting notes 10/3/14). During the 2015 formalization process, a working group member from the south Bronx said that the Bronx needed better and more comprehensive planning apparatuses for community based organizations, essentially “our own OneNYC plan, but better, for us” (5/4/15 meeting).⁵⁸ It was at this same meeting that a BCDI staff member asked the question from the above epitaph. While looking at the network of relationships that participants had made (out of yarn; see fig 8.1 below) to describe how the pieces of the network would function and support and reinforce one another, she asked “you guys, how is what we are building different than a government?” (May 2015 Field Notes).



⁵⁸ OneNYC refers to a major planning document released by the De Blasio administration linking green energy and economic inequality as a guiding document for his administration.

After returning from Mondragón, these discussions continued with greater details and coherence. In the fall of 2015, using the language of “pillars” from Mondragón infrastructures, the working group focused on the core capacities of policy research and civic action. A piece of chart paper on the wall asked participants: “Who is the CoLab, the Pratt, the Urban Justice Center, etc, for our work in the Bronx? We need research assistants, policy papers and ideas. How will we retain ownership of the knowledge agenda and the formulation of policy?” (September 2015 Field Notes). This conversation continued with even greater specificity as the end of the formalization year approached. In one of the final meetings in December 2015, the working group went around in a circle describing their biggest aspirations for the role of BCDI in the coming decade and beyond. Two participants referenced the above comments about “being like the government” that “runs things in the Bronx with the actual government”. Since several of the participants had planning degrees, this conversation about long term vision and planning veered towards planning departments and commissions. Referencing the infamous history of Robert Moses in the Bronx, one BCDI leader asked the group “what would the Bronx look like today if our neighborhoods had their own RPA [regional planning association] back in the 1930s and 1940s? We need both something like a planning commission for the future and the department of planning for the nuts and bolts stuff like rezonings” (December 2015 field notes).

It is worth noting how salient the language of partnership and collaboration with government is, particularly for later in the chapter when I make the fuller argument for BCDI as an “equity regime” in formation. It recalls both Fainstein’s exhortation of a “public-private partnership” for the left, as well as the thinking about scale from the above chapter, in which rising to scale involves taking on state-like capacities for the coordinated deployment of resources (broadly defined). In other words, part of the growth trajectory for long-term planning for BCDI, if not embedding itself formally in

the official apparatus of the local state, is to produce capacities of similar scope and function, either in preparation to take over some administrative and economic functions of the state, or to compete and contend with them.

The conversation became even more fascinating on this point, however, as other participants referenced other forms of planning agencies and capacities in New York City to describe how BCDI would function in the future. One community organizer said what was needed for the Bronx was a “people’s EDC [economic development corporation]”. Another recalled an earlier discussion in which a working group member half-jokingly said she hoped for BCDI to become a “rogue planning agency” for the Bronx”, which led to laughter, applause, and cheers of approval in the meeting (December 2015 Field Notes).

Not all points of discussion were so convivial, however. A tension emerged in the group from a working group member who responded to this conversation by saying that planning was the wrong road to go down, that it was really developers that “wag the dog” of development, not planning. So why emulate the existing planning process when developers were really in control? This led to a discussion between him and the working group member who wanted to be a “people’s EDC,” about who was driving or “wagging” whom in the development process. The question that emerged to be at issue was “do we want to be the developers or the EDC?” The working group member who wanted to be the developer argued that “capital rules the day”, while the other leader argued that “there is power in being the planners too” (December 2015 Field Notes). The group did not come to a final agreement on this point, but it was evident that the relationship between planning and development would be an ongoing debate and question for BCDI’s strategy going forward.

The strategic importance of this question for an effort like BCDI is underscored by its legacy as a core problem for similar initiatives in the past. Recalling Rast's (2005) work on the Local Industrial Retention Initiative (LIRI) in Harold Washington's Chicago, he noted that the relevance of ideas in the Initiative was often directly connected to their provenance from within the Initiative's core leadership:

Ideas emerged through action. They were not the product of university think tanks or policy experts acting independently, but were generated instead by a group of actors that represented potential governing partners. From a regime building perspective, this is crucial (Rast 2005 p. 64).

The necessity of having an internal policy and planning development capacity to the broader network thus draws on this "crucial" lesson for regime construction: paraphrasing Rast and the Stone/Imbroscio debate detailed in Chapter 2, "the influence of ideas was contingent upon the political base that advanced them. **New ideas about economic development, in themselves, had limited transformative capability**" (Rast 2005 p. 65, emphasis added). I revisit and further develop this point below towards the end of this chapter as I outline the ways in which the BCDI model represents an equity-regime-in-formation.

Connected to this discussion but not fleshed out as strongly in the formalization process was the matter of how to coordinate the political consequences of these policy and research outputs. As community organizers, the tactic of targeting elected officials for policy change is assumed. But a borough, while its own county jurisdictionally speaking, is not necessarily a jurisdiction well suited for political analysis or action, given that policies affecting a borough will only be made either at the city, state, or national levels. So borough-wide policy development would need borough-wide political coordination in terms of what to negotiate with policymaking agencies and elected officials. This is the role that is envisioned for the Civic Action Hub (CAH), although in 2018 this infrastructure piece still remains in the conceptual development phase, rather than in pilot

stages. In 2016, after the conclusion of the formalization process, the PPL's working purpose statement was

A center for economic democracy planning and policy development—by, with, and for Bronx residents. It positions local stakeholders as innovators and decision makers with regard to development in the Bronx (BCDI Operational Plan 2017).

This differed in intention slightly from the intention for the Civic Action Hub, which was described as “a central body that coordinates and supports base-building organizations as they organize and mobilize around public policy campaigns and other civic activities” (*ibid*). In my interviews, it was clear that the CAH remained one of the infrastructure components with the least programmatic coherence. The following quote from a BCDI leader characterizes these sentiments generally:

The civic action hub is probably least defined now out of all them. One idea is that its back office for organizing. Training and capacity adds, sort of an economy of scale for community organizing, and doing coordination, so coordinating campaigns across the borough. Its not meant to be in the front at all, but meant to help amplify and scale organizing and upskill, I think, training. The other thing that is debated now too is if it has a more explicitly political focus, is it a C4 at the end of the day, that's a thing to discuss.

Another participant added that the focus of the Civic Action would also be to address specifically the challenges of institutional infiltration and cooptation for economic democracy. The idea remained mostly aspirational, since the Civic Action Hub doesn't exist, but is meant to address a core challenge of what he identifies as a need to move powerful institutions towards economic democracy.

The Civic Action Hub is a very nascent idea of how do we get people to build the political skills to shift institutions? Like, and we're constantly missing opportunities in BCDI to reinforce a set of skills and ideas that, like get at that, whatever we are engaging with an institution that is fucked up. So if we have an expanding view of the economy that's focused on institutions driving the economy, we need to have the training manual of how to shift institutions. And we don't. It's a significant blindspot for us. That blind spot I think further exacerbates the tension between people. Because people will say it's too hard or it's not possible. But any one individual's actions isn't the reality or the nature of that institution. Good or bad.

Another board member connected the work of the Civic Action Hub to relationship building in the electoral and political arena, and identified the need for a pipeline of political leadership and analysis-building in ways that are typically associated with political organizations like the multi-state Working Families Party:

A lot has been made possible in terms of the beginnings of BCDI by having elected officials that we were willing, that believed in the vision, and were willing to throw down for it, and the general need for us to train and run grassroots campaigns and elect members of our community that really share our vision for economic democracy and a commitment to leverage our political infrastructure towards that. But also that want to use, you know, all of the different assets of government to set forward our vision.

In connecting political leadership to policy initiatives, the quote above shows how relationships between planning and policy, and planning and politics, are substantially intertwined. Boundaries in these spaces are sufficiently blurred such that often the division of roles and purposes of planning, policy, and political infrastructure components were difficult to tease out in the abstract. In the sections to come, I outline a series of concrete examples in which the purpose and functions of these pieces of infrastructure came into greater relief, and how they also related to the broader network model overall. I also expand upon the ways in which BCDI attempted to flesh out and differentiate the role of the PPL as a core coordinating and incubation/coordinating body for the *network as a whole*, rather than only a planning entity in the sense of “urban planning” as some combination of land use, real estate, and/or general policy development. These discussions fit into my argument that BCDI sees itself becoming a core coordination entity for the equity regime that the infrastructure network model represents more broadly.

Processes and Products in Social Justice Planning

An important reminder to contextualize the discussions outlined above with regard to BCDI as a planning entity along the lines of the Regional Planning Association, the Economic Development Corporation, or the City Planning Commission, is the extent to

which the BCDI participants generally *loathe* these institutions as racist and aggressively contemptuous of the neighborhoods and people that they work with as organizers. This is also part of what makes futile any effort to tease out the boundaries between politics and policy and planning as I mentioned above: policy and planning are inseparably political to leaders of BCDI, especially insofar as the institutions that supposedly represent and implement these practices in society are seen as fundamentally hostile and oppressive. Even the phrase “think tank” itself was constantly qualified in these discussions as an entity deserving of suspicion *per se*. Instead, the working group offered up words like “workshop” or “incubator” were used to help differentiate its relationship to the network overall and its more distributed governance and stakeholder model (5/4/15 notes). The effort to frame a discussion of the importance of planning as a tool for social justice, while condemning the vast majority of planning institutions in their practice, was a critically necessary assumption to land as a consensus for the group; this goal was not always successfully executed.

In a framing discussion for the PPL during the Mondragón trip in July 2015, a working group member said, “so many think tanks and planners are talking about the future of the Bronx. Fuck that shit. If you don’t have a plan you are a part of someone else’s plan. They consult us at the end once big decisions have already been made for us” (notes July 2015). This critical point separating planning as a tool and most planning institutions, even some of the nominally progressive ones, as structurally incompatible with BCDI’s vision led consistently to a multi-pronged discussion and aims for BCDI as a planning and coordinating body:

- 1) BCDI has to produce different and better *policies* to forward the goals and vision of economic democracy. (Outputs)
- 2) Second, it has to conduct policy development itself in a fashion that is radically more inclusive and empowering than the typical state of practice in New York City. (Process)
- 3) Finally, it has to do accomplish these two historically elusive goals of progressive planning *while also* developing a leadership pipeline of Bronx

residents to govern and develop the entire network infrastructure.
 (Coordination/governance/meta-process)

Most students of planning history would note here that even focusing on just one of these alone would be a generation's worth of work. One meeting in particular encapsulated these challenges particularly well. A subgroup of BCDI working group members and staff met in December 2015 to engage in further elaboration of the goals and strategies that BCDI needed for its PPL and Bronx-wide planning work. The conversation about what BCDI's policy development process should look like led to the following dialogue:

Participant 1: "Ok so part of our goal is we want to shift from fighting bad policies only to creating better ones, but we also need to think intentionally about how policy is made and who controls that process."

Participant 2: "Yes, we can't just be about 'increasing community involvement'. We have to think about what it means to center people and operationalize their values. We are usually doing this with 'friendly' experts—although its not always clear how friendly. So in the Bronx we are outsourcing this work all the time to others, we aren't ever building it for ourselves and our people. So for example, I was on this webinar call for the clean power plan. Community leaders had to drop off the call because it lasted too long. And the rationale that always is used is that the 'timeline doesn't permit' more in depth engagement or education. This makes the actual human beings, the people who will be impacted by these policies, into burdens! They are like, slowing down the train from where it is already headed."

P1: "But like even those processes when they are including people, its this tokenizing thing, 'lets get some brown people in the room!'"

P3: So to me this makes me think about the problem of gentrification. Its very emblematic of this. Its so urgent and frustrating but we also need long term vision for the future too. Like for the folks who want to throw paint at stuff, those kinds of tactics, based on anger and frustration, how do we connect that energy to a broader vision? Because like, most planning students, I have a planning degree, they don't really understand the difference between just holding a meeting to check a box and reaching in for leadership and vision from people who actually live in these places being planned for.

P4: And here we also have the challenge of [immigration] status because people fear the risks of speaking up, but these folks are in these communities and are very vulnerable here.

P2: Well wait but the paint thrower person, is that really just a tactical difference or do they have a totally different vision? To destroy the existing structures and systems, versus evolutionary systems change. How does planning for the Bronx incorporate that if it's a totally different worldview?

P5: We should be able to do both, its not easy though. We want those folks and we want to be able to work across sectors with people who want change from within their places in the Bronx.

P3: This is an advantage of being new, which is unusual, but BCDI can pick its spots, pick its issues, and choose how to frame them. That's an opportunity.

P5: Ok but we're getting a little bit away from one of the core questions which is how do we avoid replicating the power dynamics of policy development with BCDI? We want our base, everyday folks, to be able to say what they want from the city. I want

someone to walk up to our people and say they have a meeting with the deputy mayor tomorrow, what do you want on issue X?

P3: Sure but we also don't yet know what the areas of our purview are, they aren't defined enough yet. So we can't equip folks for that because we don't know what the focus or issue areas are.

P1: So really we are talking about two things. The process of conscientization⁵⁹ in two ways. The policy work and also to have leaders to work with us to try and build the thing that builds the other things. The coordination, the incubation piece.

P5: So that's the piece that's the job of our generation. (December 2015 Field Notes)

The contending desires to articulate a vision of the *what*, *who*, and *how* of planning for economic democracy present numerous theoretical and tactical obstacles. One of the themes that this dialogue addresses is the extent to which the long-standing challenges of race, class, and gender in planning practice can be addressed through an intentionally designed leadership development process. It should be noted that these challenges apply both to the Bronx overall, as well as internally to BCDI's own organizational staffing. It is to these issues in the case of BCDI that I now turn.

Class, Race, Gender, and Leadership in Planning

Indeed, one of the reasons why this dynamic of leadership and the centrality of low-income Bronx residents of color is that BCDI as an organization is itself grappling with these challenges in its own organizational development. The question of leadership in BCDI occurs on interrelated planes: on the level of the board and staffing of the initiative in the Bronx, and at the larger scale relationship between BCDI and the MIT Community Innovators Lab which has played an instrumental role supporting Bronx-based staffing and Bronx-based leadership in the development of BCDI since its earliest iterations as a dream extending from a master's thesis published in 2010. This supporting role and the role of social justice planners supporting community-based development and organizing projects is of course not new or unique to BCDI in any way. Heskin's 1991 work on the

⁵⁹ This is a neologism drawn from Freire, which roughly translated is a process of political consciousness development, and a framework often used in popular education and community organizing.

Route 2 corridor in Los Angeles is a seminal work on the dynamics of race, nationality, gender, and class in the relationships between planners and even among neighborhood residents. The dynamic between MIT and BCDI as both a source of immense value and tension around leadership is critical to the early stages of BCDI's development, particularly its capacities as a Bronx-based planning and coordination entity. In the section that follows, I outline some of these tensions, and how the relationship surfaced questions around race, class, and gender (and funding) in BCDI's work.

In my interviews, board and staff were upfront about their conflicted feelings about the relationship of CoLab to the BCDI work. They all acknowledged the risk that it took to invest in the leadership and vision from the Bronx, but noted the inevitable tensions that arise from a relationship—even a strong and beneficial one—in which power dynamics are unbalanced. The tensions in this relationship, and how CoLab and BCDI have worked to address them, also holds valuable lessons for the field of social justice planning, and those who wish to work with and support the leadership and visions of marginalized communities. One board member said,

Sometimes I feel like CoLab runs the show, and I don't always feel like it's that transparent. There's good stuff from them so it's not like it's wrong, but I struggle with it. Their role is so important because it brings heft to this work in the Bronx. It's so much bigger [than us], so maybe if it was more transparent it could be more effective? I don't know. There are so many dots that need connecting here [in New York], I think our connection to MIT takes us out of those connections sometimes because they're there and we're here.

Another board member echoed these sentiments, a combination of gratitude and tension:

So for the first few years BCDI was really a MIT project. Staffing I mean. The vision was us, was the Bronx. CoLab was staffing [two male Bronx organizers]. So as we are transitioning it to Bronx ownership more fully, those dynamics may change. Part of our strategic planning commitment for staffing as well is to be much more Bronx based and people of color. That will change the external piece too. ... The driver seat moving from CoLab to [BCDI] is important though, and having them as a consultant will be important too. But our values, beyond economic democracy, the people-values matter though. Gender dynamics comes up too, and racial stuff too. We all bring our shit into those spaces. [The women on the board] are getting also a lot better at managing [the men on staff], which matters. Being a little bit their bosses has been useful to changing some dynamics.

Years of collaboration also clearly helped bring Bronx-based leaders on board more to the values that CoLab brings to their work as a resource partner for co-creation, not dictating terms and strategies with local partners. In turn, the relationship between BCDI and CoLab has also led to changes in CoLab's vision, analysis, and work across the Americas. So the learning and influence is a two directional arrow, not just unidirectional. That dynamic of feeling recognized, trusted, and seen, as local leaders with real knowledge and skills, so absent often from philanthropy, government, and technical assistance planners, was another point raised in interviews:

Yes we are grateful for CoLab's investment and it's kind of like a crazy risk that they're taking. Not just risk but investment. They just believe in us and the way that it transpired is really beautiful too because it was about relationships and believing in people and then being connected to a community and believing in that community and then deciding to invest here.

This board member continued, placing her questions and tensions in this context of appreciation and trust:

I don't know that we'd be in the place we are today without them I think the tension for me is that while that is all appreciated and valuable for the initiative, we have been creating this pipeline of workers who were predominantly, not all, but predominantly white from MIT who were working in the Bronx to build stuff. And that is important because they started as grad students, as grad interns, and then, you know you invest in them and then it makes sense for you to want to hire them because you just invested a year or two in them, but the tension there of how do you balance that out with where is the other pipeline you're creating of Bronx folks to bring them in and to do that and knowing that the infrastructure at MIT, and when you're coming out of MIT where you are at skill level and capacity versus our folks that are actually really missing those capacities not always but often times. So at our retreat, the latest one, one of the goals for the year was that the staff reflects the community. Because, yeah that's a real tension for us and it felt like it was this never-ending pipeline [from MIT], and we'll always have just MIT [paid] staff in the Bronx.

Once the clear operational intention was set to prioritize Bronxites and local talent in the 2017 BCDI Operational Plan, this tension and challenge continued to be worked out in various ways. How BCDI interacts with MIT CoLab is in some ways as well just another instance of how this particular group of people relates to individuals and institutions who can both be helpful, but for which engagement comes with the strings attached of what level of accountability or autonomy is traded in the relationship. In examining BCDI's

relationships with elected officials, one sees a similar set of challenges as emerged with anchor institutions and with MIT CoLab—what does each side want or need from the other, and what is required to trade to produce in order to sustain—or transform—that relationship?

Working with elected officials and government

There are very clear ways in which elected officials in New York City can be beneficial towards advancing BCDI's vision for economic democracy in the Bronx, and their engagement with these kinds of politics builds on decades of slow and incremental change in urban areas across the United States. Like many processes of relationship building and organizing, however, BCDI's work to engage elected officials, like their work to engage anchor institution executives, senior labor leaders, and values-aligned real estate developers and business owners, there are significant strategic questions as to the (f)utility of these efforts. In my interviews, efforts to transform these relationships from patronizing and transactional to mutual and durable raised doubts, skepticism, and hope among BCDI leadership. Frustration with city officials specifically, however, also lines up well with what emerged in the chapters above concerning the different kinds of reception that BCDI received from different anchor institutions. The variation across and within institutional spheres suggests no easy answer for dismissing classes of institutions out of hand—nor does it offer much in the way of clarity on strategies that could be useful beyond individual cases. To echo the previous chapter's focus on the role of scale, it became clear that frustrations with the city had quite a bit to do with plans for growing BCDI's impact in the first ten years of its work. As a participant laid out:

The city is possibly more frustrating [than the anchors] and also is a larger order question about a progressive administration that can't run a progressive program. That's a bigger regime [points at interviewer] question that in ten years

I'd love for BCDI to help solve in the Bronx at least.⁶⁰ We had a bunch of assumptions that we'd be able to bring this thing to scale, BCDI to scale more quickly with the support of the administration. And thought this administration would be supportive, more so than it has been. We saw lifting up BCDI as a chance for them to match their progressive rhetoric with some real stuff behind it. It's also about changing understandings of what economic development can be. At a citywide level, can we think ourselves out of a neoliberal box? That's been challenging so far.

I return to the question of a broader economic development agenda below in further detail, but the challenge of working with government was also played off of other kinds of institutions such as anchors. For example, one board member said that one of the appeals of working with anchors was that they might be willing to work on different timelines and with greater experimentation and flexibility than government:

One of the reasons why the anchor institution piece was always appealing to me was because it creates an opportunity to address scale without having to necessarily wait on timeline of the government to finally get its act together to decide that it wants to do something differently.

Another board member, however, placed the locus of innovation and experimentation outside of both government and the anchors, arguing that the change agents that BCDI would need do not yet exist within these institutions, but have to be developed and strategically placed within them. She described the current situation with government as similarly frustrating, but also expressed some reserved hope that the kinds of shifts that she thought would be necessary might be achievable in the arena of electoral politics. She also makes a useful point to the fact that the relationship between anchor institutions and elected officials can be leveraged in both ways: anchors can motivate elected officials to act, but elected officials can also encourage and motivate anchors (as well as regulate them):

Outside of cultivating individual allies but I think that there's a rising tide already of younger political actors in the Bronx that want to change the culture within our [Bronx] delegation. So our ability to be able to cultivate and run candidates that can actually provide an alliance on multiple levels of city governments, you know, state, federal, to move forward a strategy beyond what we've been able to achieve

⁶⁰ The hand gesture that this staffer made in pointing to me as he mentioned the word “regime” is a result of an impromptu conversation about urban politics that had taken place a short time before the interview in which I’d used the word ‘regime’.

with individual allies. And perhaps also help us in agitating the anchors in a way that we can't quite do. Its like, how do you align your efforts to create different levels of incentive and consequence beyond just like mobilizing the protests?

This concluding point about tools and tactics is a useful segue into a broader theme that arose in my interviews around questions of politics and power. For community organizers trained to define their relationship to formal institutional power as infinitely unequal and oppositional, the tactic of relationship building across sectors and partnerships of values is tricky almost to the point of blasphemous. As such, this led to a lot of considered discussion about how BCDI could hold those tactics and toolsets together, or if that was even what it should set out to achieve. In the sections that follow, I outline the kinds of points that BCDI protagonists raised on this issue, and connect it to a broader set of opportunities around the politics of economic development.

“Good Cop, Bad Cop”

Another dynamic that emerged as a thread in interviews was a permutation of the longstanding debate and tension within community development typically framed as “confrontation versus collaboration” or some variation (Saegert 2006; Kirkpatrick 2007). In these conversations, the challenge of scaling BCDI to the level of governing partner for planning and business development was accompanied by the knowledge engrained in its leadership of community organizers that being too comfortably ensconced in the halls of power tends to undermine further organizing to improve lives in neighborhoods. Conversely, a lack of access to formal institutions of power, in their estimation, was also counterproductive. But the question of how this dynamic would play out remained for most of the leadership, since BCDI technically is its own independent entity, and can maneuver itself and position itself differently than its base of community organizing partners, many of whom engage in strategic targeting (sometimes called “hits”) of financial institutions, landlords, elected officials, and agencies. This tension emerged in

interviews as almost a division of labor, with the boundary lines between the “good cop” and the “bad cop” not yet clearly defined. One example of this was seen in a discussion of anchor institutions, which community organizers often feel are disrespectful or dismissive, like many other actors, public and private. But against the backdrop of BCDI’s larger strategy, they sometimes felt unsure about how to go about targeting or demanding changes in practices or policies.

*We also haven't gotten agitational [sic] with [a large private Bronx hospital] about how they've showed up as a partner in our projects. I think in part because we are struggling, we feel the pressure of just being able to get to the end of creating something without our partnership falling apart. And it feels like that has been a cyclical issue that has come up in BCDI around [external] partners or partnerships, like having this vision of how we could work with larger institutions that want to do better but just don't actually understand how. And yet, you know, and that undermines our ability to agitate and, **I just, I don't actually, I feel kind of like I'm struggling with how we strike both chords and don't sacrifice one for the other.** Which I believed in that sort of approach coming into BCDI, like that is necessary, we need to learn how to actually partner with these larger institutions but I do feel like our [organizing] experience, at least with this institution is constantly one that our needs don't get met and we just have to stomach it and get creative in a way. That's not justice, you know! [laughs]*

Another board member addressed this same challenge around the confrontation versus collaboration divide:

I would say right now that I think where we seem to be orienting is this interesting relationship where the confrontation is mainly held and owned by the community groups themselves and the collaboration is more so held by BCDI. I don't think that I know of BCDI as taking like the lead or a prominent confrontation position on pretty much anything. That's not to say that it's not there in terms of individuals. But as an institution, no. In some ways it almost feels, both with philanthropy with government, there's sort of this like insider/outsider component and that the community groups who have long been playing outsiders can't necessarily transition into being insiders with many of these institutions and systems, and so along comes this new thing with a new name that technically includes all those outsiders but because it is different and has a different name and has a different brand, it can play an insider role, right? It can get city council money, it can get EDC money, it can sit down with many of these anchor institutions, many of the community groups have probably at some point in time been at a press conference or some kind of other event where they were critical of some of the labor practices or activities or community role in many of these anchor institutions, right? So in some ways I think that I completely understand that, and personally I don't believe that every non-profit has to play the same kind of role. I think if BCDI's explicit agreed-upon role is to be the insider of other people's outsider that's ok.

The extent to which the insider/outsider strategy outlined above was named a tactical choice, rather than a structural inevitability, varied with some of the interviews.

I don't know what role BCDI will play: if it will be more public or if it will be like, 'we're working to support people but we're not up there in front.' I can see that there will have to be some decisions made of like 'well what's the role of BCDI here?' In some ways, I have experienced BCDI as leveraging the confrontation and agitating [of others] and going after [certain institutions] to allow BCDI to come in. Because [BCDI] can be like 'ya see what's over there? You don't want that, trust me you don't want that.' So you know, its like good cop, bad cop.

Implicit in this debate around who does the “confrontation” and who does the “collaboration” (which are themselves both very loaded words), are differences in opinion and belief in the extent to which large institutions are structurally capable of shifting their roles in society or their legacies of harmful practices. In other words, the discussion here is once again about structures and agents—if building critical catalytic leadership capacity in lumbering bureaucracies such as hospitals, universities, government agencies, or even foundations (much less the entire philanthropy sector), is both plausible *and* a strategically useful tactic for building more progressive political and economic power in US cities. There were a variety of answers to this challenge in the interviews I conducted, but the overarching theme is that if we can posit that institutions either change or die, that investing time and political energies in transformation is superior to allowing salvageable institutions to atrophy into death. What constitutes “salvageable” is yet another goalpost that will always be context dependent. Two participants had thoughts about this tension in BCDI’s work, where one had a more hopeful outlook on the possibility for institutional transformation, and the other felt less hopeful or optimistic that change will be possible. First, the optimist:

...To say we can't work with the establishment I think is just intellectually lazy. Like you're not giving yourself enough credit, time, space, to think of something more strategic than that. You're just sort of, like, 'well it's too hard to change these guys, so I'm just gonna build something new.' And not recognizing just how much work it would be to build everything new. It's gonna be really complicated, and messy, because its gonna be a BIG debate around, basically: we can't just destroy all the people who have money. Politicians, labor, banks? We can't just

destroy all these things. Some people are gonna be like fuck that, they gotta go. Because some of these folks, politicians, in labor too, those guys are gonna do really disgusting, horrible things. They have a track record of doing really disgusting, horrible things in the Bronx already. So imagine, you know, it's, an ugly fight, very tough, but I think maybe we're beginning to build stronger relationships with some of these other powerful groups.

On this same issue, the other participant had a different outlook:

*We had individual leaders from government, from the city council, from finance and real estate development, from a large Bronx anchor [names them]. They started out, you know, they came to us with a real commitment and vision. And they were the sort of people asking us, how can you help me express my values, how can our work together actually help me express my values in a more powerful way? But I don't know, I struggle with **this strategy of how you get in a deeply embedded institution to change**. And it's not that I don't think that it's possible, but, and also not lose yourself in the process. Well, if you need to do that then you're obviously not being successful in changing it! I don't know, I am kind of a Debbie Downer about this right now.*

Whether trying to change institutions and systems is possible in the context of urban politics is an open terrain of ideological and political debate. The opportunities for engaging with New York City's existing political apparatus brought these debates into focus for BCDI with an MIT CoLab funded trip for black and Latino city and state elected officials from the Bronx and Brooklyn to visit Mondragon in the fall of 2017. In the aftermath of this trip, an internal debate continued for BCDI leadership around the value of building vision and relationships to elected officials versus the absolute futility of attempting to push elected officials to relate to economic democracy with anything beyond a transactional lens.

Mondragon Elected Officials Trip 2017

The challenge of the 2017 Mondragón delegation was significantly different than the earlier 2015 delegation, which focused on solidifying inspiration for an inchoate but somewhat pre-existing analysis of community control and economic democracy among the participants. In 2017, the values and vision were in completely different places for the elected officials on the trip, and their commitment to the broader vision of economic

democracy or even employee ownership was never vetted before the trip. In other words, they were nominated based on their districts and their power, not only their expressed commitment or values-alignment. Additionally, the diversity of geography (Bronx and Brooklyn) and jurisdictions (city council and state legislature) brought very different powers and prerogatives to the space in terms of takeaways from the trip.

One board member in particular told a series of anecdotes that stood out to her from the trip. The councilperson that represented her organization in the Bronx was on the delegation, which she said provided a good “chance to connect with them,” but she also voiced frustrations about the inability of the elected officials to deepen their analysis or see beyond simplistic political categories.

For example one of the council people in the Bronx, he only really understood it through the lens of the existing cooperatives in the Bronx, like the Hunts Point terminal market cooperative. So he wasn't really getting how it would look in the Bronx and how it would be different. He basically wasn't getting the difference between a producer cooperative where the companies own the cooperative, and a worker cooperative where the workers own. But what did land for him was the Bilbao innovation factory, because it was exciting and new and doable in an urban area like the Bronx. So then it really did land for him and how it could be real and concrete in his district in the Bronx. ...Right off the bat also though, the electeds when they got there, they got wary and we're saying things like, "is this socialism?" and we were like uh, no, they're businesses. But they were so afraid of being seen as socialist or radicals because of the trip. They were starting off in the first day or two being like "so really what is this though, is this capitalism or socialism?" And then they were relieved that the companies were competitive in the marketplace--that was what made them feel relief and excited! And they said things that reflected on their experiences with worker cooperative advocacy in New York in the last couple years, like "these coops have been sold to us as for immigrants to escape poverty, to have cleaning coops and stuff" and so they were relieved too, they were like "oh this could be so much more than that." We tried to make it clear that like those businesses are really good and helpful for those people also! This isn't about taking away from that, or having it be "either, or" kind of situation, you should do both! I felt like them being able to see the companies be big players in their industries and in the European and international context, that really impressed them. And then [laughing] that it wasn't exactly or entirely socialism, whatever that means?!

During our interview, which was already a few months after the delegation had returned, there were emerging questions about how the elected officials would behave differently, if at all, based on their experiences in Mondragón. Could a trip that lands so powerfully

for some in the community organizing and community development sectors land with a thud in the political arena, even in a heavily democratic (party) jurisdiction like New York, because of vague concerns about socialism? Additionally, the clear goal of the trip was to build relationships with elected officials as leaders in their own right for economic democracy, beyond their position as legislators or appropriators of funds. The hope to rise above transactional relationships was perhaps too tall an order for a weeklong trip, but the fullness of the transformation of the elected officials, as of this writing, cannot yet necessarily be known. The same board member concluded:

I really hope going forward that the electeds deepen their analysis. I think I had conversations and heard them having conversations that made me think that yes, they are understanding it, and how these things could be real in New York or the Bronx. Hopefully that means they'd be more supportive on some policy work too if they understand it would help connect to building things they understand and want to see happen. I also think I want the council people to think beyond just transactional things like oh sure I could fund this thing, to thinking more long term and investing in projects and a vision over a longer term. Some of them need more work to get to that kind of thing though, more than others.

The work of building further analysis is not just incumbent upon elected officials, however. The framework of economic democracy, beyond the ownership of the firm or enterprise, also creates new challenges and exciting opportunities for the work of urban economic development advocacy. In the section that follows, I outline how the framework of economic democracy provides an opening for housing organizers, good jobs organizers, and cooperative developers and enterprises to coalesce into a new coalition for economic development that has proven elusive in decades of US urban politics.

Economic Development under Economic Democracy

The policy silos of housing and economic development in the past few decades have rarely been effectively integrated, as I have discussed in previous chapters. This challenge presented itself in the Kingsbridge Armory redevelopment campaign, as well as in the recent spate of rezonings in the Bronx, particularly in the Jerome Avenue rezoning,

which lasted from approximately 2016 until it was approved in 2018. The opportunity for a more unified platform for an affirmative vision of reconstructed urban economic development, beyond the usual criticisms, has rarely materialized into anything concrete. The critiques of the double standard of the “parallel universe dilemma” (Wolf-Powers 2013) and others around job quality (Damiani et al 2007), and the focus on large industry over small business, and privatization (Beauregard 1993) are all excellent critiques, but have yet to coalesce around an agenda beyond reform of the existing entities and structures that govern economic development in New York City—what Harvey long ago termed the “entrepreneurial turn” in urban governance (Harvey 1989; Haynes and Nembhard 1999; DeFilippis 2004; Cox and Mair 1989). As the staffer above noted, BCDI’s work could provide a progressive administration with some “real stuff” to match their rhetoric on inequality, but it is not yet a challenge that has been taken up. A board member recounted to me in a similar vein that economic democracy perhaps provides the framework necessary to mobilize new constituencies or existing constituencies towards different demands, thus creating opportunities for a more structural approach to reconstructing urban economic development after years of uncontested public-private partnership governance.

I think the piece that's very different about 'economic democracy' is, it's almost a space where those individual actors who do care about this never came together under a unified umbrella and a unified set of principles or agenda. I am continually surprised at the lack of people who take on, confront, and challenge the existing economic development systems and setup at the grassroots level all the way up to the policy level. In a city as big as New York, the fact that there's maybe ten organizations who have done that like a decade prior to this is pretty shocking. I would make the distinction between, there are a large number of people who have done this surrounding labor, but that conversation of labor has not crossed over to the broader populace conversation, and that the small space that they're having the populace conversation hadn't always crossed over to the labor conversation.

As she went on to articulate, the possibilities of these coalitions forming or uniting under a framework of economic democracy could have potentially longer-term or higher-order impacts on progressive politics in New York City, even within the confines of the traditional Democratic machine. Our interview took place before Mayor De Blasio

cruised relatively easily to reelection, but the premise of her points remain just as salient, if not more so:

The De Blasio administration so far has been, I'll say interested in speaking about economic inequities and injustices broadly across a variety of topics that does not mean that there are willing to disrupt existing systems or processes around changing those. So I think there's a question of how much of this moment in time, these next four years, is about changing the discourse versus how much opportunity in the next four years is it going to be to change how things are done. Changing the conversation maybe then changes what we would think about trying to accomplish for [BCDI]. I think that there are some questions about what a term limited mayor will do in his final term. My sense is [they] will do something small around the edges and not something big and transformational and game-changing and sort of like legacy-making. That seems like stupid political strategy to me, but nonetheless, yeah [sighs, laughs]. ... And since we don't yet have an organizing base that is calling and demanding and pushing the timetable for government to do this, I don't see them accelerating that in the next four years. So they're gonna go at their time clock, we don't yet have really a groundswell from the community that says, like, your time clock is unacceptable.

What the participant is talking about in this excerpt is building a base for economic democracy in New York City. A base in community, in labor, and wherever else, that would be activated and agitate elected officials and agencies about the need for a dramatic shift in priorities and policies. Without a clear plan for determining what work the Civic Action Hub would be responsible for, it's difficult to know for sure, but the work of building a popular base for economic democracy is precisely the kind of work that BCDI is designed for, and would be one of its most unique and historic contributions if executed successfully. The consequences of having a base for politics and policies for economic democracy I turn to now in the context of regime construction in urban politics.

Building an Equity Regime

This final section draws many of the above threads, and the above chapters, together into a more coherent whole. As I outlined above, the role of the planning function of BCDI's network is not just a planning arm in a traditional sense of being a technical assistance

provider for community based organizations in the Bronx, but actually serves three purposes for the network overall: develop policies for economic democracy (outcomes function), develop improved participatory processes for planning and policy (process/deliberation function), and finally, develop Bronx based leadership for the network and coordinate the incubation, growth, and relationships between the core components of network infrastructure (meta process and coordination function).

The necessity of a coordination function for the PPL, and of BCDI generally, was baked into the vision from early on, although there was not always that much clarity on precisely that that meant or what it would look like in practice. One staffer outlined this vagueness early on in the process:

The core infrastructure design in 2013 and 2014 helped us think about: what are the shared infrastructure pieces to build a network that fills gaps? That was pretty abstract and vague in that area—economic development, planning, organizing, what is this thing? When we laid it out what we had to the Working Group, and immediately folks knew what to do, people saw what was missing, and people broke out markers and paper and started changing relationships and tossing out ideas. We didn't know where we'd end up, but the leadership in the working group pushed us to think more broadly and clearly. So we exploded it out and then reeled it back in.

In 2015, during the Mondragón trip with the working group, the practical understanding of the role of a coordinating entity became clearer since the delegation met with leadership from the Mondragón equivalent, the Mondragón Cooperative Corporation (MCC). In that context, drawing a circle at the center of the BCDI network of infrastructure saying “this is us” started to make more sense, and allowed the working group to see themselves as leaders in a broader field, beyond just one organization (Mondragon field notes notes). As the formalization process neared its conclusion in the closing months of 2015, the more fleshed out versions of the core coordinating functions that BCDI would hold in the network had started to come into place. In the November retreat, an organizational design memo for BCDI outlined functions that would be held by the PPL and the board of BCDI:

Add new critical capacity that builds planning, coordination, and economic development infrastructure for the Bronx, build new partnerships that enable the initiative to scale up and build significant political power for our base, generate revenues for the broader network, and build collective power for the members of the network...

As a secondary focus, [BCDI] will strengthen and expand the democratic planning and coordination capacity among stakeholders in the Bronx, primarily members and partners of BCDI. Although identifying and building the nodes of the network (members, stakeholders, and projects) is critical, that work will be completely irrelevant without developing robust working relationships between the nodes ...

[BCDI] will provide technical assistance to support core stakeholders to align projects and campaigns with an economic democracy framework and support the development of high quality partnerships with each other and with external partners. As part of this role, [BCDI] will continue to convene core stakeholders and facilitate the collective strategy and long-term planning capacity of BCDI leadership (Organizational design memo, 11/17/15).

Here it is worth recalling some of the core dynamics of regime construction and coordination that Rast and Stone outlined and described nearly fifteen years ago. Their work emphasizes interdependence, cross-sectoral partnerships, networks, shared purpose, and coordinating capacity as critical in urban regime construction. Presaging BCDI's approach, as Stone noted in 2004, "awareness of interdependence is thus reinforced and sustained by engagement in a network. ... Purpose and network, purpose and coalition, coalition and mode of cooperation—all affect one another" (Stone 2004 p. 13). Even more of the contours of BCDI's network of infrastructure components become clearer if we revisit Stone's primary assertion about the components of regime construction. In 2004, he identifies four core components that build strong or that lead to weak regimes:

1. An **agenda** framed to provide congruent goals, concretely defined,
2. Around which a **cross-sector coalition** forms that can provide resources adequate to pursue an agreed-upon agenda as a matter of priority, and
3. The **provision of resources** and follow-through actions are facilitated through an **effective scheme of cooperation**, as well as
4. Reinforced by auxiliary means, typically involving an interpersonal and inter-**organizational network**, and may also include **side-payments** in various forms (2004 p. 10, emphasis added).

Focusing on just the boldfaced key words and phrases above, the preceding analysis of BCDI's component infrastructure parts lines up quite well. The goal of the overall

initiative is broad, but each of the core component pieces has a set of more clearly definable and obtainable objectives.

Regime (Stone)	BCDI
Agenda	CAH/PPL
Cross-Sector Coalition	Community Enterprise Network
Cooperation Scheme/Network	BCDI
Financing/Side-payments	Fund

The cross-sectoral approach aligns with BCDI's understanding of the need to work not only just with other community organizations, but with finance, labor, business, and government, to achieve a broader and transformational objective. As Stone notes with respect to urban politics, networks, in the absence of pure hierarchical command and control, are the mechanisms necessary to fulfill the promise of regime making in politics. This is the role of BCDI, the coordinating entity that aligns and plans and acts as a parastatal governance apparatus. The resources are obtained from philanthropy and government, and ultimately through the endowed fund for economic democracy, with its three funding arms, as outlined above in Chapter 7.

The argument here however, isn't just that BCDI is building a regime, but that it is building a new and different kind of regime: an equity regime, grounded in economic democracy. My argument in this regard is twofold. First of all, I argue that the intentional interconnection of the component parts represents in and of itself a contribution to the field of community and economic development, as well as urban politics, as it represents and internalization of the lessons of failures of the 20th century into a set of structural relationships (with their own incompleteness and contradictions to be sure) that are designed to address the challenges of the preceding decades, *at a scale at which it is necessary to meaningfully address those challenges*.

Secondly, and as important if not more so, is the centrality of economic democracy to the vision and the apparatuses for attaining that vision: egalitarian and participatory governance, and equitable distribution and allocation of financial risks and rewards—in other words, of ownership in the civic, social, and economic senses of the word. To recall Stone’s point from the epigraph of this chapter, BCDI is a meaningful intervention in that it integrates the values and prescriptions of alternatives long proposed and long ignored, opposed, or sabotaged, with the practicalities of *how to integrate* them into the machinery of political, economic, and civic life in the Bronx and New York City.

BCDI’s approach to answering the question of how, of “what comes next” in terms of economic development is, I think, substantively different from the ad hoc manner in which progressive urban politics have operated in many cities, from the twin cities to Chicago to Boston, and certainly in NYC, for the last several decades. To reiterate Stone’s point, “It is not enough to offer a new agenda. Alternative agendas come on the scene with frequency, but typically fade away because they lack supporting elements. Governing arrangements achieve strength and direction as a body, not as separable elements” (2004 p. 12). The BCDI network model is one possible answer to the decades long question of what a durable urban progressive regime—an agenda for social and economic justice, with supporting elements and a capacity for coordination—might look like. To this point, a board member said

The things that I'm most excited about is I think we have already started to have the seeds of and foundation of being a part of a new conversation around what economic development should mean in New York. And I think that BCDI is one of the leaders and forefronts in a huge city that still has relatively few actors who are starting to say this should and must look different. And whether it's in the next four years or whether it's after the next four years, in the early stages of when people start to say and respond and say 'yes we do have to do things differently, let's try this... to be one of those organizations, or the organization, where people are like 'we're gonna try your vendor platform or we're gonna...' is an exciting moment to sort of shape and redirect the status quo that's been in place.

As can be seen in this chapter and preceding ones above, this excitement and hope exists tightly wound with concerns about the future of the Bronx, as well as a knowledge that many of BCDI's leaders hold on to regarding the many failures that litter the path behind them.

Conclusions: The Burial Ground of Progressive Cities

Many of the strongest highlights of the Progressive Cities literature arise from the work of black political leaders, elected and otherwise. BCDI enters into their work with strong intellectual, political, and personal linkages and relationships to the work of urban black male politicians, activists, and strategists, from Chicago to Boston to New York City, including Harold Washington, Mel King, Bill Lynch, David Dinkins, Basil Paterson, Gerald Hudson, and Phil Thompson.⁶¹ As Thompson himself notes (2006), the inspiration and legacies of these men often directly out of their experiences with leaders from the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. BCDI's work evinces much of the many decades of successes and failures of this black urban progressive legacy, while also making some strategic innovations in order to learn from past shortcomings.

Why does this history matter to the vision and execution of BCDI's strategy for building and promoting economic democracy in the Bronx? The legacy of progressive urban (electoral) politics in this case runs through the leadership of key activists and politicians, particularly from black progressive leaders within and around the Democratic Party.

In the same era as the Harold Washington administration in Chicago, civil rights activist Mel King ran unsuccessfully for Mayor against Ray Flynn in Boston, pushing a platform

⁶¹ I mention these names because these are the names that were mentioned, not because there isn't ample evidence for black women's political leadership (Hull et al 1982; Robnett 1999; Winslow 2013)

similar to Washington's: for greater attention to neighborhoods against downtown development. The focus of King's campaign policy and strategy was to build a multi-racial coalition in support of economic opportunity and neighborhood-based planning, which would form the basis for Dinkins' coalition less than a decade later (Clavel 2010 and Thompson 2006).⁶² During the Flynn administration, Mel King's work in Boston continued to focus on building institutions of economic opportunity and civic participation, particularly in the black neighborhoods of Boston in which Flynn's support had been weakest. This was part of the social and political context in which the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative was incubated and grew. During the same time as King and Washington in the 1980s, a trio of like-minded black political activists was working in organized labor and the Harlem political machine. Bill Lynch, who ran campaigns and did political work for public sector unions, would eventually become Deputy Mayor under New York City's first African-American mayor, David Dinkins. Gerry Hudson, a nursing home worker in the Bronx and member of the healthcare services union SEIU 1199 local, would eventually rise through the ranks of the labor union to become the Executive Vice President of the union local by 1989, the same year Dinkins would be elected. Under the supervision of Bill Lynch in Dinkins' office when he was Manhattan Borough President was Phil Thompson, a young planner and scholar of politics who would become a senior official in the New York City public housing authority (NYCHA) during the Dinkins administration, and move on to become a professor at MIT (in the same department that supported the feasibility study for the Dudley Street Initiative in Boston years earlier).

Of these three, Hudson and Thompson together play an integral role in shepherding political support and supporting the vision and strategy of BCDI's work. Both use their

⁶² This combination of progressive whites, young people, and people of color, particularly black and latino, was ultimately the same coalition that went on to elect Barack Obama in 2008.

ties to Democratic Party operatives, including Mayor De Blasio and his staff, as well as state and local elected officials, to communicate and validate BCDI's economic and political objectives under the unfamiliar framing of economic democracy. Hudson and Thompson, as well as Thompson's spouse Dayna Cunningham, a civil rights attorney and former philanthropy executive, direct the MIT Community Innovator's Lab, through which a great deal of staff, funding, logistical, and incubation support for BCDI has been funneled as outlined above. In the spring of 2018, Thompson replaced Richard Buery as Mayor De Blasio's Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives, significantly enhancing BCDI's political connections and access into the administration. In the press conference announcing his new position, Thompson referenced his earlier work with Dinkins, Lynch, and Hudson as formative to his views on progressive politics and policy. The centrality of black male political thought and leadership in progressive urban politics since the civil rights era of the 1960s suggests the centrality of racial justice and black political leadership to urban progressive politics. This may change as demographics and political institutions change over time, but the other pitfalls may remain steady.

Another point of outlining this history is to trace BCDI's understanding of politics through the prism of those who have been influential in shaping the vision and strategic approach to politics, particularly electoral politics and public policy, beyond the Bronx-based organizers interviewed for this dissertation. Lessons learned from the political work, particularly among black male political operatives during the last three decades, are driving the strategic vision of BCDI in ways that build on, but also suffer from, the same set of practices and ideas of many of the progressive political proto-regimes that these protagonists have sought to construct. With BCDI, the hope is that perhaps they have learned enough from past mistakes to succeed in constructing a durable multi-racial urban equity regime where others have come up short previously.

With the return of Phil Thompson to New York City's government, and with such a broad ranging position of authority with close proximity to the Mayor, the question of opportunity and pitfalls once again returns us to previous historical examples. The tension of neighborhood based progressive planning and organizing entities and progressive mayoral administrations is quite literally the hall of fame and the graveyard of post-civil rights era urban progressive politics. Both the example of the Homegrown Economy Project (HEP) in St. Paul, and the LIRI case study in Chicago (see Imbroscio 1995 and Rast 2005, cited earlier), demonstrate the pitfalls of playing too friendly with senior administration officials, even in a uniquely progressive administration. To parallel the HEP's loss of power and influence with the departure of a key government official: BCDI's reliance on access to Phil Thompson during the now three remaining years of the De Blasio administration present an opportunity only insofar as any built out infrastructure is able to sustain itself past the point where he and other individuals close to him no longer hold positions of power. The ability to outlast a single administration is one of the core defining elements of a regime status. Although BCDI's relationships to senior level government officials is now just beginning, it is worth revisiting Rast's four part cycle of regime partnership, tracing the ascent and descent of the LIRI work in Chicago over a twenty year period:

- Stage 1: Experimentation and Organizing
- Stage 2: Partial Incorporation
- Stage 3: Partnership
- Stage 4: Marginalization

In this example, outlined in greater detail above in Chapter 2, we might reasonably locate BCDI's current position as mostly Stage 1, with some possible early signs of transitioning into Stage 2 as a result of Phil Thompson's elevation to Deputy Mayor in 2018. What lies ahead for BCDI, as it did for LIRI, is the same dynamic and tension that has defined the community organizing field for decades: the dis-integration of development work and organizing work. As Rast notes for LIRI, the organizations involved in standing up the initiative "paid less attention to organizing capacity because

organizing seemed less necessary when they were in power. Political support bases in the neighborhoods began to weaken as they focused more on planning and development” (Rast p. 63). In other words, Stage 4 for LIRI was defined not by their dissolution, but by a steady and significant diminution of its funding stream of patronage dollars, without much of an ongoing mechanism to organize to reenergize their (now former) base in neighborhoods.

The successes and pitfalls of Rast’s case demonstrate a series of important cautionary tales for BCDI in their efforts to integrate and legitimate policies and politics of community ownership and economic democracy into the Bronx and New York City more broadly. They also demonstrate how BCDI’s approach to a network of infrastructure pieces attempts to resolve some of these structural tensions and learn from the pitfalls of those that came before them. BCDI for example, doesn’t do its own organizing—its partnerships with community organizations who do *only* organizing are designed to separate and network those functions together through specialization and coordination. They also have a plan to self-sustain themselves independently of government and philanthropy (though of course whether they succeed is the question). In doing so, they are attempting to reduce the prevalence of these tensions, and avoid the trap of patronage politics and being coopted into junior regime partner status. Successfully avoiding that fate rests heavily on how BCDI makes use of its relationship to Phil Thompspon in his position as Mayor De Blasio’s Deputy in the remaining few years of his term.

I have argued that BCDI is part of a transitional epoch in which progressive politics, mostly but not exclusively in urban areas, begin to turn from liberal-redistributionist politics to economic democracy and equity regimes (Imbroscio 2013). The consensus of the regime theory debates cited throughout solidify the notion that having the right framework for executing politics, however, doesn’t change the fact of politics and power.

They still have to do it. On this front, there is no way to know whether BCDI's responses to these long-standing challenges will yield success or provide for another useful case study in the graveyard of well-conceived failures. But the literature has something useful to say about failure as well. Imbroscio notes that while failure creates clouds of dismissiveness and uncertainty, it also provides invaluable insights and expertise, as well as allies embedded in unexpected organizations and institutions along the way (1995 p. 858). Similarly, Rast concluded from his analysis that programs like LIRI in Washington's Chicago may seem pretty modest and incomplete, but over the long view represent water on the stone of politics, allowing for those after to advance further, push harder, in pursuit of new and additional opportunities (Rast 2005). In light of these historical patterns, of ebb and flow, of progress and reaction in the long and uneven march of progressive urban politics over the past half century, more than social sciences, perhaps Beckett is the most instructive chronicler for this work: "All of old. **Nothing** else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. **Fail** again. Fail better" (Beckett 1983)

But history is not a perfect circle, either. A series of recent political developments suggest a changing set of opportunity structures (and barriers) to BCDI's agenda for economic democracy in the Bronx and New York City. Some of these events are local and urban: in 2014, a few years before Phil Thompson came back to government in New York City, the executive director of Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative became the director of Boston's Community Economic Development agency under Mayor Marty Walsh. In 2017, after the death of his father, Chokwe Antar Lumumba won election as mayor of Jackson Mississippi on a radical platform of economic democracy, community control, and solidarity economy. In 2018, a congressional district split between the East Bronx and Northern Queens elected a young democratic socialist to congress, indicating a perhaps a shifting appetite even among partisans in the democratic party for new ideas and approaches to remaking the economy and addressing inequality. A few months

before her victory in the general election, a bipartisan bill supporting employee ownership and worker cooperatives passed both the house and senate, the first such legislation in many years at the federal level. Needless to say, opportunities are not strategies. At the same time as these events took place, many more extraordinarily harmful policies at the federal and state levels were either being passed or enforced more harshly overwhelmingly directed at the kinds of people who call the Bronx and New York City home. In the conclusion that follows, I look back to the preceding chapters and offer some restatements, analysis, and concluding thoughts.

Chapter IX: A Future out of Time

But, bless your soul, man, we can't all always attain the heights, much less live in their rarified atmosphere. Aim at 'em—that's the point...

—W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn* ([1940] 2007, p. 78)⁶³

There was slavery and civil rights and now it's us. We are what comes next.

—Economic democracy training participant (2018)

Here in the conclusion, I attempt to synthesize the broad conclusions from the preceding chapters. Some of the points raised here may be reiterations of conclusions from individual chapters, modifications thereof, or distinct syntheses of broader themes from the sum total of the empirical evidence.

BCDI's early pivot from localizing procurement by focusing on cooperative business development to developing institutional support infrastructure for economic democracy was clearly one of the most critical decision points in the development stage. In Chapter 5, I alluded to the goals of the BronXchange as “market-making” and “rewiring” markets as social institutions. The larger takeaway from all of the chapters, however, is that this “rewiring” is actually key to every network component, and a core overall objective of the initiative. To borrow from the lexicon of organized labor, BCDI is, in effect, attempting a multi-faceted institutional salting operation for economic democracy. This means that each of its core components is designed to both cultivate and target important constituencies for economic democracy. Because of their expansive definition of economic democracy and the economy, this universe of stakeholder/targets in the Bronx

⁶³ Cited in Douglas 2015

includes community power building, planning, development and finance organizations, organized labor, government, education, workforce development, and small business and economic development entities. The four (ultimately six in theory) core components of BCDI's work are the tangible vehicles through which this salting is supposed to take place.



This brings critical attention back to something a participant said in Chapter 4: “we need to have the training manual of how to shift institutions. And we don't. it's a significant blindspot for us.” BCDI has, to an extent, an example of organizational transformation from the experience of moving the Northwest Bronx Community Clergy Coalition towards reorienting itself to economic democracy. This is no small feat—the organization is over four decades old and has a multi-million dollar budget. That experience, besides being clearly personally powerful for a number of people, is the ‘proof of concept’ for the transformative power of the training series outlined to a degree in Chapter 6.

There are, however, few other victories of this kind, and no solidified manual for how to replicate that success in another community organization, much less in any other organization from a different sector. The discipline of planning has examined theories of institutional change, of course (see Bolan 1996; Alexander 2005), and empirically in New

York City there have been some modest shifts for particular individuals across sectors of government, business, and organized labor. But BCDI does not have a theory or playbook for converting these relationships and individual transformations into larger organizational or institutional movements (see fig 9.1 above). This is a glaring gap, as the participant acknowledged above.

The gap here, and BCDI's ability to address it, will lean heavily on the success of BCDI's ability to act as a coordinating mechanism to relate between sectors of its work. This reverts again back to the critically important work of regime theory from Lauria (1997) and Clarence Stone, but even more so, the work of Rachel Tanner (2013) on cooperative ecosystems in Quebec, and Menser's more recent comparative work that includes Mondragón, Seikatsu, and Quebec among its case studies. As noted in Chapter 8, the core functions that Menser outlines for successful regional democratic economies are: a financing capacity or bank, a university and/or research center, a nongovernmental coordinating body, and a multi-issue organized social movement base (2018 p. 259).

MaxD (Menser)	BCDI
Bank	Fund
Movement	Economic/housing/racial/environmental justice
Education/Research	PPL/EDLC
Coordinating entity	PPL/CAH/BCDI

Regime (Stone)	MaxD (Menser)	BCDI
Finance/Side-payments	Bank	Fund
Cross-Sector Coalition	Social Movement	Economic/housing/racial/environmental justice
Cooperation Scheme/Network	Non govt coordinating body	BCDI
Agenda	Movement + Education + Research	CAH/PPL/EDLC

Through its core functions, BCDI seemingly learned and internalized this lesson, or something like it, in their planning and development. What it suggests for the future of this kind of work in the United States remains less clear, and leads back to Chapter 7 and the study of scale and scalability. The issue here is whether the coordinating institutional functions described here are able to act as *incubating* infrastructures without an underlying economic and social base, or can they only sustain and coordinate themselves on the strength of an existing (but uncoordinated) base? To mix some folksy metaphors: how much cart can you put before the horse while making the road you're walking? BCDI doesn't know for sure. I haven't found anyone who does. In his late 2018 review of Nathan Schneider's *Everything for Everyone*, Gar Alperovitz writes:

Answering the hard questions, about not just power, scale, and strategy, but also about how systems—and not just projects—relate to the underlying mobilizing and organizing force of culture and politics, is essential to the political project of advancing a serious shared vision of a transformed economy.

BCDI, never mind its contemporaries and historical forebears, have been working on these “hard questions” for a while, and the answers don't necessarily appear that much closer. In the spirit of inquiry, then, I continue to ask a series of additional questions that

I think this project has raised, particularly in the realm of envisioning a different set of more democratic and equitable economic relationships.

This takeaway I see as being about the relationship of production and consumption. In Chapter 7, I quoted a participant above talking about production being the core of value creation in the economy. This isn't to discount the value of consumption, or organizing around consumption in the form of shelter, food, health, etc, as critical. But social movements in the United States in particular on the left have much more developed theories about justice, fairness, and equity in the economy when it comes to the politics and policies of redistribution and consumption, than of production. In order to force more equitable wealth distributions across race and gender, reparations can only get you so far. What about the engine of the economy after that?

For BCDI, to build economic democracy in the Bronx means attempting to contest political and economic configurations arising from the role of production—particularly in advanced and digital fabrication, but also through regional non-basic services through the BronXchange—in the economy in the Bronx and New York City. This is an extraordinarily competitive sector with high barriers to entry in terms of skills and capital. Deciding to exercise voice in production, rather than exit, as they believe the left has overwhelmingly done, means “getting their hands dirty” with their relationship to capital and surplus generation (also known as “profit” which on the left is one of only a few concepts more disdained than “markets”).

But the fact that production is seen as “dirtying” of their hands is itself part of their critique of the left, which has essentially ceded the scope of production and surplus generation to hostile and reactionary forces, choosing instead to obtain most of its resources from private philanthropy. How or why philanthropy is somehow less “dirty” than profit from enterprises in this equation remains unarticulated. To a great extent, I think this is a reflection of the decimation of the role of organized labor and trade unions in constituting the leadership of the broad anti-capitalist left in the United States over the past several decades.

For any supposed vision of economic democracy to abdicate its responsibility to contest this terrain and develop practical paths forward for “socially useful production” (Smith 2014) means that the left has no true plan for governing or wielding power in society beyond a vision of redistribution and improving opportunities for collective consumption. To be clear, these are critical too—but to have well-developed feminist/socialist/universalist proposals for social insurance and well-being, without anything with the same level of rigor or sophistication to say on how business and production should be conducted in society is to yield too powerful a space for economic change and transformation. Again, the scope of this challenge transcends the BCDI’s work in the Bronx, but any answers to it in the Bronx would help produce answers elsewhere.

The relationship of this challenge of a “just” production under economic democracy bears a relatively strong relationship to the problematic of scale and scalability, as outlined in

Chapter 7. Developing an economic apparatus to create *nonsoels* (Tsing 2012) of economic democracy—a legible and replicable assembly line of policies, businesses, and cultural and ideological collateral products that are readily absorbed and implemented in the broader political economic regional ecosystem of New York City—is a task most easily achieved if stripped of the deeper structural arguments for racial reconstruction and transformation embodied in the best versions of BCDI’s core spirit and practice. This cautionary tale for what is “lost” in this scalar process, weighed against what is gained, has recently been played out, to controversy and discord, in the field of Community Land Trusts (DeFilippis et al 2017; DeFilippis et al 2019) and has been the subject of significant debate in the sphere of solidarity economy organizing (Dinerstein 2014; Hudson 2018; Miller 2006; UNRISD 2016). How and where one lands in this debate is as much a spiritual and moral question as it is one of politics and economics. The entire foregoing summary of scale and scalar tradeoffs in this dissertation could be reduced (although perhaps overly simplified) to a passage from the King James Bible, Mark 8:36, which asks us “for what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” Despite the moral quandary, I imagine Marx’s response to this would have been quite simple: *What does it profit? We have a world to win. That’s the profit. Souls are for the dead.*

This echoes Polanyi’s conclusion in the final chapter of *The Great Transformation* that the difference between social democracy on one hand and fascism on the other is “not primarily economic. It is moral and religious” (1944 p. 267). I personally can’t imagine any empirical dataset that could finally or completely resolve this dilemma, so I leave that to future research.

What then, about the role of policy and politics? In Chapter 8, I identified the ways in which the interrelationships of BCDI's core infrastructure components represent the internalization of decades of experimentation and failure in the realm of progressive city theory and practice. Under conditions of success, what might some transformative but achievable policy propositions look like for New York City or New York State? Once again, I return to Robert Fitch for a slice of his prophetic vision for what he too called economic democracy.

In 1993, Fitch outlined the following proposals for New York City to counteract the devastation of post-bankruptcy restructuring and neoliberalism and regain its status as a productive and thriving urban region. These included proposals such as taxing fictitious capital to create real capital, essentially a financial transactions tax; municipalizing New York City land; bringing elite non profits under city control or enacting substantial PILOTs (something that Anchor institutions would be unlikely to support); establish the new york bank for jobs and development (analogous to the recent launch of a public banking campaign for New York City, see Mohammedi and Murphy 2019); fund and finance producer coops, small and minority owned businesses; treat industrial land like parkland, treat industrial buildings like landmarks; roll back subsidies for luxury housing development; abolish public development authorities (this would in present day terminology include the NYC Economic Development Corporation); build a new port and restore rail linkages to the region; revive housing production with 50,000 new units per year; save jobs by extending rent regulation to commercial and industrial enterprises

(similar to the Small Business and Jobs Survival Act now under consideration by the New York City council see Warrker 2018); and finally, promote economic democracy through employee and worker ownership and the development of a city-led industrial policy for economic diversity (1993 pp. 250-267).

What's striking about these proposals is the extent to which some of them seem politically impossible or implausible, while others are being actively debated and promoted. I would argue, as I noted at the end of Chapter 8, that this suggests an open window of opportunity in which to set more ambitious benchmark demands for what constitutes minimum acceptable practice for "progressive" local, state, and federal policy. Policies like the above in New York City would be significantly more effective if leveraged with aligned policies at the national level under a supportive administration; including a more steeply progressive redistributive tax code, modernized labor laws, revived and modernized anti-trust and anti-monopoly and anti-monopsony enforcement legislation (Bivens et al 2018; Steinbaum 2017)

The discussion of policy here also speaks to the reinforcing nature of scalar politics. The democratization of local institutions, from the municipal authorities to the level of the individual enterprise, dramatically enhance the viability of creating enabling policy frameworks and legislation at the federal level through multi-scalar advocacy and policy transfer networks (Doussard 2015) The reverse is also true. A federal "model cities" initiative for economic democracy in the twenty-first century designed, developed, and implemented in consultation with a network of policy and social movement organizations

would have catalytic local impacts (although the pitfalls of federal action can be seen time and again through the twentieth century examples of anti-poverty and urban policy).

All of these proposals would support broader goals of economic justice and social democracy. Some of these proposals could be defended as “non-reformist reforms” (Gorz 1968). Yet many of them may also come up short on the task of more broadly and dramatically transforming ownership and control in the economy. They fall short at least in one sense because social democracy, while a substantial achievement, may not adequately transgress upon the boundaries of state and market, of public and private, and of the question of ownership and property as enshrined in the liberal constitutional order of the United States.

To borrow from the participant who voiced an aspirational wish that “something more, some grander strategy” animate her organizing vision, my fieldwork and the time I have spent synthesizing and analyzing my data returned me insistently to the relationships between urgency, time, and democracy. Like the multi-scalar view of policy transfer and impact outlined immediately above, the concept of time, and its abundance or scarcity, has continuously arisen as a core political and economic theme. At the global level, the question of time confronts us through the prism of climate change. The IPCC report released in the fall of 2018, like several others before it, states plainly that urgent and dramatic action to curb fossil fuel use and GHG emissions must be undertaken immediately in the coming decade(s) in order to avert the most severe and apocalyptic projections of climate upheaval. There is not much time to act. How do our ideals of

shared authority and democracy stand up against the need for urgent and dramatic state action to address this overarching, existential challenge? Democracy as ideal, and democracy as institutional configuration and process do not align here, and we may not “have time” to figure out what to do about that incongruence.

The concept of time has visited me with regard to the urgency of the problem of gentrification in the Bronx, as I described in Chapter 3. Throughout the entirety of the process of researching and writing this dissertation, I have kept continuous track of the progress on the Kingsbridge Armory redevelopment project. Only in the first months of 2019, six years after the CBA was signed, did the developer finally secure financing to break ground. As of the fourth quarter of 2019, ground has not been broken. In the elapsed time, the minimum wage in New York City and state has risen above the supposedly generous minimums set at the time in the CBA agreement. More houses and apartment complexes have been sold and bought throughout the Bronx, and sold and bought again. Time marches on, while some things stand still, and while BCDI continues to develop and build towards its understanding of economic democracy “at scale” in the Bronx. What will the Bronx look like in the decade or more that it could take for BCDI to achieve even minimum viability as a “scaled up” version of itself? Time, the organizers feel, is short, and the need for impact is great and urgent.

Time has visited this project as I have engaged in my own independent practice and advocacy for a more cooperative New York City. Part of the project of economic democracy is the increased role of collective management and democracy in daily life,

whether it is a local or regional policymaking body or public utility (Menser 2018) your workplace, your child's school or cooperative daycare, your local participatory budgeting process, your housing or food cooperative or credit union board or membership meeting. Who has that kind of time? On primary night in New York State's September 2018 statewide elections, reporter Masha Gessen for the New Yorker asked Tascha Van Auken, a campaign manager for a victorious democratic socialist candidate in Brooklyn about what being a democratic socialist means for state government, and for politics:

'the things we define as democracy: access to political engagement and the ability to live and thrive to be able to have access to political participation, to have time to do it.' Van Auken looked like she'd had as little sleep and as many drinks as anyone who had scored a victory that day, but her definition of democracy was clear, thoughtful, and well rehearsed: *'If you are working two jobs, you don't have the time.'* (Gessen 2018)

For those of us who support and advocate for more cooperation, for more economic democracy, for more popular management and stewardship of the economy and the public (Menser 2018; Unger 2005; Rahman 2016) at all scales, where do we expect people to find the time for this proliferation of popular management and leadership? And, to recall Dewey, this also presupposes the institutional design of a society that supports human capacity development to understand and manage these institutions from a young age.⁶⁴ Under conditions of inequality and urgency that structure our daily lives in ways the push us towards both nihilism and utopianism, despair and hope, where should we

⁶⁴ From Dewey: and if they were competent after studying it, how many have the time to devote to it? ... Today, so great and powerful is the sweep of the industrial current, the person of leisure is usually an idle person. Persons have they own business to attend to. Politics thus tends to become just another 'business:' the special concern of bosses and the managers of the machine. (1927, pp. 136-138)

find the time? How does a movement for economic democracy make time? In 1927, Dewey asked similar questions. He rightly noted that there should be

no sanctity in universal suffrage, frequent elections, majority rule, congressional and cabinet government. These things are devices evolved in the direction in which the current was moving, each wave of which involved at the time of its impulsion a minimum of departure from antecedent custom and law. The devices served a purpose; but the purpose was rather that of meeting existing needs which had become too intense to be ignored, than that of forwarding the democratic idea. (Dewey 1927 p. 145)

In his era, he was also closer to the dramatic upheavals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when the industrial labor movement first came into existence to do battle with what Polanyi called the “satanic mills” of unbridled and unregulated industrial market society. Workers made the time. Literally. They fought to develop a framework for time that met the most basic minimum requirements for dignity in an industrial society. Eight hours for work, eight for rest, eight for what we will. What are the minimum requirements for what comes next, for the society that economic democracy promises us? What does a day under economic democracy look like?

In order to consider economic democracy as a framework for our political and economic life, at a bare minimum, will require new institutional arrangements that *both take and make more time*. The need, as Dewey wrote nearly a century ago, is now too intense to be ignored. I won’t presume to have the answers to how we should structure that time, but some have already posited that substantial gains in productivity make a legitimate case for reducing the workweek to four days (Stein 2019). What if that newly available day was made for the practice of democracy, the maintenance and (re)production of collective and public life? A society in which economic democracy is widespread—“at scale” even—is a society in which we can remake the time we have together.

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

[60-120 minutes]

Background/Armory

- 1) [Where relevant] How did you become involved in the Kingsbridge Armory redevelopment campaign?

Formalization/Economic Democracy/Board formation

FOR BOARD/WORKGROUP: How and when did you decide to become part of the workgroup that led to the creation of BCDI?

- 2) What were your objectives at the time as you remember them? What did you hope to see happen?
- 3) What differentiates “economic democracy” in your perspective from “community organizing” or “community building”?
- 4) If you think there are differences, do these differences play out in your own organization’s activities?
- 5) What is the process for BCDI to pick its projects? How do you understand a particular project and its relationship to the idea of economic democracy?

FOR STAFF: What are your everyday tasks and projects, how do they relate to BCDI’s broader objectives?

- 6) How is BCDI different from a CDC like the Point, or a CBO like MOM or NWBCCC?
- 7) Explain how or why a certain person or organization might be considered a “strategic partner”
- 8) What were some of your most important takeaways or lessons learned from the trip to Mondragon in 2015?

Talk to me about the 6 core infrastructure pieces of the CEN. What are they and how do you see them relating to each other?

Where do you fit in as a board member / as an individual?

EDTS

- 9) Has your engagement with the economic democracy training series changed your understanding of how to build community power or “do” community organizing? If so, how?
- 10) Has your participation with BCDI led to changes in how you understand “the economy” and its relationship to your work and life?

Politics:

Relationships with anchors, govt, unions. One of confrontation/collaboration tension. How does this play out in BCDI's work and vision going forward?

- 11) How do you understand BCDI's relationship to local government/anchors/labor? Do you envision yourselves as partners? Antagonists? If conflicts arise, how do you make sense of tensions and conflicts in those roles?
- 12) What kinds of policy advocacy work do you see being relevant to BCDI? Is it different from other kinds of policy you have advocated for in your organization's work generally?

Scale

- 13) The word "scale" is very common in BCDI's materials. How do you understand "scale" in the context of your work with BCDI? What would it mean for BCDI to "grow to scale" or "scale up" in your opinion? What would that look like?
- 14) How do you view the role of organized labor and government in fostering "economic democracy" as it relates to the work of BCDI?

Concluding Questions

- 15) What are some of the biggest challenges facing BCDI as a network or organization?
- 16) What are some of the most critical sticking points for you personally or for your organization in your work with BCDI?
- 17) Who else should I be talking to?
- 18) What question didn't I ask that I should have? And if I had, how would you have answered it?"

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