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BUILDING COMMUNITY ECONOMIES IN MASSACHUSETTS: AN EMERGING MODEL OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT?

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The Alliance to Develop Power (ADP) and Nuestras Raíces (Our Roots) are two longstanding community organizations growing in the fertile social soil of the Pioneer Valley of Massachusetts. In a semi-rural part of the state, these two organizations have an urban focus, the ADP on institution and wealth building, affordable housing, fair employment, and financial services for low-income and disenfranchised people throughout the Valley, Nuestras Raíces on urban agriculture, environment, food security, and small business development for the sizeable Puerto Rican community in the small, historically industrial city of Holyoke. This summary snapshot of the ADP and NR belies the broad compass of their daily engagements in community building and organizing as well as the dynamism of their non-traditional approaches to economic development. Indeed, the liveliness and richness of these organizations make it difficult to treat them simply as case studies of the social economy.

Precisely because the ADP and Nuestras Raíces are difficult to narrate or categorize, they function as a spur to the theoretical imagination. Recognizing them as economic organizations (which they definitely are, though not exclusively) requires us to expand our usual notions of economy, stretching the limits of market-based and capital-tethered conceptions and opening our

eyes to a diverse array of economic practices and institutions. Recounting their stories forces us to rework our understandings of economic development and economic dynamics. Understanding them as part of a social economy contributes a sense of innovative dynamism that is missing from familiar treatments of the social economy as a (second-best) provider of social services, transitional employment and bureaucratically mandated social inclusion. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, theorizing them as building “community economies” (Gibson-Graham 2006) offers a new lens through which to read the existing economic landscape and, at the same time, suggests a visionary project of economic development for activists on the ground.

In what follows, we first briefly tell the stories of *Nuestras Raíces* and the ADP from their inception to the present, using ethnographic data from interviews and participant observation.¹ We then examine the community economy that each organization is in the process of constructing—understood as an economic space in which interdependence is acknowledged, negotiated, and enlarged. Throughout, traditional notions of economic singularity, dynamism and development are unsettled as alternative formulations and practices come into view. We conclude by recognizing the constitutive role of knowledge production in the shaping, expansion, and viability of the social economy.

Nuestras Raíces

Imagine a little kid that might walk by a vacant lot on her way to school...She sees it full of trash and needles...it looks terrible. Then we start working with

people in her neighborhood, maybe her grandparents or her uncles, to make that into a garden. And she sees people cleaning it up, building a toolbox and brightly painting it, putting up a fence, working the soil in the springtime and...things growing in there. Maybe she helps out to plant flowers, or works together with a group of kids to have her own garden in there, and...if you can imagine the transformation of that little kid's outlook on life, from seeing something in the middle of her neighborhood that was so ugly to seeing people that she knows, and even participating in making it be beautiful and productive. It's extremely powerful on the little kid's frame of mind, about what she can do and what her community can do. (Daniel Ross, November 2000)

In the early 1990s a Hampshire College student dedicated his senior project to helping Holyoke residents start a community garden on a vacant lot owned by the city. After he graduated, the gardeners started Nuestras Raíces to sustain the project, with part-time coordinators funded by a local community-based non-profit. In 1995, after several difficult years, 23 year old Daniel Ross came on board as Executive Director and things started to take off.

By 1996 there were three community gardens and NR had broadened its mission statement to encompass “community, economic and human development in the downtown wards of Holyoke through projects related to agriculture and food” (Ross, quoted in *Holyoke: A Weekly News Magazine*, May 11, 1996). In 1997, using grants, loans, gifts and earnings, they took a mortgage on a one-story building which would become the Centro Agrícola—housing a greenhouse, a

shared-use commercial kitchen, a restaurant, meeting rooms, staff offices, and an outdoor plaza for gatherings and events, with a colorful mural, fountain, plantings and seating for the restaurant. Community members, staff members, college students, carpenters' union apprentices, prison pre-release programs, substance abuse programs, and casual volunteers worked alongside skilled artisans paid below market rate to renovate the building, using plans donated by a local architect, building materials donated by local businesses, and a general contractor from Orange, more than an hour away, who donated approximately half of his time on the job. The Centro was completed in 2003, with \$350,000 in grant money spent on the project.

Currently the Centro Agricola houses El Jardin Bakery, making wood-fired brick oven organic bread sold all over the Valley; Mi Plaza, a restaurant serving Puerto Rican and American food using locally grown and community garden produce; Marine Reef Habitat, using the greenhouse and supplying fish tanks and reef tanks with corals and invertebrates for educational, scientific and decorative purposes; 4-8 small businesses using the commercial kitchen for catering, food processing, and production of sauces. In addition, there's a bilingual library on agricultural, environmental and health topics, meeting space, classroom space for community education, and office space for staff.

In addition to the gardens and the Centro, the other major project of NR is Tierra de Oportunidades (TOP) farm. In 2004-05, after a summer long community-led strategic planning process, NR purchased four acres of river front farm land in Holyoke. In 2006, the farm was greatly expanded when the Sisters of Providence offered to lease 26 adjoining acres along the

river for \$1 per year. The farm operates as a beginning farmer training project and business incubator. Each year 10-12 businesses involved in market gardening and livestock production (chickens, pigs, horses) are chosen for the season by a committee of agriculturalists, including the manager of the Food Bank Farm, from applicants who submit business plans prepared with the help of NR staff. Customers and community members are drawn to the farm by additional businesses, facilities, and activities on site. These include a youth-run petting zoo, nature trails, a conservation area, a farm store, a pig-roasting business using organic pork raised on the farm (this will develop into a full-scale restaurant over the next several years), a 2 day harvest festival drawing over 2000 people, an outdoor stage for events (rented for weddings, retreats, concerts, family parties, company picnics, etc.). A large greenhouse has been salvaged from nearby and a 19th century barn has been moved to the site to house equipment and livestock. In the future, NR plans to spin off farms, as individuals with 3 years of successful farming experience become eligible for beginning farmer loans of \$300,000 from the USDA to buy their own farms. Already Francisco Fred, a successful 2007 incubator farmer, has rented 2 acres of land in Hatfield for 2008, doubling the size of his farm at TOP.

Today Nuestras Raíces is a national model for community organizations focused on urban agriculture, environmental justice, and economic development. Ten community gardens afford space to approximately 120 families and produce more than \$1000 of fresh organic food per family. More than 20 small businesses started through NR's business development assistance are renting farm plots or space in the Centro Agrícola. The organization has 20 full and part-time staff members and an annual budget of \$750,000, of which 10 per cent is earned income—

largely rent paid by the businesses in the two incubators. Unlike similar organizations in other urban areas, they receive no money from the city.

Nuestras Raíces is currently increasing its impact by addressing local and state policy issues, having formed the Pioneer Valley Environmental Health Coalition and the Holyoke Food & Fitness Policy Council. These policy councils bring together youth, non-traditional community leaders and dozens of agencies to produce powerful, community-led movements for healthy environments and infrastructure.

Alliance to Develop Power

When Caroline Murray became Executive Director of the five-year-old Anti-Displacement Project in 1993, her goal was to transform it from a housing *advocacy* organization to one whose mission is *organizing* tenants to preserve their affordable housing: in her words, changing the question from “how can tenants be informed about what’s happening?” to “how can tenants control what’s happening?” (Caroline Murray, November 2007). Over the next 12 years the ADP won \$60.5 million in federal, state, and local funds to purchase, rehab and transform 1450 units of at-risk housing to collectively owned, permanently affordable housing cooperatives, creating the largest holding of tenant-owned housing in the US.

Today the ADP's scope has expanded well beyond affordable housing. Their mission is broadly conceived as community empowerment, achieved via institution and community building, shared wealth and asset creation, leadership development, cooperative economic development, and mobilizing low-income and disenfranchised people through organizing campaigns to achieve lasting social and political change. In 2007, to capture their wide-ranging goals, they changed their name to Alliance to Develop Power:

You know, a community organization's main goal is to build power...we added another focus to it which was the people who were marginalized by not having control over any piece of the economy...we use a direct action model of organizing where we go directly to the decision-makers...and that's the heart of who we are. (Caroline Murray, November 2007)

A key focus of the ADP is creating institutions that enlarge the membership, provide a setting for leadership development, support ADP organizing campaigns, and build the ADP community economy. In 2001, they created United Landscaping and Painting (now United for Hire) as a worker-owned cooperative to provide landscaping and maintenance services to the housing cooperatives and employment for tenants. The business was capitalized by loans from Spring Meadow housing cooperative, among other local sources. UfH employs from 6-20 ADP members at any one time and grossed \$500,000 in 2006.

A more ambitious venture is the Worker Center/Casa Obrera which opened its doors in June 2007, with sponsorship from the local and national AFL-CIO. The Center organizes unorganized and undocumented workers and offers ESOL, adult basic education, democracy school and leadership training, worker rights training, a food cooperative, a legal clinic, assistance in filing wage and hour claims, and immigrant-based social networks. Currently they have 100 members each paying \$52 per year in dues. To provide financial services to the unbanked, they recently introduced a debit card where members can load their pay checks for a small fee rather than paying exorbitant fees to check-cashing establishments. Cards shared with distant relatives facilitate migrant remittance transfers and Worker Center dues can be automatically deducted.

The “ADP has created business and capital holdings worth \$45 million” and “these community-owned assets contribute \$20 million a year in cash flow to the local economy” (press release, Nov. 26, 2007). Among ADP assets is 130 Union St., a 6,600 sq. ft. building purchased in 2003 with ADP affiliate institutions (largely the housing cooperatives) putting up the down payment. Currently three housing coops each have five percent equity in the building, which houses the ADP staff, United for Hire, offices for one of the housing coops, and the Worker Center/Casa Obrera.

Membership in the ADP is for the most part “institution-based.” Institutional members include the four housing cooperatives which pay dues to the ADP (ranging from \$12,000 to \$20,000 annually), United for Hire which pays dues as well as rent for space at 130 Union St., and the Worker Center which pays rent but at this point does not pay dues. For various reasons, United

for Hire has transitioned from a worker cooperative to a worker-controlled business wholly owned by the ADP, which appropriates the surplus created by the enterprise. Fifty percent of the ADP's operating budget of around \$600,000² is internally generated, with the other 50 percent coming from grants. The Worker Center is also a dues-based membership organization, but the members are individual workers.

The ADP and its member institutions have separate governance structures. Each of the housing coops is a non-profit enterprise with its own board made up of tenants, which oversees the running of the coop and decides how to spend the available money collected as rent. United for Hire and the Worker Center are member-controlled, with decisions about jobs and wages (for the former) and decisions about campaigns and services (for the latter) made by the worker members or in consultation with them. Both institutions are represented on the ADP Board of Directors as are the housing coops, and the Board takes a very active role in oversight and planning for the ADP.

At the moment, the ADP itself has six paid staff and a contingent of volunteer leaders. ADP-trained tenant volunteers run many of the services and facilities at the housing coops, most notably the food cooperatives that distribute annually 180,000 pounds of food, largely donated by the local Food Bank. Food distributions to 900 tenant families constitute approximately one week's supply of food per month. In addition, every summer the ADP provides two meals a day to 500 children in the housing coops, totaling 60,000 meals in the summer of 2006.

One of the major issues the Board has dealt with over the years is the tension between the institution building and organizing missions of the ADP. The housing cooperatives, for example, pay substantial dues to the ADP and the tenant boards are intensely interested in the question “what does the ADP do for us?” Caroline notes undefensively that this question arises in part because of the way she directs her talents and energies—“I’m an organizer!”

Whenever we had money, we would hire an organizer to do a campaign. And then we didn’t necessarily have adequate infrastructure to continue to sort of watch over the fruits of our labors...in the last year we have focused on hiring different kinds of positions, so we now have a Director of Operations who’s sort of in charge of big picture stuff...working with all the boards, all the ways we’re sharing our money, all of the inflows and outflows. (Caroline Murray, November 2007)

They also hired a community builder to work with the leaders of each housing coop to “build *intentional* community.” In her first six months, the community builder surveyed members to see what they wanted and then organized youth mentoring and tutoring (led by coop members and “former youths”), brought in social services, facilitated access to government assistance programs, helped coordinate the food coops, and organized social events as well as classes and trainings.

While the ADP has re-committed to building their community institutions, much of their energy is focused on organizing campaigns. An entire paper could be written on stories of power

marshaled by ADP campaigns , which have achieved extraordinary successes, often through showing up en masse in the legislature or at the residence of someone in power—restoring food stamp eligibility to immigrant families, blocking punitive changes in state and federal welfare laws, publicizing abuses in local workforce development programs, leading the national effort to hold Workforce Investment Act agencies accountable for actually providing job training, helping to pass an Economic Stimulus Bill creating \$6 million in resources for community-based job training in Massachusetts, winning changes to Massachusetts labor laws protecting day laborers, playing the major role in national efforts to save the Section 8 affordable housing program, and gaining over \$300,000 in wage restitution for underpaid local workers.

The ADP is currently taking a lead role in the national Campaign for Community Values (CCV), a three-year effort spearheaded by the Center for Community Change and involving hundreds of grassroots groups in reframing the 2008 elections around shared values rather than separate issues: “It’s been this weird intellectual thing that we’re doing...it kind of bugs us but we really like it” (Caroline Murray, November 2007). The CCV organized a question and answer session between 8 presidential candidates and 5000 members of community groups in Iowa last December. Because the boards of the institutions paid to send their members, the ADP was able to fly 22 leaders to Iowa for this event. As one of three individuals chosen to speak to the candidates on national TV, Dedra Lewis of the ADP told the story of her daughter’s severe illness and the loss of her job and health insurance because of staying home to care for her. There’s footage on YouTube of Lewis speaking to Obama and the candidate embracing the 8 year old daughter.

Building Community Economies as a Practice of Economic Development

Both *Nuestras Raíces* and the ADP see economic development as an important part of their mission. Yet their pursuit of this mission only minimally conforms to the familiar practice of local economic development that planners and politicians espouse. This cognitive and practical dissonance presents a theoretical opportunity—what if we were to take their self-descriptions at face value, acknowledging their success as development organizations? Perhaps we could begin to trace the lineaments of a new (because not yet recognized or formalized) model of local economic development.

Interestingly, the traditional version of development and NR/ADP-style economic development appear to have the same goal, which is a generalized increase in social well-being. Where they diverge, however, is that NR and the ADP keep this goal constantly in sight whereas traditional development practice has tended to emphasize means and measures rather than ends. Local development planners and policymakers generally do not open up the question of what might be the best way to increase well-being for a particular population or locale. Instead, they trot out the familiar development package—new or expanded firms and industries in export sectors, employment growth, a rise in per capita income. The connection to social well-being is assumed or even forgotten.

When we look at development as practiced by Nuestras Raíces and the ADP, nothing from the old model seems to fit. Many of the elements in the picture are non-“modern,” even backward-seeming—nonmarket economic activities, like self-provisioning and gifting, play a major role; unpaid (volunteer) labor is key to every activity; the core sectors involved are non-export (technically, non-basic) industries like housing and locally oriented agriculture. It requires a vaulting imaginative leap to convene these under the rubric of “economic development,” yet development is what these organizations say they are doing. Taking them at their word produces a deconstructive moment, blowing apart our categorical certainties. Suddenly what has been stigmatized as “outside” development or “anti-development” is prominently figured in the development frame. Noncapitalist enterprise, unwaged labor, nonmarket transactions—elements of what Gibson-Graham call the “diverse economy” (2006, 2008; see Figure 1)—are foregrounded as resources that can be drawn upon to increase social well-being. As we deconstruct development through the experience of these two organizations, it becomes hard to believe (or at least questionable) that such diverse economic resources should be excluded from the development picture, and that the economy should have been so narrowly and capitalocentrically defined. Such is the power of deconstruction—to make the familiar strange.

Figure 1 A Diverse Economy*

| <i>Transactions</i> | <i>Labor</i> | <i>Enterprise</i> |
|---|--|--|
| MARKET | WAGE | CAPITALIST |
| <p><i>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</i></p> <p><i>Sale of public goods</i> <i>Ethical 'fair-trade' markets</i> <i>Local trading systems</i> <i>Alternative currencies</i> <i>Underground market</i> <i>Co-op exchange</i> <i>Barter</i> <i>Informal market</i></p> | <p><i>ALTERNATIVE PAID</i></p> <p><i>Self-employed</i> <i>Cooperative</i> <i>Indentured</i> <i>Reciprocal labor</i> <i>In kind</i> <i>Work for welfare</i></p> | <p><i>ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST</i></p> <p><i>State enterprise</i> <i>Green capitalist</i> <i>Socially responsible firm</i> <i>Non-profit</i></p> |
| <p><i>NON-MARKET</i></p> <p><i>Household flows</i> <i>Gift giving</i> <i>Indigenous exchange</i> <i>State allocations</i> <i>State appropriations</i> <i>Gleaning</i> <i>Hunting, fishing, gathering</i> <i>Theft, poaching</i></p> | <p><i>UNPAID</i></p> <p><i>Housework</i> <i>Family care</i> <i>Neighborhood work</i> <i>Volunteer</i> <i>Self-provisioning labor</i> <i>Slave labor</i></p> | <p><i>NON-CAPITALIST</i></p> <p><i>Communal</i> <i>Independent</i> <i>Feudal</i> <i>Slave</i></p> |

* Note: The figure should be read down the columns rather than across the rows. Source: J.K. Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics*, p. 71. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

Via the experience of Nuestras Raíces and the ADP, the domain of economy is enlarged and radically decentered, becoming an unstructured space of diversity, no longer colonized by the master signifier of capitalism. This dramatically opens up the field of economic possibility, bringing into view a wide range of sites and practices as resources for development. For NR, economic development is not a narrow project of capitalist growth but a broad endeavor addressing every dimension of social well-being—health and fitness, food and nutrition, environment, education, arts and culture, useful work, personal growth, community. They are not only creating wage employment for “working age” individuals but involving people across the generations in productive economic activities that directly benefit themselves and the community. They are not just building human capital to suit the narrow requirements of the local labor market but reframing the undervalued skills of older men, youth, and women as wealth-generating assets. The ADP’s activities are similarly broad and directly focused on enhancing social well-being. They include creating a community-based and community-supporting housing market; winning wage and benefit increases and restitution for existing jobs (as well as generating well-remunerated new jobs); creating shared assets and wealth for the ADP community; organizing the distribution of free food to member families; creating an alternative market in banking services; equipping disadvantaged workers to negotiate the labor market and supporting them through organizing campaigns; integrally linking development with organizing and empowerment. Rather than applying the one-size-fits-all prescription of capitalist growth (assumed to lead, however circuitously, to increased well-being), NR and the ADP approach the goal of increased well-being *directly*—starting where they are (low-income neighborhoods),

building on existing assets (agricultural knowledge and skills, access to affordable housing), and producing what people specifically need (this list gets longer as organizational capacity grows). Their demystifyingly direct approach to development means that each initiative can be scrutinized for its immediate effects on community well-being and adjusted accordingly. There's no generic prescription to roll out, no faith to be placed in mechanical outcomes, no long run to wait around for.

In recognizing these distinctive features of development NR/ADP style, we have moved beyond deconstruction and into the positive practice of renaming/resignification. Here the question becomes, how do we characterize the form of development practiced by these two organizations? Is there a concept that could lend its coherence to their multiple, disparate activities and at the same time garner richness and depth from the association? Not surprisingly, given the authorship of this chapter, the concept that leaps to mind is Gibson-Graham's notion of a "community economy" (2006). In simplest terms, a community economy is a space in which economic activity constructs a community where interdependence is acknowledged, negotiated, and often enlarged. Perhaps the most important "output" of a community economy is a communal subject, a "we" that emerges from the activity of building an economy through ethical decision-making and joint participation.

Both Nuestras Raíces and the ADP have the expressed intention to build a community on an economic base, and to build a viable economy on the strengths of a community. One of the ways they have done this is to ensure that the aspects and activities of the organization are

economically linked, in order to strengthen the community economy as a whole. So, for example, a tenant who pays rent in one of the ADP housing coops is not only covering the costs of housing provision and maintenance, but contributing to a pool of surplus that the coop board distributes to support the non-housing activities of the coop and the ADP. Some of the rent goes to pay United for Hire (whose workers include tenants and other ADP members) to do landscaping and maintenance on the housing complex; some goes to support the food coops and the distribution of free food every month to tenant families; some is paid in dues to the ADP and is used to support its organizing mission, mobilizing community power around housing, labor, immigrant and poor people's issues. The rent also pays for the ADP's "community builder" who organizes activities and support services for tenant members in the housing coops; it creates discretionary funds that can be used to pay for member participation in distant conferences and mobilizations; it funds ADP asset building and equity holdings (1 housing coop contributed a loan to start United for Hire, 3 coops put up the down payment and own a share in 130 Union St.).

As we have seen, the economic links between ADP institutions generate half of the ADP's annual budget. The housing coops support the ADP through dues; the Worker Center, United for Hire, and one of the housing coops support 130 Union St. by renting space; United for Hire produces a surplus that is used to support ADP organizing and staff. Economic activities also link individual members, knitting them into the organization. Weekly "loading parties" for the debit cards, for example, are held at the food coops to bring members together in a space of economic community.

At Nuestras Raíces , a community economy is in part constituted through an internal circulatory system in which outputs from one production process become inputs to another. On the most basic level, the organic and ethnic food produced on the farm and gardens contributes good nutrition and cultural renewal as inputs to local household economies. Produce in excess of what is needed is often gifted to neighbors and other gardeners: “The tradition of sharing is inside gardening itself”(Jaime Iglesias, Garden Coordinator, October 2000). The farm and market gardens supply food to Mi Plaza restaurant and pigs for the pig roasting operation as well as produce for the farm store; small businesses paying rent for commercial kitchen space are processing foods grown in the community gardens or on the farm; the restaurants and the commercial kitchen produce waste that is composted for use on the farm and gardens; animals raised on the farm are fed farm produce and restaurant scraps and produce manure to be used as fertilizer; farmers join together in a producer coop to market their produce at farmers’ markets and local stores. Courses in business planning are offered by NR staff to community members who then start businesses on a farm plot or in the Centro Agricola incubator; youth receive environmental education through being involved in diesel exhaust monitoring, opposing the location of a waste transfer facility near the farm, and engaging in environmental restoration, eradicating invasive species and creating nature trails for members and visitors, including customers at the farm store and the pig roasting operation; young people gained artistic and design skills through creating a mural that enlivens the Centro Agricola plaza. In these examples the educational work of Nuestras Raíces is either an input to or outcome of the environmental, agricultural, cultural and community-building work of the organization. Individuals come in as

youth with no specified roles or as cultivators of garden plots in one of the community gardens and, over time, become volunteer workers for the organization, leaders or managers of projects, board members, garden coordinators, environmental activists, and integral members of a productive community. The two incubators (TOP farm and Centro Agricola) nurture businesses that contribute rent to support the organization and maintain its assets. As these businesses mature and spin off to other locations, many will continue their affiliation with Nuestras Raíces, enlarging and strengthening the community economy through cooperative marketing endeavors that extend the Nuestras Raíces brand and multiply its markets.

The Ethical Dynamics of Development at Nuestras Raíces and the ADP

So far we have seen how the process of building a community economy involves thinking through the ways that the activities, products and payments of an organization can contribute to strengthening and building an economic community. From the description above, it seems that one way this can happen is through continually “completing the circle,” making sure that one thing flows into another, that energies generated internally are captured by the community rather than allowed to dissipate and leak out. Starting United for Hire was a way of completing the circle for the ADP, eliminating payments to an outside maintenance firm; building the commercial kitchen and the restaurant was a way of completing the circle for Nuestras Raíces , ensuring that value adding activity takes place within the community. Upon inspection, every

aspect of these organizations' activities is geared to contribute to other aspects, strengthening the community as a whole. For the ADP, this is an explicit principle; any proposal for a new project or program confronts the question, "does it support the ADP?" But whether tacit or explicit, the vision of completing (and enlarging) the circle is part of an ethical dynamic of development for both organizations. In other words, it is a principle that guides decision-making about what the organizations do.

When we speak of "ethical dynamics" of development we are entering onto relatively untrodden ground (Gibson-Graham 2006; Gibson et al. 2008). Development dynamics are usually understood in terms of structural logics embedded in macro-narratives that unfold in predictable ways—mechanization, commoditization, proletarianization, and capital accumulation are the elemental structural dynamics of capitalist development. Productivity increases, employment growth and rising incomes are the signs of these structural forces at work. By contrast to the oft-told tale of logical unfolding that undergirds the Western development project, the development stories of *Nuestras Raíces* and the ADP are unpredictable and idiosyncratic. Their individual pathways toward increased well-being are governed by the decisions of a community of stakeholders, not dictated by putative logics of economic evolution. Rather than attempting to trigger a familiar transformation in a known economic space, which is the aim of most development practice, *Nuestras Raíces* and the ADP open up the economy as an ethical and political space of unknowing, a space of freedom and decision in which we choose the forms that our necessary interdependence will take.

The participants in these organizations have been concerned to build economies in which the constitutive activities and organizations support each other—economically, socially, culturally, politically. In the process they have made many decisions about key issues around which economic communities often negotiate. Elsewhere we have identified these issues as four coordinates of ethical decision-making in a community-based, community-building economy—necessity, surplus, consumption, and commons (Gibson-Graham 2006). Phrased as questions, these become visible as targets of ethical decision-making that often involves difficult choices and tradeoffs, a process of balancing between shared but competing goals and commitments:

- What are our unmet *needs* and how can we meet them?
- How can we generate *surplus* and how should we utilize it?
- How can we share, maintain and enlarge the *commons*?
- How can our *consumption* meet our needs, allow for the generation of surplus, and augment (or at least not draw down) the commons?

Just a few examples may suggest how decisions around these coordinates can be seen as constituting an ethical dynamics of development.

In a role play of a housing coop board meeting at a recent ADP leadership retreat, the issue on the table was whether or not to allocate more of the rent *surplus* to subsidize the food coop as a way to address the rapidly rising price of food. Some board members argued that the funds should be used instead to undertake needed property maintenance. Here we can see a very realistic example of a decision whether to meet the *needs* of all tenants for affordable food, or to maintain and restore the *commons*—the housing complex itself. In the straw vote taken at the

role play, the food proposal won by a small margin. The reasoning was that temporarily deferring maintenance to meet a crisis was justified, but it was also recognized that funds for that maintenance would have to be found, perhaps necessitating a rent increase in the future.

An example that centers on *surplus* and *consumption* is that of United for Hire, which started out as a worker cooperative in which the worker members appropriated any surplus they generated through their work. For various reasons, including the difficulty for workers of running a business as well as doing their jobs, United for Hire is now a wholly owned subsidiary of the ADP. This means that any surplus that remains, once wages and benefits and other expenses have been paid, is appropriated by the ADP and distributed to support ADP operations and organizing campaigns. UfH workers, among themselves and through their membership on the ADP board, democratically agreed to this arrangement, which limits their potential *consumption* by excluding them from the possibility of profit-sharing. This limitation is acceptable because they see their *needs* as being met by excellent wages and benefits. So here we have an example of ethical decision-making in which a *surplus* that could have gone into a *consumption* fund for a small group of ADP members is directed toward supporting the operations and organizing of the entire community.

In the words of anthropologist Stephen Gudeman, “A community makes and shares a commons...without a commons, there is no community; without a community, there is no commons (2001, 27). For both Nuestras Raíces and the ADP the creation and expansion of a *commons* is a central goal and achievement, integral to sustaining and growing the community.

Since 1993 Nuestras Raíces has been “reclaiming the commons” for a landless agricultural population stranded in a depressed urban setting, engaging in arduous negotiations with the city of Holyoke over access to land and water. This process of wresting garden space from the city has been accompanied by ongoing ethical decision-making within the organization about modes of sharing out the common space. Access to the community’s land, infrastructure, equipment, skills, and funds as well as work and meeting space is governed by democratically agreed-upon rules of entry and behavior. These are administered in the gardens by elected coordinators, and on the farm and Centro Agricola by the Farm Director and Executive Director under the supervision of the board. The rules and programs of NR assure that the commons is continually being restored and augmented rather than drawn down or consumed. This allows for the enlargement of the farming community and increased services to members. Space is also allocated at the Centro and the farm for celebration and enjoyment—outdoor seating at the restaurant, annual community festivals, concerts and dancing draw an ever-widening group of people into the NR community as committed customers, gardeners, entrepreneurs, volunteers, and appreciators. In the vibrant multi-use spaces of the NR commons, we see the concrete embodiment of an ethically negotiated space of interdependence.

The ADP has likewise created a huge *commons* in the housing coops, Worker Center, United for Hire, 130 Union St., and the ADP organization itself. They have generated sizeable common wealth—shared and jointly administered assets of \$45 million. On an ongoing basis, they create a common identity through a negotiated process of self-recognition (explaining themselves to

themselves) and of self-presentation (explaining themselves to the world). This involves developing and disseminating a common language:

In the past we didn't invest enough in the ongoing training and education of members of the coops and our business...about how everything we do is different, that...we are creating and we continue to *create this alternative economy*...We need to do more of that type of thing to institutionalize our beliefs for new people that are moving in and new members of the coops and that's sort of the lesson of the moment... it's not like you win and then you're done...“the revolution is continuing.” (Caroline Murray, November 2007, emphasis ours)

When we went to Washington, DC, for fair immigration reform on June 19th [2007] with a busload of people, everybody from all our member groups came...this is part of our re-branding efforts about a shared fate—an injury to one is an injury to all and what does that mean?...We've done some real intentional leadership development and conversations about building bridges particularly between African Americans and immigrants who you hear on the radio are pitted against each other...when it comes to job training or low wage work. But in our organization we've been able to build a multi-racial coalition in support of immigration reform because we've engaged in those conversations. (Caroline Murray, November 2007)

Here we see a recognition on Caroline's part of the role of a common language in both marking and constituting a community. Through sharing wealth, engaging in joint activities, and speaking a common language the ADP is producing a communal subject, a "we" whose boundaries are continually enlarged and whose self-recognition is a key to power. The ongoing process of producing that subject is an ethical dynamic of development, one which involves continually choosing to (re)create ourselves as subjects of a community economy.

Principles and Practices of Ethical Dynamism

Both Nuestras Raíces and the ADP have grown considerably from their beginnings in one community garden and two housing complexes, respectively. Not only have they greatly expanded the scale of their original activities, but they have taken on an ever-widening range of projects and properties. We have treated this process of growth as one of ethical dynamism, in which the ethical coordinates of necessity, surplus, consumption and commons are considered in relation to one another in negotiating the path of development. This may be a conscious or largely unconscious process for either or both organizations.

In addition to the principle of balancing among the four coordinates, we see a number of other principles, visions and values as structuring the decisions and pathways of NR and the ADP. Above we identified the principle of "enlarging and completing the circle." Here we would like to examine three more, treating each as an ethical dynamic of growth: (1) each organization is

“community-led” and sees straying from this value as dangerous if not fatal; (2) each sees its evolution as “organic” and “logical” and places a value on one project growing out of another; (3) each values and fosters individual transformation to strengthen and grow the organization.³

(1) Membership-led, community-driven

Nuestras Raíces and the ADP are both organizations with strong executive directors—this is perhaps an understatement—but at the same time they are resolutely and affirmatively community-led. Each organization has an active, decision-making board of directors largely comprised of members of the organization or its institutions (and for each ADP institution, there’s also a board or leadership team made up of members). Daniel Ross and Caroline Murray see the boards as the voice of the community, and take their directives very seriously. For these community-led organizations, the imperative of growth (if we can call it that) comes from the community.

The unusual composition of the board at NR was a major topic of conversation on “Institute Day,” when other community organizations from around the region received training in the Nuestras Raíces model. Participants in the training were shocked to discover that no prominent business people or professionals or “other people with money” sat on the board. The issue of community leadership surfaced again that day when one of the visitor groups complained about the difficulty of involving their members in the project of urban farming. Hilda Colon, who was running the training, said “Maybe you shouldn’t be doing that then!”

Asked where ideas come from for new projects at Nuestras Raíces, Daniel Ross responded:

We're constantly hearing and constantly open to...ideas. It's hammered into staff that they've always gotta be asking and always gotta be writing down what people say. But we also do formal processes of evaluation and surveys and brainstorming sessions: "Where do you want to go next? What's your next idea? How can we work together on these things? What help do you need from us?" (November 2007)

The idea of buying farm land came from a community-wide survey funded by the Ford Foundation and conducted by community gardeners and teens from the youth program. The reliance on member-led initiatives is not just maintained by ethical commitment but also through the discipline of failure—and the ethic of learning from mistakes. Each organization has experienced the very expensive (in terms of effort and money) failure of outsider-generated projects. El Jardin Bakery started out as a NR-owned business, when a baker from outside the community convinced Daniel they could make a lot of money selling artisan-style organic bread. As soon as they got the bakery up and running, the market changed: "Everybody jumped into doing artisan bread." Moreover, it wasn't the sort of bread that Puerto Ricans eat nor, at \$4 per loaf, could they afford it, so they had to market the bread in other parts of the Valley. Principal lesson learned: "All the businesses that we do now have to come up from within the community" (Daniel Ross, November 2007).

Starting United for Hire as a worker cooperative was similarly an idea from outside, one that was not strongly supported by the ADP community. Members wanted jobs, but they could not

afford to underpay themselves till the business got off the ground, nor could they afford to capitalize UfH with a personal investment of \$1000, even if it was deducted from their pay in small increments over the first few years. Under the current arrangement in which the ADP owns UfH, members run the business democratically but they are free of the cooperative legal structure and responsibilities.

(2) Organic/logical evolution

The work on Labor Ready [a campaign against an abusive temporary labor service] led to the Worker Center because if we were going to shut them down, we thought that the center could replace Labor Ready...but it didn't really work like that so we just started a company for our members [United for Hire]...And then the idea of going after Pynchon came along because United for Hire made a bid on a contract and a dirty employer [Pynchon] undercut the bid and one of our members worked there and knew why they could bid so low and how they were breaking the law...So we went after Pynchon [eventually winning \$130,000 in restitution wages] for 52 workers who had experienced wage theft. (Participant observation with Caroline Murray, February 2008)

Every step that's taken has been a logical outgrowth of what previously existed. So it's sort of grown in a logical way to fill a broader and deeper niche in the city. It's added...not just one garden but more gardens; and it's expanded from mostly old men to youth and women as well. It's built on the original kernel of

agricultural heritage and food...to expand into a bunch of new businesses in an economic development direction and arts and cultural activities that are also building on that...all of those really come from the same rural heritage—mostly from Puerto Rico. So every step that’s come out has kind of built on what was there before. (Eric Toensmeier, Farm Director at NR, December 2007)

Relying on organic evolution (rather than solely on strategic planning) resonates with the familiar injunctions to community groups to “start where you are” and “build the road as you travel.” Often on that unfolding road, serendipity is a catalyst for what will become a major program. In the early days of NR, a local primary school teacher brought some students down to La Finquita (the first community garden) and immediately

the old men started to teach the youth how to plant some flowers and vegetables, and the youth were very excited...the next day, those same youth came down on their own on their bikes and brought more friends and they kept bringing more friends so Daniel Ross and the gardeners decided to start a youth program. And it just kind of took off from there. (William Aponte, Youth and Environmental Coordinator at NR, January 2008)

As the youth program grew, the participants themselves recruited new members, “so they were all friends...and to get a new person into the program, it was their decision...the same way they decided to hire me” (William Aponte, January 2008).

Occasionally the “logical next step” stretches the organization beyond its limits. At the request of immigrant workers, the ADP Worker Center developed a “Know Your Rights” curriculum

and provides trainings in the neighborhoods of Springfield. After the training each immigrant is given a card summarizing their rights, with the ADP phone number on it:

So what's happening in our neighborhoods is the local police...they're racially profiling people and then...arresting people illegally and calling immigration officials illegally. So one of the results of us doing these "Know Your Rights" trainings and passing out these cards is that now we're getting calls from people who are in detention—which we don't necessarily have the capacity to deal with.
(Caroline Murray, November 2007)

To handle such calls, the ADP staff had to become experts on what to do when someone is detained, and all their time became devoted to rapid response. That's when the leaders of the ADP institutions stepped in:

Whenever staff are sort of pulled in a direction, it's really our leadership that pulls us back to the center...bringing us back to our mission—that we're not an immigrant response team. We're organizers. (Caroline Murray, November 2007)

Now the ADP has developed an external response team of local social service agencies and immigration attorneys to call when immigrants are detained.

As this example suggests, each organization realizes that they cannot rely on organic evolution to operate automatically. Everything requires care and nurturing:

We have to make sure we *establish* what we begin...We have to make sure that it works before we jump to the other one, and we are very careful in that—keeping

in mind about everything there is. (Julia Rivera, Board Chairman, NR, December 2007)

(3) Transforming individuals, developing organizations⁴

The heart of community organizing, I mean it's about building power, but it's also about the transformative experience...when people have their first time speaking truth to power, I mean it changes who you are. And for our folks, you know, for us, making sure people have that opportunity...that's what makes it magical. It's not about buying a building. (Caroline Murray, November 2007)

On May 30th...immigration officials stormed into a house with 20 armed guards and took people away in the dark....so Joel went to the house that night and met a woman who had spent an hour hiding in the bathroom, in the shower stall with her son. And he...talked to her and within 48 hours she was speaking to the press...and then she went to Washington, DC and spoke before a rally of 2000 people a week later. Um, so not only seeing her be able to rise up out of one of the most traumatic experiences...but also seeing Joel...It's very few people that can do what he did with her. So for me that's sort of what keeps me going...the beauty and humanity of what we do. (Interview with Caroline Murray, November 2007)

Joel Rodriguez is a Puerto Rican/Native Canadian who has been a staff organizer at the ADP for two years. Before that he was a volunteer ADP leader. And before that, he spent more than 5

years in prison. Currently Joel is the lead organizer for the ADP's prevailing wage campaign to get contractors who are building affordable housing to obey Massachusetts wage laws.⁵ At the Fair Immigration Reform Movement summit in Washington, DC, with a busload of ADP members in attendance, Joel talked about building an alliance between the ADP, the unions, and different worker groups—Puerto Rican, Mexican, Honduran, African American—to win wage restitution from an employer. ADP leaders were partnered with union leaders to “search for the kings” (leaders) among the worker groups, and to visit each one at home. By bringing the group leaders on board, the campaign got all the workers to stand together against the employer:

This was like one of my first goose bump moments that you have as an organizer.

One leader stood up and...said: “Alright, if we go in tomorrow and we demand our money and they fire us, what are you guys going to do?”

They didn't look at the ADP, they looked at the *other* workers. You know, their co-workers. So one by one, the Puerto Rican leader stood up and he said, “Well, if they fire you guys, we'll leave.” Until we had everybody in the room—I'm getting goose bumps again—they said, “Well, we'll shut down the job! WE'LL ALL STOP WORKING!” (Joel Rodriguez, February 2008)⁶

From this successful campaign, the ADP gained several new leaders “who are still part of ADP today and they go out and they talk to their co-workers and they talk to their communities.” The ADP also cemented their relationship with the building trades unions, which will strengthen the ongoing campaign:

It was a great combination; it was a great relationship...But the most important thing is you have to maintain it. You have to keep on making it and building it. You have to caress it, feed it and give it water, give it life—just like us, for survival. (Joel Rodriguez, February 2008)

Together, the ADP and the unions got the state Attorney General to enforce prevailing wage laws and agree not to enforce immigration laws (which would exclude many workers from restitution payments). The next step for the ADP is state-wide campaign to make prevailing wage laws broader in application and easier to enforce.

Daniel Ross frequently identifies the central goal of Nuestras Raíces as community building, which involves working “to help people believe that they can make changes, real changes” and teaching them how to do it within and through an organization:

So getting people to believe in themselves as leaders and teachers, and getting them to participate in meetings and vote and build a strong organization, it's been difficult. People do like to plant and take home their vegetables, but building people into an organization that's democratic and grassroots and really reflects the changes that people want to make in the community is difficult. I think it's our true mission... it's a challenge we embrace, but it's hard. (November 2000)

Meeting the challenge of building leadership (or even participation) has strengthened the educational mission of the organization. Not only do they offer courses related to their environmental, economic, and agricultural mission—classes on nutrition, organic farming, business development, environmental restoration, etc.—but they have created a distinctive

leadership development course culturally oriented to Latinos, a training for community garden coordinators (elected by participants in each garden), and a training for board members, since all members of the board are drawn from the NR community and projects and have little or no experience as directors of organizations.

One of the things is...Nuestras Raíces helped me to grow as a person...First time I joined the board, it was something I didn't even know about—being a board member. And I learned a little bit here and a little bit there, learning and learning and learning and I grow, you know; I have changed... Every day is a learning day, a time for you. (Julia Rivera, Board Chairman of NR, December 2007)

At Nuestras Raíces, every program has involved transforming subjects as a way of also developing the organization, but the youth program is perhaps most explicitly focused on those goals. Nalany Garcia is an 18 year old who joined the program when she was 9. Until the last few years, what kept her attached to the program were the freedoms it gave her—getting out of the house, hanging with friends, not having to work at a menial job, having some money to spend. But

Now it's like, I'm *into* it. I'm really interested to learn the environmental things. ...it's like I'm always in the office; we're doing presentations; we're doing research; we're fighting against the waste transfer facility...So I *like* what I'm doing, you know? (Nalany Garcia, January 2008)

In 2007 Nalany was involved in NR's citywide asthma-reduction project where she learned diesel hot-spot mapping. Over the course of the year the group gave numerous presentations on the project's findings, to community groups and even at Smith and Mt. Holyoke Colleges.

One of my [school] principals made a little comment about "people gotta go flip burgers"...And I was like, "No! Not *everybody* does that"...I felt like telling her, "No! I work in an office for environmental things and things that will help *you* breathe better in the future."

Sometime I feel like, "Damn, Nalany, I can't believe YOU do that! Like out of all people, YOU do that." So I feel proud... (Nalany Garcia, January 2008)

Considerably less voluble than Nalany but no less involved in NR, Angel Ortiz has been with the youth program for 10 years. He is serious about farming and plans to study animal husbandry in college, and he's also deeply committed to Nuestras Raíces and its growth.

Janelle: When you were little, did you participate in this stuff because it was fun?

Angel: No, I wanted to learn about a lot more things instead of learning just a little bit, and I didn't know half the things that they were talking about at the time.

Janelle: Do you think being involved here has affected your life?

Angel: Yes. If I wasn't here I would be in the streets...or in jail somewhere...I used to throw rocks at police and...we all used to fight all the time and do bad things before I came here. (Angel Ortiz, January 2008)

During the summer of 2007, Angel and an adult NR volunteer were invited to take over an untended plot at the farm. They grew nine or ten types of vegetables and sold the produce at the Holyoke farmers' market.

Angel: The other year we raised pigs and then I got into it more and more and more. I love playing with the pigs...they tell me I'm the pig whisperer. I've learned a lot of things about animals...soon enough I'm going to go to college for it.

Janelle: How long do you see yourself staying here?

Angel: I think I'm going to be here...for a long, long time. Probably thirty years. Probably be the farm manager. Probably own my own farm later on. (Angel Ortiz, January 2008)

Lover of learning, animals, and pigs in particular, Angel sees himself not only as a future farm owner but as a manager, a vision that would have been largely unimaginable for a Puerto Rican boy from Holyoke just 15 years ago and one that has been wholly shaped by *Nuestras Raíces*. In return, Angel is a committed member of the organization who puts all his energy into the farm.

Returning to the Social Economy

The unique successes of Nuestras Raíces and the ADP have allowed (and even lured) us to rethink both economy and economic development, placing the diversity of economic activity and the ethical practices of subjects at center stage. In the activities and achievements of these two organizations, we have discerned the emergence of “community economies” where interdependence is acknowledged and built upon to increase social well-being. We have suggested that NR and the ADP are enacting a new model of economic development, something that we may find already emergent in other sites and settings. (Mondragón in Spain and Mararikulam in Kerala come immediately to mind.) We use the term “model” advisedly, if somewhat recklessly, recognizing that there may be something transportable and replicable in the experience of these two organizations—if not in the details of what they do, in the more general process of creating community economies to enhance well-being, through an ethically dynamic process of democratic negotiation.

What does this study suggest for the ways in which we understand the social economy? First, it suggests that we can see the social economy as a space of experimentation, where familiar concepts are redefined and novel visions are enacted. For us as academics, orienting ourselves to the experimental quality of NR and the ADP means opening to what we can learn from them, refusing to know too much too soon. It means greeting their claims about economic development with curiosity rather than skepticism. It means treating failures and mistakes as

grist for the mill (just as they do), the stuff success is made of, not signs that the experiment can never succeed. It means bringing a collaborative spirit to the academic role of naming and narrativizing their achievements, and those of the social economy as a whole. The goal is to produce a knowledge that strengthens the social economy and helps to build it over time, enlarging its creativity, capacity, and credibility worldwide.

Secondly and relatedly, it suggests that we might treat the social economy as a pool of exemplary resources for communities at every scale. Here we have focused on community-based organizations with an economic development mission, a topic that speaks particularly to the re-localization movement, and to local governments and grassroots organizations working to build community and increase well-being. But the social economy is a treasure trove of innovative governance, social service provision, community-based resource management, conservation and restoration initiatives—indeed an endless list of socially and environmentally beneficial activities in every site and sector. Producing and disseminating an accessible knowledge of this proliferative variety could greatly contribute to the health and expansion of the social economy.

At issue here is the performativity of knowledge, the ways that it participates in bringing into being the realities it describes (Law and Urry 2004; Gibson-Graham 2006, 2008). The power of the academy to “perform” the spread and success of the social economy should not be underestimated. Academic knowledge is transmitted via a global infrastructure of educational institutions whose professional graduates are charged with enacting academic models on the

ground. If researchers were truly open to the radical and experimental energies of the social economy, “another world” could potentially arise from social economy research and the training of social activists and entrepreneurs. Actually, that world is already here—it’s just waiting to be strengthened and enlarged.

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Notes

¹ Interviews with Daniel Ross and Jaime Iglesias of Nuestras Raíces were conducted by Gregory Horvath of the Community Economies Collective in the fall of 2000. In November 2007, the team of Janelle Cornwell, Katherine Gibson, Julie Graham and Ted White (videographer) did videotaped interviews with Daniel Ross of NR and Caroline Murray and Mary Lou Symmes of the ADP. All other interviews and participant observation at both organizations were conducted by Janelle Cornwell between November 2007 and August 2008. The Community Economies Collective (www.communityeconomies.org) has had a relationship with both organizations since 2000.

² This figure does not include revenue generated from United for Hire.

³ Another important ethical dynamic involves networking, alliance-building and collaboration with other organizations, institutions, and individuals. Suffice it to say that an entire chapter could be written on this process, for each of these organizations.

⁴ We have a lot of interview material on the personal experiences of Daniel Ross and Caroline Murray as executive directors, organizers, and social entrepreneurs, but decided not to focus on these key individuals because their presence is already so strongly felt in this chapter.

⁵ Prevailing wage is a standard that is set by a state or local government on projects that are funded with public moneys. Contractors on the project are required to pay the “prevailing wage” which in most cases is the union rate.

⁶ Recorded at the Building Alliances workshop, Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM) Summit, Washington, D.C., Feb. 11, 2008.