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Enabling transformative agency: community-based green economic and workforce development in LA and Cleveland

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ABSTRACT
This article explores enabling conditions of creativity and transformative agency in the field of community development. Based on a comparative case study of the Los Angeles Green Retrofit and Workforce Program and Evergreen Cooperative Initiative in Cleveland, it finds a combination of problematic situations at the field and organizational level, individual biographical factors and available resources, and the presence of trusted intermediaries enabled alternative community development practices. In seeking to contribute to institutional planning theory on the paradox of embedded agency, it builds on the pragmatist planning approach to consider such multi-level enabling conditions and interim activities of individuals and organizations working towards institutional change. At the same time, it addresses shortcomings of pragmatist planning by attending to the role of particular historical actors, institutions, and policies in “problem solving” within the specific case studies along with the implications of structural disadvantage and inequality and sociocultural diversity for governance processes.

Introduction
In recent years, planners have paid growing attention to the subject of institutional transformation, as climate change, global economic crisis, and soaring inequality have accentuated the need for alternative templates of urban governance, policy, and development (Kim, 2011). In the field of community development, the arrival of the subprime mortgage crisis and Great Recession (2007–8) undermined the gains and viability of the dominant Community Development Corporation (CDC) model, prioritizing affordable housing production. Yet, these events also helped spur the enactment of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, complete with funding for energy efficiency programs, renewable energy technology, public transportation projects, and green workforce training. Consequently, cities across the country saw mobilization of urban coalitions seeking available local government grants, loans, and other financial incentive programs to confront the overlapping economic, social, and environmental crises facing their communities. In Los Angeles, 25 community, labor, and environmental organizations came together as the Los Angeles Apollo Alliance and lobbied the city council to enact and implement the Green Retrofit and Workforce Program, retrofitting publicly owned buildings to improve environmental quality and public health while creating unionized, family sustaining jobs with career paths, particularly for low-income and other historically marginalized...
communities. In Cleveland, Ohio, a group of philanthropic organizations, public agencies, anchor institutions, university-based research centers, and community development corporations spun off the Evergreen Cooperative Initiative a network of “green” community-based cooperative enterprises owned and operated by residents from the disproportionately low-income and African-American east side neighborhoods that leveraged the procurement needs and capacities of anchor institutions for community wealth building.

The Los Angeles Green Retrofit and Workforce Program and Evergreen Cooperative Initiative diverge from community development practices prevailing over the past few decades in a number of ways (See Table 1 for summary case descriptions). Mainly, they transcend the focus on affordable housing production, social service delivery and place making to pursue targeted job creation and economic development while prioritizing the needs of historically marginalized, majority minority, inner-city populations.

Table 1. Summary of Case Studies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Los Angeles Green Retrofit and Workforce Program</th>
<th>Evergreen Cooperative Initiative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convenor/ Lead Origin</td>
<td>SCOPE/AGENDA (Community-based organization) (2005) Coalition of 25 labor, environmental, and community groups in Los Angeles convened under banner of the Apollo Alliance to organize and advocate for an inclusive and equitable green regional economy (and creating good jobs, a fairer economy, and energy independence more generally)</td>
<td>Cleveland Foundation (Community Foundation) (2005) Greater University Circle Initiative formed as partnership between civic organizations, the City, and local anchor institutions (i.e. hospitals, universities) to regenerate low income inner city neighborhoods surrounding University Circle, a cultural-institutional cluster located four miles (~6.4 km) east of downtown Cleveland.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>Using local ordinance (2009) as a starting point, aggregate municipal retrofit projects at the neighborhood level, placing highest priority on retrofitting buildings that are located in low-income communities as well as those that directly benefit those communities (i.e. libraries and recreation centers). In the process, improve environmental quality and public health while creating family sustaining jobs with career paths, beginning with low-income and other historically marginalized communities.</td>
<td>University Circle being the largest employment center outside of downtown Cleveland and the anchor institutions, particularly hospitals, ranking among the top regional employers – leverage anchor institutions financial capacities (i.e. annual purchasing and procurement expenditures) to develop a strategy of import replacement, creating livable jobs, and community wealth building in surrounding inner city neighborhoods. Spin off network of multi-stakeholder cooperatives partly owned and operated by residents of target areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Structure/ Components</td>
<td>-Retrofit all city-owned buildings larger than 7500 square feet (~696.7 m²) or built before 1978 with a target of hitting LEED Silver-level certification. -Open green construction career paths to workers from “disadvantaged” communities-Foster public sector career development within the city by hiring workers from city training programs and upgrading part-time workers to full-time status.-Support minority and women-owned green business development-Promote use of locally manufactured and purchased quality green products</td>
<td>-Evergreen Cooperative Corporation, a holding company, along with a cooperative bank, R&amp;D entity, and land trust work jointly to support business operation and development and more generally maximize potential scale and longevity of the initiative.-Evergreen worker-owners partake in organizational governance and claim a portion of the firm's profits by way of equity stakes (expected to total $65,000 in about seven to eight years). -As of writing, evergreen enterprises include an industrial-scale laundry, solar panel installation/ weatherization outfit, and a 10-acre hydroponic greenhouse, all of which tap into anchor institutions and other place-based entities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>Instance of collaborative partnership among building and construction trades and unions, service sector unions, government agencies, and community-based organizations that represents an important milestone for community unionism and the American labor movement, deepens public engagement in the planning and administration of energy efficiency, and delivers tangible gains to working-poor families and other marginalized populations.</td>
<td>Model for connecting firm level employee-ownership efforts with coalition building, local economic and workforce development, and racial reconciliation to both deepen and widen the potential impacts of shared capitalism. For community foundations and community development corporations, offers a fresh new approach to community development in the aftermath of a foreclosure crisis that wiped out many of the gains produced by the prevailing model of housing production.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
communities. Rather than using public subsidies to entice major employers to locate to the area on the premise that “trickle down” local economic development will eventually reverse the fortunes of disinvested neighborhoods, each grew out of place-based, multi-sector partnerships that combined shared vision, trusted relationships, collective capacity, existing local assets, federal and state grants, and philanthropic dollars to create employment opportunities more directly. Both initiatives relied on unconventional divisions of labor (i.e. community and civic organizations leading economic and workforce development projects), in part because their focus on the emergent “green” sector – whether related to building energy efficiency or local sourcing and procurement – required extensive social organization and planning both on the demand and supply sides of the market. Finally, in incorporating labor unions and worker cooperatives into the said community-based green economic and workforce development strategies, the two initiatives are engaging and arguably regenerating these progressive economic institutions to better serve communities of color, particularly from low income, opportunity-poor urban neighborhoods. While the long-term success and broader impact of each initiative remains to be seen, their very emergence and viability helps expand and diversify templates, toolkits, and repertoires for community development.

The conception and operationalization of such community development initiatives entails significant collective optimism, creativity, and transformative agency on the part of actors for which enabling conditions and policy and planning implications so far remain little understood. How do such community development practices come to be, and how might planners build on this understanding to encourage greater variation, experimentation, learning, and innovation within community development practice so as to minimize vulnerability to catastrophic events along with other anticipated and unanticipated conditions? To address these questions, this article examines how the Los Angeles Apollo Alliance and Evergreen Cooperative Initiative catalyzed their respective community-based green economic and workforce development projects. The following section overviews the institutional perspective and pragmatic tradition in planning thought as they relate to explaining transformative agency. Next, describing the research design and methodology, I then apply a revised pragmatist conceptual and analytical framework to detail multi-level enabling conditions and mediating factors for the alternative community development practices as embodied by the Los Angeles Green Retrofit and Workforce Program and Evergreen Cooperative Initiative. The final section overviews findings and concludes by contemplating implications for progressive community development and policy and planning more generally. While the form and content of progressive policy and planning may vary across cases, here it encompasses concerted efforts at enhancing capacities and livelihoods of marginalized communities, addressing structural poverty, tackling unequal wealth distribution and property ownership, building grassroots organizations and power, and stabilizing neighborhoods, economies, and places as opposed to deepening inequality via displacement of poor residents, land speculation, and gentrification.

**Literature review**

**Institutional planning and transformation**

In recent years, planners have paid growing attention to the subject of institutional transformation, as climate change, global economic crisis, and soaring inequality have accentuated the need for alternative templates of urban governance, policy, and development (See Kim, 2011 for overview). Planners have long grappled with the coordination of actors and organizations, whose behavior is mediated through deeper and more resilient aspects of social structure, including norms, procedures, and rules (Scott, 2004, 2008). Patsy Healey (Healey, 1996, 1998, 1999) was among the early champions of the
institutional perspective among planning scholars – advocating a shift in focus of analysis from the interests and actions of various placemakers and local stakeholders to the “rules of the game” and the capacity of planners to act strategically within institutional contexts (Healey, McNamara, Elson & Doak, 1988, pp. 253). The planning scholarship on institutional transformation has largely bifurcated between institutional analysis “interpreting what might be an enduring value or an organizational form in need of transformation” (Beauregard, 2005, p. 206), and institutional design, providing normative guidelines for changing problematic rules, procedures, and organizational structures (Alexander, 2005; Gualini, 2001; Sanyal, 2005). However, more recently, planning scholars have begun to address the gap between institutional problematization and entrepreneurship by identifying enabling conditions of institutional transformation at the field and organizational levels (Carmin, Anguelovski, & Roberts, 2012). Meanwhile, the paradox of embedded agency, or the question of how individuals and organizations can overcome the conditioning forces of their social contexts to pursue institutional transformation remains largely unresolved (Holm, 1995, pp. 398; Powell & Dimaggio, 1991; Clemens & Cook, 1999; Seo & Creed, 2002).

**Pragmatist planning**

In exploring detailed mechanisms of the socially constructed process of institutional transformation, institutional planners such as Healey have borrowed from the philosophical tradition of pragmatism, which celebrates the human capacity to invent, create, and transform within specific contexts nonetheless universally wrought by uncertainty and conflict (Healey, 1997, 2008; Forester, 1988, 1993, 1999, 2012; Hoch, 2007, 1984). Among its great proponents, John Dewey saw human action as largely constituted by situational imperatives, with creativity and action flowing from the immediate need to respond to pressing problems rather than calculation of the most efficient means to attain prefigured ends (Dewey, 1997). Simply put, creative action flows less directly from preexisting preferences or rational calculations on the part of actors than from problematic situations at hand and particular resources at the disposal of actors. When pressed with a series of practical demands requiring response, what was previously an “end” transforms into a “means” for another “end-in-view” and so on, with knowledge, understanding, and preferences forming in the flow of action. More fluidly and seamlessly combining field and organizational level enablers of agency and mediating the chasm between structuralist and behavioralist views of agency, such conceptions facilitate a more practice-based theory of embedded agency that focuses on the interim activities of individuals and organizations working towards institutional change. This is in contrast to process-oriented approaches, which focus on event sequences that result in a specified outcome.

**Individual-level enablers of transformative agency**

Aside from attention to the situated particularities of practice, pragmatism offers planners an appreciation for a fuller range of human capacities that can potentially enter into public policy and planning practices (Healey, 2008, p. 287). For instance, neo-pragmatist Hans Joas’s creativity of action theory highlights the role of biographical and sociological context in shaping creative action (Joas, 1997; Joas & Knöbl, 2009). For Joas, historical circumstances have located the actor in various field positions, which have in turn incorporated a series of perceptions, actions, attitudes, tastes, and practices. Consequently, the actor as a bodily entity carries around certain aspirations and tendencies, along with value commitments, also shaped by self-formative and transcendental past experiences. These tend to operate
in a pre-reflective, habitual fashion until situations arise where routines no longer suffice to require reflection, creativity, and adaptation. At this point, the actor selectively recasts and projects preexisting aspirations in ways that are relevant to the situation at hand while invoking preexisting values and ideas as standards. Further incorporating insights from phenomenology, the French pragmatist sociologist Bruno Frere postulates, “the more an individual is exposed to non-homogenous, complex and diverse social contexts, the more likely he or she is to possess a variegated legacy of adapted dispositions, habits or abilities that are non-homogenous and not unified” (Frere, 2011, p. 254). Besides problematic circumstances at the organizational or field level, such theoretical formulations indicate the need to better attend to biographical trajectories, in particular self-formative or transcendental experiences, along with actor exposure to non-homogeneous, complex, and diverse social contexts, in contemplating enabling conditions of creativity and transformative agency.

**Shortcomings of pragmatist planning**

Among critiques of pragmatist planning are those finding fault with: (1) an overemphasis on the significance of instrumental problem solving as the most effective model of human action, and (2) an inadequate understanding of the implications of structural disadvantage and inequality and sociocultural diversity for governance processes (Friedmann, 1987; Healey, 2009; Hoch, 1984). As noted by the pragmatist planner Charles Hoch (1984), by treating human experience and action as natural evolutionary capacities, pragmatist planning can overlook the role of particular historical actors, institutions, and policies in “problem solving” within specific situations along with agreements among said actors on definitions of the problem and courses of action. In fact, implementation of regulations and allocation of resources are often guided more by the force of politics than democratic problem-solving ability, and the limits of pragmatic inquiry come quickly in the absence or breakdown of social trust and when disagreement emerges among different classes, sexes, strata, or social groups. Hence, in imagining a re-constructed pragmatic theory of planning, Hoch accentuates elements of “human experience, practical activity, and democratic community participation, but without the naturalistic bias and liberal pluralism,” and a focus on “defining problems in relation to the particular histories and attachments of people in specific locales,” but without the separation of process and substance (p. 343).

**Conceptual framework**

In seeking to advance planning theory and practice on institutional transformation, this paper builds on the pragmatist approach to planning while additionally drawing insights from recent neo-pragmatist formulations on individual-level enablers of transformative agency to explore multi-level enabling conditions of transformative agency. While doing so, it tries to avoid tendencies among pragmatist planning perspectives towards instrumental, naturalistic, and abstract conceptions of problem solving and societal progress and to underplay the complexity of structural inequality along with sociocultural diversity in society. More specifically, the analysis pays close attention to the role of particular historical actors, institutions, and policies in “problem solving” within the specific case studies. It further probes what sorts of entities or procedures are suited for bridging different organizational circumstances and biographical trajectories, helping level existing inequalities of authority, power, and resources, and establishing common cause among various stakeholders, some with considerable epistemological and normative disagreements and inconsistencies, not to mention historical conflicts and tensions.
Research design and methodology

The case study research applied a contextualized comparison approach to studying comparative politics that places differences rather than similarities at the center of analysis. In doing so, it thus attempts to bring into relief how actors in “various contexts are engaged in struggles that, while different in appearance, are nonetheless similar in substance” (Locke & Thelen, 1993, p. 19; 1995). Such an approach differs from traditional causal analysis that tries to hold variables constant across cases while overlooking different starting points or varying degrees of valence which different issues pose in different contexts. In Los Angeles and Cleveland, particular sets of originating conditions and factors (including parallel but disparate trajectories of intense neoliberal urban policy and local economic development practices) gave rise to different “sticking points” for community-based green economic and workforce development initiatives. Yet the two cases also exhibit considerable overlap in terms of programmatic aims and features as well as enabling conditions and processes of creativity and transformative agency. Hence the presence of place-specific historical contingencies which might provide a basis for skepticism towards universal, one-size-fits-all prescriptions. However, even with case specificities and variation, the conceptual framework can still facilitate description and analysis of processes of alternative community development.

My unit of analysis included the respective green economic and workforce development initiative as well as participating organizations and individuals. Put a different way, the study consists of an embedded case study design, attending to enabling conditions of agency at the field, organizational, and individual levels along with what sorts of entities or procedures bridged different organizational circumstances and biographical trajectories, helping to level existing inequalities of authority, power, and resources, and establishing common cause among various actors. To unravel the process by which community and civic organizations in the case studies undertook the task of framing and carrying out their respective community-based green economic and workforce development programs, I conducted field and archival research between November 2010 and May 2012. The study relied on primary data from 89 unique, semi-structured, in-depth interviews with representatives of community and civic organizations, university-based policy research centers, and local government and other public agencies as well as consultants and other program participants. Interview questions partly aimed at understanding why and how respondents engaged in the said alternative community development initiatives, thus thematically exploring enabling conditions of transformative agency without explicitly setting out with select theories in mind against which the findings would be tested. It also drew upon notes from direct observations of meetings, deliberative processes, work sites, and organizational settings. Secondary data sources include program proposals, reports, and organizational records, legislative and regulatory documents, planning documents, notes of correspondence; newspaper articles and editorials, and meeting minutes.

The following section presents findings from the Los Angeles Apollo Alliance and Evergreen Cooperative Initiative respectively. Both cases feature organization-level enabling conditions whereby actors derived a sense of creativity and transformative agency from problematic circumstances where routines no longer sufficed, with preferences and goals formulated in the course of action, in accordance with available resources and the appearance of attainable ends. Aside from problematic circumstances and other situational imperatives confronting organizations, findings highlight biographical factors shaping individual predisposition towards alternative community development practices. Moreover, it speaks to the essential role of bridging entities and procedures mediating different organizational circumstances and biographical trajectories and establishing common cause among various stakeholders.
The Los Angeles Green Retrofit and Workforce Program: case findings

Organization-level enablers

In Los Angeles, member building trades representatives of the LA Apollo Alliance widely traced their initial involvement in the LA Green Retrofit and Workforce Program to the negative impacts of the economic recession on Southern California’s construction sector, along with the more general need for comprehensive market recovery and expansion strategies. As stated by a painter:

When it gets hard like this, most people fight more. Doesn’t need to be that way but that’s what’s apparently going on. The reason I can’t be aligned with the carpenters right now is because they’re trying to take our work … So we’ve drawn alliances with community groups, day laborers, the UCLA Labor Center, the LA County Federation of Labor, and LAANE [Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy]. We want to get more PLAs [Project Labor Agreements] and more alliances to get more work.

Others referred to the problem of declining unionization, particularly in the face of impending baby boomer retirement, as motivating participation in multi-sector coalition work. Environmental justice organizations like Communities for a Better Environment (CBE) also worried about the economic recession and general trend of blue-collar job loss in LA’s inner city, reconsidered their traditional approaches of trying to shut down polluting industries and instead clean up polluters and create green jobs. Representatives of environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club spoke to similar circumstances as the building trades in terms of declining organizational relevance and power as a result of their aging, white male membership (in this case predominantly middle as opposed to working class) in a broader context of shifting demographics:

Chances are that if you attend a typical Sierra Club meeting, the average age is 65, and the person is white middle class. Well, over time people have started retiring. So the membership, volunteer pools are shrinking and so is our power, because the demographics are shifting in the US … And now that we have to replace some of the folks we’re losing, do we do it with more white older middle class people or do we figure out a way to bring in and work with communities of color?

In the case of policy research and advocacy organizations like SC oPE/AGEnDA, Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), and the California Construction Academy (CCA) at the UCLA Labor Center, the emergence of the national green collar jobs movement and temporary availability of state, federal, and foundation funds for innovative planning and program development, particularly around energy efficiency, helped rupture organizational routines and peak their interest in operationalizing models of green retrofits and workforce development. The relatively abstract and theoretical nature of discussions within national progressive policy and planning networks regarding green jobs, along with the nascence and pliability of policy structures, further cemented their desires to get at the forefront of defining green economic and workforce development standards and practices. Similarly, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 721 converged on the green economy in following policy discourse and trends around expanding public sector employment and creating career paths for unskilled entry-level jobs amidst continuing privatization and public budget deficit.

Emerging preferences and goals in the line of action

As the initiative came together and progressed, LA Apollo Alliance members iteratively formulated preferences and goals in response to problematic situations, in accordance with available resources and the appearance of attainable ends. The decision on the part of SC OPE/AGEN DA to mobilize the community-environmental-labor coalition under the Apollo Alliance umbrella materialized at the confluence of several events. As the organization explored the topic of green collar jobs as a potential issue
focus in 2005, its leadership became involved in state-level discussions about the possibility of building an Apollo Alliance in Los Angeles. Antonio Villaraigosa had just been elected mayor of Los Angeles and was taking active steps to make Los Angeles the greenest big city in America. Having initiated and implemented multiple workforce development campaigns targeting the regional economy to link low income communities with living wage jobs and career paths, SCOPE/AGENDA was also ready to expand its regional coalition, consisting largely of community-based organizations, unions, faith-based organizations, and public sector employee unions, to encompass environmentalist organizations, the building and construction trades, and other “non-traditional partners.” The detailed structure and content of the LA Green Retrofit and Workforce Program emerged in a similar manner. The local tradition of city leadership around economic development provided a municipal repertoire of sorts that helped clarify the focus of the campaign on retrofitting city buildings and creating related public sector jobs. Additionally, a 1998 Los Angeles City Jobs Program, along with various precedents around project labor/community workforce agreements, provided a foundation upon which the coalition could build green career paths into the building trades and improve economic prospects in the inner city. Following passage of the ordinance, concrete plans for the worker training component of the initial pilot stage of the green retrofit and workforce program actualized in conversation with stipulations attached to available public funds. A quick push into training prior to the institutionalization of the career ladder connecting the vocational worker classification and building trades apprenticeships came about as the city council prepared to lay off hundreds of workers. Upon the completion of the training program, the Program Director and Advisory Committee next resolved the pending selection of the initial set of retrofits for the pilot phase before proceeding to establish program infrastructure for citywide retrofits. In sum, outcomes of previous initiatives or processes-oriented future directions became means for new “ends in view,” with goals of actions crystallizing in the course of employing particular resources or repertoires.

**Individual-level enablers**

Many of the interviewees additionally spoke of biographical factors shaping their predisposition towards shared value creation and alternative modes of economic and workforce development. The Executive Director of the Piping Industry Progress and Education (PIPE) Trust Fund identified a series of seminal experiences during the 1970s, in which his union membership suffered betrayal at the hands of employer organizations after partnering with them against environmentalists, as a major milestone in his movement towards collaborative partnerships with nontraditional allies such as community and environmental organizations. An assistant business manager of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 11 explained his participation in the Los Angeles Apollo Alliance and promoting racial inclusion in the building trades more generally as stemming from his experience of poverty growing up in the coal mining hills of West Virginia, interracial bonds forged with fellow soldiers during military service, and past frustration with intra-union nepotism:

I came out of the military in 1974, applied to the apprenticeship program but didn’t get into Local 11 until 1979. By the time I got my journeyman ticket, I had 12 years experience. I’ve had some hands put in my face. I was on book five here. It wasn’t just about only white people being taken in. Predominantly 80 percent of the people here were white. They had kids; they had sons-in-law.

A SEIU 721 regional coordinator traced his involvement in labor organizing, social movement building, and progressive policy advocacy back to formative experiences growing up in a working-class household in LA’s San Fernando Valley and engaging in student activism during his undergraduate and
graduate studies. As for a research and policy analyst at LAANE, early insights on the structure of class stratification in the USA enabled her to see the contradictions of individualist cultural ideology about hard work sowing economic rewards, while her bi-racial status illuminated the inherent transience of social categories and structures. She further reflected on the transformative potential inherent in certain types of cities:

It could be that in places like Los Angeles, we get all kinds of people who come from [various] realms, and this mix of people calls into question the fact that, well these [dominant] narratives [about economic development and income and wealth distribution,] aren’t coherent; they’re narratives that don’t match. And when you get people who are in these social spaces, where these things are more obvious, those are the people who reconcile by creating these alternative models that are for them more reasonable.

Several other respondents echoed such perceptions of Los Angeles as a major urban node that brought together diverse people with rich life experiences and enabled them to affirm their respective observations about the falsity of dominant narratives about economic development and income and wealth distribution, and in turn co-create alternative policy and planning discourse as well as related practical initiatives.

**Bridging entity and procedures**

If problematic circumstances broke organizational routines, and situational factors and biographical trajectories predisposed individuals to embrace transformative institutional work, SCOPE/AGENDA’s location between various sectors and issue areas appeared essential to bridging different organizational circumstances and biographical trajectories and aligning various stakeholder interests. The organization brought extensive community organizing and coalition building experience from past broad-based sectoral initiatives aimed at creating living wage jobs and career paths in the health care and entertainment industries. Through past policy engagements, SCOPE/AGENDA had established a good working relationship with a number of senior city council members in addition to building an impressive organizing network of inner-city residents and voters. Yet the organization’s structural position was not the only ingredient for success in the early stages of the policy campaign. SCOPE/AGENDA spent a year investigating strategies for green economic and workforce development and connecting low-income communities of color to green jobs and career pathways as well as meeting with potential partners to explore potential synergies with respect to issue or problem areas, target demographics, theories of change, and collaborative dynamics. In so doing, it sought to level disparities in resource, knowledge, and influence among community, environmental, and labor organizations as well as address historic tensions, including clashes between the building trades and environmental organizations over matters of urban development as well as grievances among communities of color over practices of racial exclusion by the building trades unions. Following its early success in getting the LA city council to introduce the Green Retrofit and Workforce ordinance, SCOPE/AGENDA spent another two years administering surveys, publishing research papers, going door to door to engage South LA residents about the need for green jobs as a way to improve environmental quality and address poverty, forming community delegations to attend council meetings and other public events, and making phone calls to elected officials to enact the ordinance (Lee & Ito, 2009; Ranghelli & Craig, 2010). Aside from building grassroots support and campaign momentum to ensure the passage of the Green Retrofit and Workforce Ordinance, SCOPE/AGENDA additionally engaged partner organizations such as the UCLA Labor Center and Institute for Research on Labor and Employment to create a roadmap for implementation while institutionalizing a program director seat along with an advisory council
and interdepartmental taskforce to help guide policy implementation. Hence they built in and seeded continuing opportunities for wider “problem solving” and engagement throughout the policy process.

**Evergreen Cooperative Initiative in Cleveland: case findings**

**Organization-level enablers**

In Cleveland, anchor institutions such as University Hospitals attributed their initial engagement in the Evergreen Cooperative Initiative to a desire to improve the surrounding neighborhoods for better recruiting and retaining staff members who brought demands for public safety, urban livability/local housing, public transportation, and environmental sustainability. As conveyed by a hospital executive:

> What’s happened with the recession, sustainability movement, and everything else, the younger people coming to work for us, they want to know, “Can I live there? Are you going to help me live near there? I don’t really want to own a car. So what’s the public transportation like? What are you doing to control all these environmental issues?” So the way we recruit now is driving and reinforcing what we are doing in the community (Standley, 2012).

Non-profit hospitals also faced legislative mandates related to health care reform, which required greater attention to community benefits provided by publicly subsidized institutions. For the City of Cleveland, the rampant poverty, unemployment, and crime in the disproportionately African-American east side neighborhoods blatantly contrasted with the economic progress and prosperity achieved in the downtown and University Circle areas. Moreover, the city’s leadership sought to minimize Cleveland’s carbon footprint and create a more resilient local economy by exploring place-based, green economic development. Likewise, the Cleveland Foundation’s accomplishments in reviving Cleveland’s downtown, stimulating the development of the local biomedical technology sector, and improving the city’s cultural and educational institutions around University Circle stood in stark contrast to the economic and social crises faced by the east side neighborhoods. Where the foundation had invested in affordable housing production in the area over several decades, the housing and financial crisis had wiped out many of the gains, which underscored the need for an alternative approach to individual and community asset building. As for the Democracy Collaborative, a research center at the University of Maryland dedicated to the pursuit of democratic renewal, increased civic participation, and community revitalization, it had recently emerged from convening practitioners from community development corporations, co-ops, land trusts, and employee-owned firms with social entrepreneurs, funders, and the media with a charge to find practical applications for asset-based, citywide, multi-sector approaches to individual and community wealth building. Similarly, the leadership of the Ohio Employee Ownership Center (OEOC) at Kent State University, whose information and outreach activities typically centered on promoting employee ownership via methods ranging from succession planning to employee buyouts, sought to take employee ownership to scale in deindustrialized urban areas, where economic globalization and capital flight destabilized local economies.

**Emerging preferences and goals in the line of action**

Coming together under the initial umbrella of the Greater University Circle Initiative and then the Evergreen Cooperative Initiative, partner organizations pooled resources and capacity to expand the scope for goal setting and discovered previously unknown goals in the course of action. Respectively undergoing leadership changes and undertaking physical remodeling and expansion projects, the University Hospitals, Cleveland Clinic, and Case Western Reserve University leadership became
aware of such commonalities along with the potential for mutual coordination to benefit the surrounding neighborhoods. Cleveland Foundation staff stepped in as catalyst and convener given the Foundation’s philanthropic interests, spatial focus on the communities of Cleveland, and reputation as an “honest broker” among both the public and private sector. In jointly planning a community asset-building pilot, the partner organizations initially expected Cleveland’s network of high performing CDCs to assume a leading role, but upon meeting the latter’s reluctance to shift from housing to economic production, developed the idea for Evergreen as a network of green worker cooperatives based in the Greater University Circle target neighborhoods. In particular, the Democracy Collaborative emphasized local approaches to asset development and wealth building, while the OEoC extended insights and best practices from the employee ownership movement to explore how worker cooperatives might help anchor capital in the community, secure jobs with better wages and benefits, and stabilize the local tax base. In turn, the ideas for the first two businesses – an industrial-scale green laundry and rooftop solar panel installation and energy retrofit outfit – came from the anchor institutions, which were struggling to realize commitments to sustainability issues. The hospitals were particularly keen to strengthen the links between environmental and human health. On the other hand, organizational features such as the holding company, cooperative development bank (providing low interest, long-term financing for cooperative startups as well as identifying new lines of business), and land trust (acquiring land and leasing it out on a 99-year basis for added protection against temptations to “demutualize” and business failure) emerged as the Evergreen leadership team, and other stakeholders grappled with considerations of longevity and scale. Finally, Evergreen’s community engagement strategy crystalized as part of an effort by the leadership team to complement the cooperative self-governance and leadership training among Evergreen worker owners with a push towards greater civic participation, democratic control, and accountability in the target neighborhoods.9

**Individual-level enablers**

Speaking to the theme of individual-level biographical and situational factors consonant with the Evergreen vision, the Program Director for Neighborhoods, Housing, and Community Development at the Cleveland Foundation described a formative experience dating back to her time working with the city’s Empowerment Zone during which she realized the minimal amount of gains accruing to the community from corporate subsidies for job creation in the inner city. In her words:

> The work we are doing in Greater University Circle and Evergreen is as a result of what I learned in the Empowerment Zone, which I’ll never do again … we weren’t going to create another program that gave lip service to the community.

The Chief Administrative Officer of University Hospitals spoke of his creative disposition as an artist and musician, along with his poor, working class roots, as shaping his commitment to racial inclusion in the politics of job creation and distribution:

> I just resented the good old boy thing … not even racial … just the club. And I’m very unique in this role. I am an artist. I started with nothing. I grew up in Canada. I had three fathers by the time I was 13 years old. So I just had a different platform … no silver spoon stuff … and started on a dock, loading trucks at a hospital.

Longstanding Cleveland residents like Mayor Frank Jackson and some of the Evergreen worker-owners remarked on their deep ties to the inner city Cleveland neighborhoods in which they grew up and their desire to see their regeneration. An operational manager of one of the Evergreen businesses remarked,
This is my neighborhood. This is where I grew up at. This is the building I grew up at. This is one of the neighborhoods that was really hit hard by the foreclosures and whatnot. You know, you kind of feel cast aside, thrown away in a sense, and to have something positive like the Evergreen Initiative come about, it was like a godsend! It was just what the neighborhood needed (PBS, 2010).

The co-founder and Executive Director of the Democracy Collaborative, on the other hand, traced his engagement in Evergreen and interest in community wealth building strategies more generally back to his upbringing in Southern California, where he learned a hard lesson on “corporate loyalty” upon his father’s layoff from a big oil company and later became involved in the open housing ballot campaign, antiwar movement, and efforts around workplace democracy. For the Executive Director of the Ohio Employee Ownership Center, witnessing the closing of the Youngstown Sheet and Tube steel mill in 1977 and its devastating effects on the city and its residents left a deep impression. Hence for many of the above actors, cities not only formed the backdrop of their biographical trajectories but also gave rise to insights on the tensions and contradictions internal to capitalist development as well as place-based attachments and commitments, which fueled their desire to improve urban environments and their political economies.

**Bridging entity and procedures**

In Cleveland, the Cleveland Foundation played a pivotal role in bridging different organizational circumstances and biographical trajectories as well as establishing common cause among different actors. Following a century of providing financial administrative stewardship to wealthy donors, convening high profile business interests around civic projects, and directing numerous iterations of urban remaking, the Foundation occupied a central location at the intersection of different sectors and issue areas and wielded widespread recognition and esteem. At the same time, foundation leadership and staff drew upon their extensive knowledge of local institutional structures and politics to selectively summon the leadership of particular partner organizations and the varieties of capital at the disposal of the respective coalitions according to the stage of the program. Beginning in 2005, the Cleveland Foundation took the initiative of quarterly convening the University Circle’s anchor institutions behind the banner of the Greater University Circle Initiative to coordinate physical expansion and improvement projects, discuss the conditions in the surrounding neighborhoods, and find crosscutting issues around which the group could collaborate. It then partnered with the Metropolitan chamber of commerce, local philanthropic organizations, and the city council to plan a roundtable on asset-based community wealth building in Cleveland. In the aftermath of the roundtable, the Foundation commissioned the Democracy Collaborative to spearhead the conceptual development of a community wealth-building plan for the Greater University Circle and followed up by hiring OECD to conduct feasibility studies, business planning, and raising capital for prospective businesses that would comprise the network of community-based cooperatives at the center of the “Cleveland model.” Later, the Cleveland Foundation committed US$3 million in grant funding to create an Evergreen Cooperative Development Fund in addition to garnering funds from anchor institutions and other philanthropic organizations. Foundation officers further arranged external support from specialized nonprofit organizations to complete vital tasks such as recruitment, job readiness training, and community outreach and organizing. While postponing direct community engagement until planning processes were complete, the Evergreen Cooperative Initiative addressed entrenched structures of disadvantage in the target neighborhoods and ameliorated their history of socio-spatial polarization and tension with respect to University Circle anchor institutions. For decades, many of the institutions had erected concrete barriers separating themselves from the surrounding neighborhoods as the
emissions from their waste incinerators plagued neighborhood residents, inciting community activity and protest. Moreover, much of the jobs they generated, whether directly or through construction projects, bypassed the surrounding areas to instead benefit generally more affluent white residents of outlying suburban areas.

Discussion and concluding remarks

In sum, respondents across the two cases thematized a sense of organizational agency deriving from problematic circumstances where routines no longer sufficed, with available means guiding ensuing reflection, creativity, and adaptation. Individual-level factors likewise motivated engagement in the respective green workforce and economic development initiatives. Additionally some articulated place attachments, while others spoke to the role of cities in bringing together those with compatible insights about the shortcomings of the dominant urban and economic development model and a propensity to co-create practical alternatives. If problematic circumstances broke organizational routines and situational factors and biographical trajectories predisposed individuals to undertake alternative community development practice, the presence of trusted intermediaries such as SCOPE/AGENDA and the Cleveland Foundation also appeared critical to relationship building, collective goal setting, and collaborative partnership in action. Both organizations received wide recognition as honest brokers and had a proven record of effective participation and leadership in coalitional work. Beyond the organizations’ structural positions between various partner organizations, their concerted efforts at critical and systematic inquiry, coalition building, and program development effectively catalyzed the respective initiatives.

The importance of multi-level enabling factors of creativity and action notwithstanding, it was only when SCOPE/AGENDA and the Cleveland Foundation established common cause and facilitated the combination of collective resources and capacity among actors with disparate organizational circumstances and biographical trajectories that they conceived and operationalized the respective local economic, workforce, and community development initiatives. Hence, in applying a pragmatist planning approach to addressing the paradox of embedded agency, or the question of how individuals and organizations can overcome the conditioning forces of their social contexts as to pursue institutional transformation, this study reaffirms the pragmatist emphasis on democracy as a means for shared problem solving and value creation in the public realm amidst real-world complexity, uncertainty, and constancy of change. Beyond classic pragmatist ideals and aspirations of cultivating democratic intelligence, the combination of forces among multisector partners towards pluralistic problem solving enhanced the scope for joint policy and planning exploration, experimentation, and inquiry and dialogical, plural, multivocal conversations in the public sphere. At the same time, LA Apollo Alliance member organizations had to address their histories of conflict and tension along with disparities in resource, knowledge, and influence to successfully work together to achieve their policy vision. In Cleveland, the Foundation mediated the gross power inequalities and history of socio-spatial polarization and tension between University Circle anchor institutions and surrounding communities, initially convening well-resourced and technically able partners to get the Evergreen Cooperative Initiative off the ground before directly engaging the target neighborhoods through the community outreach and organizing component. Their strategy speaks partly to both the challenge and importance of managing conflicting interests and systemic inequalities among stakeholder groups as well as to the necessity for inclusive participation, self-determination, and community-based planning for program sustainability.
Returning to critiques of pragmatist planning that emphasize the role of particular historical actors, institutions, and policies in “problem solving” within specific situations, the case study findings offer implications for transformative community development at this historical juncture amidst escalating climate change and systemic inequality and in the aftermath of the subprime mortgage crisis and Great Recession. Despite proliferating discourses and practices of urban sustainability and green economic development, there is nothing inherently balanced or progressive about a “triple bottom line” of economic, environmental, and social priorities. In fact, emergent green economic sectors – whether related to building energy efficiency or spinning off green enterprise by channeling local sourcing and procurement – require extensive planning and social coordination on both the demand and supply sides of the market to function viably, let alone spin off good jobs or regenerate ailing neighborhoods. While the private sector might offer business expertise and financial capital, civil society organizations like SCOPE/AGENDA and the Cleveland Foundation not only command extensive social networks and symbolic capital in the form of positive recognition by policy makers, planners, and potential opponents of development projects, they further possess significant cultural capital in having good knowledge of local institutional structures and politics. Therefore, they can effectively summon leadership from partner organizations and employ the varieties of capital at the disposal of their respective coalitions to advance policy and program goals in ways that might be less feasible for companies and other private sector interests with less knowledge of local history and institutional arrangements. In addition, the place-basedness and broad reaches of civic coalitions into different communities (and the power and resources that come along with that) potentially translate into a certain level of politico-institutional efficacy as well as democratic accountability, in part related to broader mandates and longer time horizons that tend towards greater economic, environmental, and social sustainability.

Ultimately, it falls upon progressive actors, organizations, and coalitions to undertake the daunting task of building shared resolve, strategically deploying collective assets, leveraging policy and funding opportunities, influencing key decision makers, and setting up specific policy structures that reallocate resources and decision-making power in the economic sphere, against considerable institutional inertia. These include faulty assumptions guiding the dominant community development model, including the segmentation of community development and political organization from economic programs as spheres of engagement for civil society actors, private sector primacy in the economic sphere, and “bottom up essentialism” that limits community and civic groups from broadening their approaches to community development and urban problem solving more generally. Beyond the reification of the economy on the part of civil society actors, complete with notions that poor neighborhoods are weak markets requiring reinvestment and integration into the American economic mainstream through private sector initiative (Lenz, 1988; Stoecker, 2008, p. 304; Taub, 1990), this study renders problematic the reification of community development templates, toolkits, and repertoires. This is not to prescribe the likes of the Los Angeles and Cleveland initiatives as panaceas for countering poverty across US cities. Rather, this article underscores the criticality of diverse, multipronged, and flexible policy and planning efforts, including those transforming the economic sphere, in iteratively tackling the structures of socioeconomic and spatial disadvantage and inequality underlying the continual proliferation of urban poverty and dauntingly faced by community development practitioners across American city-regions. While the long-term successes and broader impacts of the respective initiatives remain to be seen, their contribution to greater ambiguity, variation, and innovation within the fields of community, workforce, and local economic development will likely minimize the vulnerability of communities, neighborhoods, and localities to catastrophic events along with other anticipated and unanticipated conditions in the long term.
Notes

1. The study by Carmin et al. (2012) on early adoption of urban climate adaptation agendas in the global south attributes transformative agency on the part of cities to endogenous factors such as the presence of visionaries, champions, and civil society advocates, seminal events, and existing priorities. On the other hand, exogenous factors such as extreme events, changing incentive structures, and diffusion of information and ideas are said to drive later stage adoption.

2. Joas’s work counts among more recent formulations on individual-level enablers of transformative agency, with parallels to the cognitive turn in institutional theory.

3. Historically, the city council has taken an activist role in fueling economic development, whether by diverting water from Owens Valley Aqueduct or establishing a municipal public utility.

4. This program responded to the “work first” orientation of the 1996 federal welfare reform legislation by transitioning the city’s low income and “hardest to employ” residents into living wage, unionized public sector employment under a “vocational worker” category, represented by SEIU.

5. The funds were available through the Workforce Investment Act, Energy Efficiency Conservation Block Grant Program, and National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences Minority Worker Training Program.

6. Consequently the Green Retrofit and Workforce Program shifted focus from job creation to job retention.

7. This included the issuance of Qualified Energy Conservation Bonds (QECBs) to finance a subsequent set of retrofits, creation of a revolving loan fund in which to deposit monetized energy savings in order to finance citywide retrofits beyond the first two phases supported by ARRA dollars, and formalization of a Civil Service Apprenticeship connecting green retrofit trainees with green careers in the building trades.

8. For instance, in 2009, Mayor Jackson convened the Sustainable Cleveland 2019 initiative with the objective of “building an economic engine to empower a green city on a blue lake” by the 50th anniversary of the infamous Cuyahoga River fire.

9. Starting with the establishment of Neighborhood Voice (2009) as a “hyperlocal” print and online newspaper, which incorporated contributions from citizen journalists and representatives of anchor institutions and other organizations from the Greater University Circle area, in 2011, Evergreen shifted to a more comprehensive approach that incorporates Neighborhood Voice with Neighborhood Connections, a community-based organization based in the Greater University Circle, to fund citizen-led neighborhood projects, events, and activities. To the extent social events and activities foster dialogue among neighbors and get them to address different issues of common concern, the idea is that strengthening personal ties and linkages among different groups might promote a healthier civic environment, complete with greater political engagement and accountability.

10. In Los Angeles, longstanding environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club lent the LA Apollo Alliance symbolic capital in the form of an established name and reputation, while the building trades unions offered rich experience and effective institutional structures for workforce development, community-based organizations like Community Coalition and SCOPE/AGENDA claimed widespread public trust with respect to the prospect of generating gains for residents of low-income communities, and university-based partners such as the UCLA Labor Occupational Safety and Health Program (LOSH) and the Labor Center provided research and policy analysis, spelled out program details, and gained buy-in from policy makers under the guise of technical expertise and neutrality. In Cleveland, the Foundation’s policy and programmatic wherewithal combined with the anchor institutions’ enormous purchasing and procurement capacities, along with the Ohio Employee Ownership Center and Democracy Collaborative’s technical expertise and appearance of objectivity and rationality.

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Bibliography