

Making Space for Creative Feminist Care: Glasgow's Peoples' Bank of Govanhill

By Heather Mclean
with contributions from Ailie Rutherford and Alex Wilde

The following piece is part of Progressive City's Planning for Community Economic Development series, which examines a range of initiatives, such as cooperatives, alternative forms of collective land ownership and stewardship, mutual aid networks and worker advocacy/training organizations. Read more about this series [here](#).



PBoG's Swap Market storefront, Govanhill, Glasgow, 2020.

Activists and artists around the world continue to critique creative industries and elite arts organizations for accelerating gentrification and reproducing precarious labour relations. They show how this sector entangles artists and community groups in exclusionary urban regeneration strategies that pit communities against each other for resources. They also charge that Indigenous, Black and People of Colour (I-BPOC) artists, two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and gender diverse identity (2SLGBTQ+) artists, disabled artists, older artists, and working-class artists are bearing the brunt of exclusionary creative industry policies within a context of neoliberalism and ongoing colonial planning practices.

At the same time, it is important that we don't view exclusionary capitalist practices as all-consuming and lose hope. Instead, we can also amplify the work of feminist, queer and trans artists co-creating alternative arts economies within the confines of restrictive neoliberal urban policies and politics. [Glasgow's People's Bank of Govanhill \(PBoG\)](#) is one exciting example. Feminist artist-activist Ailie Rutherford spearheaded the PBoG in 2015 as part of her broader practice of fostering alternative economies in Glasgow's Govanhill neighbourhood. PBoG's activities have included transforming a former pawn shop into a Swap Market space where communities can share, barter, and trade everything from English-as-a-Second language and music lessons, to clothing, food, books, and tools for home repair. With a range of collective interventions, the PBoG challenges neoliberal competition and individualistic modes of ownership and art making with currency experiments, ad-hoc exchanges, on-the-street discussions and workshops mapping intersecting local economies. Overall, the collective continually explore ways of putting feminist economics into practice at a local level, pushing for a radically different economic model and alternatives to capitalism.

Currently, 70% of children in Govanhill are living in poverty as violent UK austerity policies dismantle vital community services and infrastructure. Home to a high number of new immigrant and working-class families, the neighbourhood is also undergoing rapid gentrification as artists and middle-class residents are buying up the ageing tenement buildings. Over the past five years, Govanhill has transformed into a popular site for arts spaces, coffee shops, bars, and organic food stores.

At the same time, at *Market Forces*, a Swap Market event held in 2019, community members discussed how artists in Govanhill have played a significant role in the neighbourhood's political activism and radical working-class history (People's Bank of Govanhill 2022). These insights echo feminist urban researcher [Winifred Curran's analysis](#) of the contradictory role of feminist and queer artists and arts spaces in gentrifying neighbourhoods. Even though property developers value the arts for development, feminist and queer arts-activist spaces like the PBoG are continually practicing care as a radical practice and creating collectives that unsettle "dominant neoliberal constructs of value" (Curran 2018:95). As a feminist collective committed to practicing radical care and alternative economies, PBoG's Swap Market organises playful, accessible and creative public workshops on precarious labour, the intersectional dimensions of housing justice, and alternative feminist economies.

In the Spring of 2020, when Covid forced us all into isolation, Ailie and the PBoG still found ways to nurture collective alternatives, including the *Post Capitalist Futures Read and Draw* group. PBoG's Swap Market blog stated:

This moment of global crisis and the Covid pandemic is likely to transform capitalism as we know it. While this is a difficult time for all of us, can times of crisis also open up space for new possibilities to emerge? It is in these times that large collective shifts in consciousness are possible and major shifts in political and economic structures can happen. We are already seeing lower pollution levels, reduced consumption and new mutual care networks. What else do we imagine happening that didn't seem possible before?

For our initial meeting, poet [Raman Mundair](#) led participants in a guided meditation based on Arundhati Roy's article "the Pandemic is a Portal." To spark participants' imaginations, the PBoG provided instructions on [their blog](#) on how to make our own headsets to wear while reading -- antennae to pick up signals from the cosmos as we envisioned post-Pandemic futures. Then, in the summer of 2020, eight of us from

Denmark, Latvia, Scotland, and Canada participated in more read and draw gatherings. Twice a month, we met on Jitsi, an open-source meeting platform, to share the images we sketched in response to readings.

We also accessed funding from the Nordic Summer University to co-curate online gatherings where we learned about I-BPOC, 2SLGBTQI+, and disability justice responses to the pandemic, movements that centre the lives and leadership of sick and disabled queer, trans, Black, and Brown people. The articles we discussed included, "Hawaii Considers an Explicitly Feminist Plan for COVID-Era Economic Recovery" in Truthout, a piece that describes Indigenous, Women of Colour, and migrant women-informed strategies for envisioning a holistic feminist and queer economy that takes care work seriously. We also read the work of Joy Buolamwini, a "poet of code" who combines art and research to illuminate the social implications and harms of AI. Buolamwini founded the Algorithmic Justice League to create a world with more ethical and inclusive technology and fight against what she terms the "coded gaze," uncovering large racial and gender bias in AI services from companies like Microsoft, Amazon and Facebook.

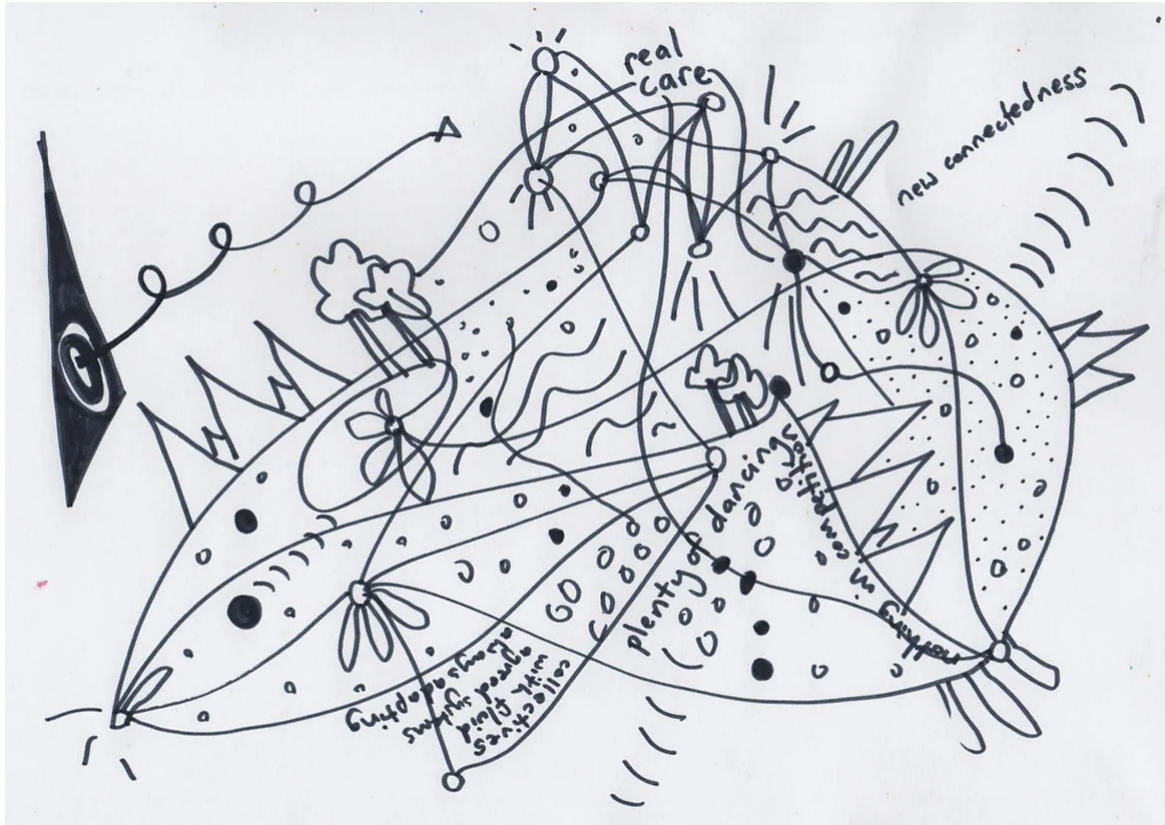
PBoG continues to live the precarious conditions they critique as they facilitate these kinds of alternative creative spaces. This past year, the collective lost the physical Swap Market space because of funding cuts and rising rental costs. The group, made up of working moms and caregivers living on piecemeal arts and non-profit sector contracts, now run PBoG as a nomadic organization that facilitates online events. At the same time, larger, more established and well funded Glasgow-based arts organizations continually try to usurp and control smaller, more precarious collectives like PBoG. Responding to these tensions, PBoG members wrote the following provocation during their tenure as artist-in-residence for the Southside Central area in a city wide Glasgow City Council residency programme:

"With the breadth of creative activity taking place, often against the odds, we propose that the last thing Southside Central needs is a new artist in residence programme. What we need is to find a way of better supporting existing creative activity. We need time and physical space for creative people to come together, form collaborations, alliances, share knowledge and resources, have a collective voice, to allow us to work together to develop ideas and address some of the larger issues at stake in our communities".

Moreover, as the collective curates online activities, PBoG is increasingly troubled by the ways that the virtual sphere reproduces heteropatriarchal, colonial, and white supremacist values and practices. Ailie and researcher Bettina Nissen write, "our every experience is commodified online, and our inter-relationships are increasingly trackable, traceable, and data-mineable." In response they continue to envision and practice strategies for building caring and collective online alternatives, including String Figures, a project that supports and strengthens feminist and creative groups working for social justice through de-centralised open-source networks centred on a principle of mutual care (String Figures 2022). This digital tool creates space for local and trans-local collectives to collaborate in an online space to remotely create intricate visual diagrams coded with information and build de-centralised support networks. The Swap Market also hosted a three sided feminist cooperative football match. In this game, three teams named de-growth, decolonization and climate action were made up of women and non-binary players.

To conclude, in a recent article about activist responses to climate crisis, debt, and austerity in Yes Magazine, adrienne marie brown stated, 'the most daunting thing to me is the scale of change that's needed. What makes me the most hopeful is that so many people are asking "How do I live my life? How do I spend my

money? How do I care for my babies and care for the loved ones in my life?" People are realizing the front line is within us, and we have to practice. And that makes me hopeful because I can feel that change in myself and see it in the people I love.' Through proliferating creative economic alternatives with diverse communities in Glasgow, PBoG nurtures such caring and collective front line activism in the city's Southside and online. As planners, activists, policy makers and artists committed to fostering socially just cities, we must continually work in solidarity with intersectional feminist arts organizations like PBoG.



PBoG Read and Draw participant's vision for a post-pandemic world – a world with “plenty of dancing, care and new connectedness.”

Author:

***Heather Mclean** is a performance artist and assistant professor in Human Geography and Environmental Studies at Athabasca University. Heather's research focuses on culture-led regeneration, precarity, arts interventions, and everyday geographies of agency, resistance and mutual aid. Working from feminist, queer, decolonial and participatory paradigms, she engages in research that de-centres dominant discourses and involves participants in*

knowledge co-production. Her current research investigates the role of the arts in envisioning and enacting mutual aid in rural British Columbia and Alberta. Her drag king character Toby Sharp: The Tool for Urban Change is based on her ongoing research on gender, art, performativity and urban politics and her past life as an urban planner in Toronto. As Toby, she has engaged in co-research as Toby with Dirty Plotz, a queer/feminist cabaret collective. She has also led drag king walking tours and mock professional development seminars for the Workers' Theatre, the People's Bank of Govanhill, and the Glasgow School of Art in Glasgow, Scotland, the Edinburgh College of Art and the Western Canada Theatre.

Contributors:

Ailie Rutherford is a visual artist working at the intersection of community activism and creative practice. Her collaborative artworks bring people together in conversations about our social and economic landscape using print, performance, sci-fi visioning, games and technology as playful means to work through difficult questions and radically re-think our shared futures. Resulting works range from proposed new models for living and working together to the building of new infrastructure.

Her feminist economic artworks have been shown at Unbox festival, (Bengaluru, India) MoneyLab at Institute of Network Cultures (Amsterdam, Netherlands), Supermarkt (Berlin, Germany), Tracing The Tracks//Work Affair at Rum 46 (Aarhus, Denmark) White Papers on Dissent for Dutch Design Week at Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven, Netherlands) and will be shown in the Lumbung space at Documenta 15 (Kassel, Germany). She recently curated the Wired Women festival for NEEON Digital Arts (Dundee, Scotland) and is artistic director of the Feminist Exchange Network (Glasgow, Scotland)

Alex Wilde has experience and interests in social art practices, city planning, food systems, land stewardship and community ownership. Her practice often involves art, gardening, cooking and urban design. She often works with people to create spaces for gathering and sharing ideas, skills and almost always food. These spaces are used to initiate dialogue about connecting to our local environment, the land, our food systems and each other. They have taken many different forms including community gardens, temporary markets, pop up cafes, a mobile soup trolley, walks, a festival and a soil lab. She also works on active travel infrastructure projects, community regeneration initiatives and is a longstanding member of the community campaign to save Govanhill Baths.

From Amazon to Community-Controlled Economic Development: The Western Queens Community Land Trust

By Cecille de Laurentis and James DeFilippis

Members of the WQCLT Board and Steering Committee provided valuable feedback and suggestions for this piece, including Max Scott, Gil Lopez, Memo Salazar, Brenda Lau, Jenny Dubnau, Tom Paino, and Grace Chung.

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Photo by Max Clement Scott

In the summer of 2019, organizers in the Long Island City (LIC) neighborhood of Queens, NY had an ambitious idea: turn a local, mostly underutilized 600,000-square-foot 1938 WPA building into a community land trust (CLT) housing artist studios, light manufacturing, and community spaces. A CLT project of that size and with those uses would be notable anywhere, as CLTs are typically residential with smaller-scale developments. But the city-owned building wasn't just any public works project in a post-industrial neighborhood - it was a large part of the site New York City and State had promised to Amazon with \$3 billion in public subsidy for its HQ2. Announced in 2018, the plan was hailed by some for its alleged job creation, but a large grassroots coalition that included community-based and labor groups such as The Teamsters, RWDSU, Queens Neighborhoods United, Justice for All Coalition, Woodside on the Move, and many more opposed it. Among other reasons, the coalition argued that ongoing gentrification and displacement would be greatly exacerbated, Amazon has a history of promoting anti-labor practices, and the company provided the facial recognition technology federal immigration authorities used at a time when raids were common in the immigrant neighborhoods of Queens. Organizers across Queens and the city as a whole mobilized to fight off Amazon's publicly subsidized mega-development, proclaiming that "Queens is not for sale." After Amazon withdrew on Valentine's Day 2019, some coalition members gathered that summer to ask "Now what?" Their answer: a CLT that would put the process of economic development under community control - in the very building that the City almost handed over to Amazon.

The LIC neighborhood sits along the East River and was once home to a dense ecology of manufacturing; it was also a railroad terminus and the locus for a range of port and freight activity. As industry began to shrink in the area in the late twentieth century, artists moved in; the manufacturing zoning allowed for performance and exhibition space, and studios and rehearsal spaces coexisted with the remaining industry activity. A set of rezonings from 2001-2009 swept away much of the manufacturing-zoned land and ushered in large-scale residential development. By 2018 - when the Amazon deal was announced - the Municipal Arts Society estimated that 8.74 million square feet of residential construction (more than 10,000 units) had been built in the area. Longtime residents watched with dismay as industrial working-class jobs vanished and gentrification displaced longtime residents, small businesses, and artists.

In 2019-2020, the nascent CLT organizers worked to flesh out their vision, collaborating with Masters students at Rutgers University during a year-long planning studio. Through this process, the Western Queens Community Land Trust (WQCLT) was born. Its founders envisioned it as encompassing not only LIC but Western Queens neighborhoods from Astoria to Flushing. As the pandemic hit the communities of Western Queens particularly hard, CLT organizers spent much of 2020 addressing the needs of their neighbors. Then, in the winter of 2020, Chhaya CDC in Jackson Heights collaborated with WQCLT on an Enterprise grant to carry out a much-needed feasibility study for WQCLT's proposed first property. The grant allowed WQCLT to hire Bagchee Architects, who had also worked with the Mott Haven-Port Morris CLT in the Bronx.

The target building is city-owned and occupied by the Department of Education. Bagchee Architects and WQCLT organizers spent the spring and summer of 2021 learning what the LIC and Western Queens community envisioned in such a building. NYCHA residents, local manufacturers, nonprofit social service providers, food justice organizers, and artists participated in focus groups. WQCLT tabled at the

Queensbridge Houses, a NYCHA development north of the site, and at community spaces and fairs. In fall 2021, WQCLT participated in a citywide day of action under the banner of "Public Land in Public Hands," holding a daylong event at Queensbridge Park, adjacent to Queensbridge Houses. As other local groups tabled and artists and musicians shared their work, Queens residents from all over the borough learned about the CLT, shared their visions for the building, signed up to participate, and ate food provided by the Street Vendor Project of the Urban Justice Center, La Adelita, and The Connected Chef.

Bagchee Architects' feasibility study summarized the community's vision: the Department of Education would remain in the portion of the building they currently use for office space, storage, workshops, and food distribution. The rest of the building would transform into a multi-purpose economic development and community hub. WQCLT recently dubbed the building "Queensboro People's Space," vowing to reflect the racial diversity, immigrant communities, and organizing at the heart of the borough. The CLT is working closely with the Street Vendor Project, and plans to provide a large commissary kitchen and parking for the vendors' carts - both indispensable in New York City. It has also been working closely with the Queens Action Council, a food justice organization in the area, to potentially create a food co-op addressing a lack of affordable and healthy food in the area. The building will also include significant manufacturing space, artist studios, and a theater for live performances, as well as office space for local nonprofits and other social service providers. WQCLT is working to build out a governance structure that would both give Western Queens residents the agency to shape the building far into its future *and* keep rents deeply affordable. Community governance is key to making this building a hub for economic activity and social life in the area, connecting the "community" and "economy" of community economic development in ways that are impossible with developer-led, top-down projects.

Although WQCLT is fairly young, the group is also working to expand its impact beyond the local level. CLTs in New York City come together, share knowledge, and organize through the New York City Community Land Initiative (NYCCLI). As a NYCCLI member, WQCLT mutually supports CLTs across the city and participates in education and advocacy that is rooted in local work while pushing for city-level change.

WQCLT does not own the target building yet, but is collaborating with a large mission-aligned nonprofit developer to move forward with the project, which has received support from local elected officials. WQCLT has indicated the wish to partner with the Department of Education to adapt the building for community use as part of the citywide effort to keep public land in public hands. Working with Woodside on the Move, a neighborhood organizing and service-providing nonprofit, and the citywide New Economy Project, WQCLT recently secured funding from the New York City Council to hire its first staff member, which significantly increases the organizing capacity of this thus-far volunteer-run effort.

As the area's history of destructive rezonings and the attempted Amazon HQ2 deal exemplify, the City and the private sector have historically collaborated on market-driven economic development strategies. New mixed-use projects in Queens that include commercial space and a minimum allotment of affordable housing may claim to achieve the same goals as WQCLT, but lack community control, sufficient affordable units, and guardrails against displacement of existing local enterprises. WQCLT's organizers understand that community is more than just housing, which is why they formed one of the few existing CLTs planning for commercial development. The CLT structure, through its provisions for local democratic governance, can be used to create a new framework of economic development driven by people in neighborhoods. Structure alone does not guarantee democracy, but WQCLT also holds promise because it is an effort driven by

organizers who stood their ground against Amazon's HQ2 and other development efforts that failed to center local residents in their planning. Western Queens residents live in their neighborhoods, and know best what jobs, services, and community spaces they need - for that reason, they deserve the opportunity to own and control development themselves through an entity like WQCLT.

Cecile de Laurentis is a Woodside resident and member of the Western Queens Community Land Trust Steering Committee. Cecille holds Masters degrees in City and Regional Planning and Public Policy and currently works in community development finance.

James DeFilippis is a professor of Urban Planning at the Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University. He is a founding member of the New York City Community Land Initiative (NYCCLI) and the Western Queens Community Land Trust. He has written or edited six books and more than 50 articles, book chapters, and applied reports.

Neighborhood Kitchens

By Zeynep Özsoy

The following piece is part of Progressive City's Planning for Community Economic Development series, which examines a range of initiatives, such as cooperatives, alternative forms of collective land ownership and stewardship, mutual aid networks and worker advocacy/training organizations. Read more about this series [here](#).



Background

COVID-19 has intensified existing inequalities in cities, especially for women who work under precarious conditions. The importance of sustainable urbanization as a path to social justice and economic prosperity becomes much more evident in these conditions. Moreover, the need for social solidarity and mutual aid has impelled initiatives to develop public policy to combat widening social and economic inequalities and pursue just economic alternatives. In this context, Istanbul's Neighborhood Kitchens project is a good example of sustainable urbanization that aims to reduce growing levels of poverty and the exclusion of women in economic and social life in urban areas. The project also addresses the need to access healthy and

affordable food for those who are living in big cities, as the costs of food have risen significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

OECD data shows the women's labor force participation ratio in Turkey is the lowest among member states, with only 29% of women participating in the workforce. In Iceland and Germany, 77% and 73% of women participate in the workforce, respectively, while the average for all OECD members is 59%. Additionally, the World Economic Forum's 2021 Global Gender Gap Report ranks Turkey 133rd among 156 countries in gender parity, 101st in educational attainment for women, 114th in women's political empowerment, 140th in economic participation and opportunity, and 105th in health and mortality. For women who lack a living income and who struggle to participate in the workforce, insecure work such as cleaning is often the only option. For these reasons, women face significant barriers in meeting the basic needs of themselves and their families. Under these circumstances, increasing access to skills training becomes an important policy tool to support women's employment.

Another major issue in Turkey is access to healthy food, especially in big cities. Because of the fast pace of life, many don't have time to cook at home, instead turning to mass produced, unhealthy meals offered by fast food restaurants. Health statistics from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) show that as of 2018, the obesity rate in Turkey is 28%, the seventh highest in the world. Ensuring healthy food for all urban residents is an important urban policy objective, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Alternative Food Networks in Turkey

The Neighborhood Kitchens Project, developed by volunteers and supported by the Şişli municipality in Istanbul, aims to address these two key problems: the disadvantaged position of women in the labor market and access to healthy food in urban areas. In this project, the municipality of Şişli selects appropriate applicants, provides them gastronomy training that is certified by partner universities, and encourages them to establish their own cooperatives and businesses. Şişli is also planning to provide a space for women who want to establish a cooperative restaurant. As an alternative to unhealthy food produced by fast food restaurants, the food from the Neighborhood Kitchens is prepared using traditional and natural produce grown locally. Women, who for various reasons are unable to participate in the wider labor force, are also provided with employment.

The project's leaders state that the primary goal is to create awareness, on a neighborhood basis, of accessing healthy and reliable food, and to offer an alternative to factory produced food for those living in the neighborhood. During the past decade, Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) and Alternative Consumption Cooperatives have already become popular in Turkey and stand in “opposition to conventional, supermarket-led food chains.” AFNs aim to transform both the production and consumption of food and are organized by activist consumers at a grassroots level. AFNs emerged as “quality food markets” that are an alternative to “mass markets” characterized by the dominance of a few big producers and retailers. The Neighborhood Kitchens project aims to build on the momentum of this emerging movement in Turkey.

In the long run, Neighborhood Kitchens have been able to stimulate solidarity in urban neighborhoods and create a base for organization. In Turkey, previous examples of urban solidarity were shaped by being hemşehri (people from the same hometown), belonging to the same Islamic sect, and belonging to an ethnic

group. Unlike earlier examples organized around ethnicity or religion, emerging initiatives, such as Neighborhood Kitchens are experimenting with inclusive, egalitarian practices. They provide an alternative shaped by solidarity, non-hierarchy, participation, consensus, and cooperation. These solidarity-based organizations act as prefigurative spaces to advocate ecological farming, solidarity-based initiatives, locality, food politics, and sustainable urban politics. Neighborhood Kitchens are also inclusive initiatives, aiming to involve participants from different nations and ethnicities representative of the cultural diversity of the Şişli district. . Since participants come from a variety of different backgrounds, staff are trained to ensure that they do not use discriminating language and behavior.

Stakeholders

The executive stakeholder of Neighborhood Kitchen is (Neighbor Solidarity Food and Business Cooperative), located in the Şişli district and founded by a group of activists. It is also supported and funded by the United Nations World Food Program and the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH. It has developed strategies on behalf of the EU to improve the self-confidence of vulnerable groups and strengthen social harmony between the Turkish and Syrian communities. Turkey has a higher population of Syrian refugees than any other country and a recent study shows that “psychological and socio-cultural adaptation of Syrian refugees are strongly influenced by economic concerns, pre-migration expectations, religion and perceptions of Turkish natives’ expectations/attitudes towards Syrians.”The planning and implementation process of the Neighborhood Kitchen project was supported and guided by professional chambers such as the chamber of food and agriculture engineers, who shared their professional experiences. Şişli City Council, local politicians, activists and civil initiatives are also contributing to project development and implementation.

Gastronomy Training

Participants in the project have spoken to the unique nature of its participant structure in terms of organizational processes and the transformation of consumers to “prosumers”. Though there are other solidarity based organizations, Neighborhood Kitchens is a multi-stakeholder project that includes civil society, international organizations, the municipality and universities. Neighborhood Kitchens aim to provide just, reliable and healthy food, while also carrying out vocational training. Participants who are unable to afford items such as kitchen tools and ingredients needed for the training are supported by the Şişli Municipality. Participants are chosen after an in-depth interview with a social worker.

The project also involves an educational component, in which professional cooks train selected women. The first practical training in the Central Neighborhood Kitchen started in March 2021 under the names ‘Traditional Turkish Cuisine’ and ‘Kitchen Maid’. This training was conducted by the Public Education Center of the central neighborhood. In the first phase, 48 beneficiaries were awarded a certificate from the Ministry of National Education after training at Nisantaşı, Ayvansaray, and Kent universities. The limited kitchen facilities of the Public Education Center led the municipality to cooperate with universities, allowing women selected by the social services department to receive professional cooking and pastry training. An additional agreement has been made between the municipality and the University of Altınbaş: participants who have completed the gastronomy training will also be provided with basic management training via the university’s Faculty of Business.

The kitchen is currently established in two central neighborhood districts but the intention is to expand the project to 25 neighborhoods of Şişli. The kitchens plan to produce products such as sourdough bread, yogurt, pickles, tarhana, and tomato paste using traditional methods including smoking, drying, and marinating. So far, a total of 4 people are employed in the Neighborhood Kitchens including a Syrian national and an LGBTI+ individual. One of the partners of the Neighborhood Solidarity Food and Business Cooperative, which is an executive stakeholder of the Neighborhood Kitchens, stated that, besides volunteers and full-time employees, there are also temporary employees: “employees are paid by the hour and are employed daily when needed”.

A Şişli Municipality Social Services Specialist said that their goal is not to directly employ all women who receive gastronomy training, but to support women to gain more than a minimum standard of income by encouraging them to work cooperatively: “...we want them to learn for themselves, to fight and engage, to learn cooperative working. Our trainees also have social media accounts and they sell from these accounts ...”

Eventually the project is expected to promote the Neighborhood Kitchens gastronomy education through cooperatives established in other neighborhoods. With training, unemployed women are able to produce and sell their own products, introducing a source of income. The Şişli Municipality Director of Social Support believes the Neighborhood Kitchens project will be a protective measure against the risks of poverty and food crisis.

Conclusion

The number of AFNs and Alternative Consumer Cooperatives under the umbrella of the food sovereignty movement are increasing in many large cities in Turkey. Recently, municipalities have also been taking part in the movement. The Neighborhood Kitchens project takes the movement one step further. Although there are various alternatives for people who want to access quality food items, there are few alternatives for cooked food for those who do not have enough time to prepare a meal. This project supports women’s participation in the labor force while at the same time offering healthy food alternatives to neighbors. The Şişli municipality is preparing a new space which will function as a kitchen and restaurant. This new space is expected to attract women who are ready to take the initiative and establish their own cooperatives contributing to foundations for a more inclusive alternative livelihoods

Zeynep Özsoy is a professor of Organization Studies and she is currently serving as an Acting Dean of Business School at Altınbaş University. She studied business administration in Ankara University and sociology in Middle East Technical University. Her current research interests include social and solidarity economy and gender diversity, with a focus on critical management studies.

Taking Community Engagement Seriously: Universities, Inequality and Accountability

By Ana Milic, Alex Megelas, and Emanuel Guay

The following piece is part of Progressive City's Planning for Community Economic Development series, which examines a range of initiatives, such as cooperatives, alternative forms of collective land ownership and stewardship, mutual aid networks and worker advocacy/training organizations. Read more about this series [here](#).



There is a growing interest in the academic world, both in Canada and beyond, to cast universities as institutional actors engaged in social development and committed to building relationships with a variety of community-based stakeholders. These relationships often take the form of community-campus collaborations, which refer to collaborative projects and initiatives that bring together people and organizations embedded both in academic settings and in other institutional environments. For instance, community-campus collaborations have been praised for their capacity to establish durable partnerships and help foster innovative solutions to pressing social issues. However, in looking more closely at a case in Montreal, a city in which universities have expressed a strong interest in furthering the community-campus

collaboration model, a more complicated picture of the pitfalls and blind spots, as well as the strategies for social responsibility and accountability can be revealed.

The community-campus collaboration model in Montreal is often framed as a strategy to foster social development and challenge inequalities. Despite a seeming alignment in the language and values used to describe it, the outcomes of community-campus collaboration can differ significantly. For instance, in an opinion piece penned by Suzanne Fortier (principal and vice-chancellor of McGill University) and Daniel Jutras (rector of the Université de Montréal), it is mentioned that partnerships between universities, international knowledge networks, and various local stakeholders will be “redefining rules of community life at a time when we can no longer tolerate structural inequalities and systemic racism.”

While the stated commitment raised here is noteworthy, we would do well to consider the range of strategies that emerge from it. Evidence shows that universities have, at best, an ambivalent social impact, as they act as drivers of economic growth and innovation while contributing to spatial and economic inequality, as well as racial inequality. As shown in the cases of West Harlem with Columbia University and North Philadelphia with Temple University, the inequitable impacts from the development of academic campuses and ensuing gentrification follow distinctly racialized patterns. These patterns are reflected here in Montreal. As has been extensively documented, a new campus of the Université de Montréal (“Campus MIL”), which opened its doors in 2019, has had a deleterious impact on Parc-Extension, a low-income neighborhood in which first-generation and second-generation migrants have developed strong bonds of solidarity and support networks for numerous decades. The opening of this campus has accelerated the gentrification of Parc-Extension, leading to an increase in rents, evictions, and residential instability for low-income tenants, in particular those who recently arrived in Canada and in a precarious immigration status. The Campus MIL’s initial plans included a student housing strategy, but it was put aside in the years preceding its opening, which has encouraged the displacement of Parc-Extension residents to the benefit of incoming waves of students. No measure has been put forward so far by the University to address the long-term impact of its campus on the neighbourhood’s residential stability, despite numerous calls for increased accountability by local community groups. This situation is particularly questionable, given that the Campus MIL has been branded as an “innovation campus,” where the research produced could ostensibly generate benefits for the community and the city.

Developing genuine collaboration between academics and local communities and fostering sustainable social development both require a break with the assumption that research and student placements are automatically beneficial to the community. When repeated engagements with researchers do not lead to any significant positive change or benefit for communities, the risk of research fatigue increases, and can eventually lead to an opposition to research projects which appear as extractive and insensitive to local concerns. Devising socially responsible research projects should lead academics to acknowledge the concerns of the communities who are involved, and whose lives and realities need not be framed in relation to academic imperatives. It is also important to not position students and researchers as separate entities and superior holders of knowledge and skills: in fact, there is an actual risk of causing harm to communities when relatively inexperienced interns and volunteers find themselves in contexts they are not familiar with, or asked to intervene on issues they have never personally experienced. Rather than othering communities by framing them as entities which researchers will experiment on, efforts should be made to build nuanced

and equitable relationships that position research as an extension of local agency and follow the “nothing about us without us” principle put forward by practitioners of solidarity research.

University administrations and planners need to put forward strategies that can help to make university resources accessible to the community, in order to respond, in a concrete and accountable way, to community-identified needs. In that regard, the conclusion of the report MIL façons de se faire évincer: The University of Montreal and gentrification in Park Extension highlights examples of universities that have taken leadership in partnering with local communities, by transferring resources and creating spaces to acknowledge the latter’s expertise and concerns. For example, the Concordia University Office of Community Engagement offers a range of innovative activities to encourage equitable collaborations between the university and various communities around Montreal, while the Vancity Office of Community Engagement at Simon Fraser University has created a community space for Vancouver residents to organize activities related to community issues.

We hope that this sharing of perspectives will contribute to ongoing reflections on how post-secondary institutions can be accountable to community stakeholders, by considering critical and self-aware community engagement practices that go beyond benevolence, professionalization, disconnected internship programs, and “innovation labs.” Community engagement should be done in consultation with residents, measurably benefit communities, foster students’ critical thinking and deepen our understanding of our shared context, while acknowledging power imbalances and striving to mitigate them. This requires a break with a widespread perspective that envisions cities as “laboratories” for researchers to toy with.

If those of us who are embedded in academic settings are serious about developing research projects that can contribute to social development and problem-solving, we need to pay closer attention to how these projects can provide concrete benefits and support local communities with their various initiatives. Rather than perpetuating historicized exploitation of compromised communities, our universities need to shift their work, engagement, and research towards structural changes that recognize their own position and complicity in the status quo.

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If you are interested in reading more about this topic, please see the Progressive City article [The City is not your Laboratory](#) by Jonathan Marty.

Confronting non-profit co-optation through an anti-racist feminist practice

By Deborah Leslie and Norma M. Rantisi

The following piece is part of Progressive City's Planning for Community Economic Development series, which examines a range of initiatives, such as cooperatives, alternative forms of collective land ownership and stewardship, mutual aid networks and worker advocacy/training organizations. Read more about this series [here](#).



Interpreter Services Toronto (IST)

Introduction

Immigrant women confront numerous difficulties securing stable employment. In addition to lacking professional networks or recognized work experience, they confront multiple intersecting inequalities, including gender, racial and familial oppression. Some non-profit organizations have emerged to serve as intermediaries in the labour market, providing training and social supports that enhance their ability to secure livelihood. But many such organizations face the challenges of being reliant on neoliberal funders (state or philanthropic) and the associated top-down, patriarchal and Euro-centric cost-driven mandates, which curbs any transformative potential. One non-profit organization in Toronto, Canada that seeks to address some of these challenges and enhance the inclusion of immigrant women is Interpreter Services Toronto (IST). IST is an Employment Social Enterprise (ESE), or what is commonly referred to in other parts of North America and Europe as a 'work integration social enterprise' (WISE). Interpreter Services Toronto was established in 1987 and designated as a social enterprise in 2009. This organization taps into the language skills that women possess when they immigrate to Canada, and provides participants with training as a language interpreter. IST is part of the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, a non-profit legal clinic serving women experiencing domestic violence, sexual assault and human trafficking. Once trained as an interpreter, participants translate for women who use the clinic's services, aiding them in accessing legal, health and other forms of assistance. The programs provided by this non-profit social enterprise thus serve two, often overlapping sets of women: immigrants in need of training and work experience and those struggling with domestic and sexual violence. In this article, we explore how IST creates a space of care and resistance within (and beyond) its training program. More specifically, we look at how the organization strives to meet their hybrid economic-social mandate through a feminist and anti-racist praxis by raising awareness of systemic modes of exclusion, providing social supports, influencing regulatory frameworks, and developing networks among participants and the broader community. Through these efforts, the organization contributes to alternative practices of economic development, with the potential to not only reproduce, but also challenge market and social relations.

Non-profit labour market intermediaries: reproducing precarity or charting alternative economic pathways?

Work integration social enterprises (like Interpreter Services Toronto) are part of a non-profit industrial complex that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s to fill gaps that arose from state cutbacks to social services. WISEs are also part of the social economy, which has been defined as encompassing self-governing, relatively independent organizations guided by their social objectives. WISEs often originate in community activism, but raise funds through a number of avenues, including the sale of goods and services, foundation support, government grants, and charitable donations. Programs are targeted at communities facing significant barriers in the labour market, such as immigrants, women, youth, people of colour, the homeless and the disabled. WISEs provide training programs through a mix of in-class instruction, as well as practical work experience. They have a mandate to promote economic integration through the formation of both hard and soft skills while also fostering social inclusion. To this end, they offer a range of other supports, including language instruction, housing assistance, counselling and workshops on labour and civil rights. WISEs also aim to create a 'safe space', where participants can explore the multiple and interlocking oppressions they face and develop the skills and social networks needed to tackle these oppressions.

While charting new economic pathways for communities (such as immigrant women) and filling gaps left by cutbacks to state programs, many WISEs have, since the 1990s, been increasingly dependent on state

funding, and as a result, subject to neoliberal state mandates. With the retrenchment of many government programs, responsibility for workforce development has been downloaded onto WISEs. With this, WISEs have been increasingly subject to cost-benefit and calculative neoliberal logics and accounting metrics, which are often at odds with the social objectives central to these organizations' core mission. Emulating a 'work-first' ethos, WISEs face increasing pressure to get workers into the labour market as fast as possible. This erodes the substantive nature of many of their training programs and cuts into their social supports (which are not valued in a neoliberal framework). The pressure to push participants into 'any job' serves to reproduce labour market precarity. In this new calculus, some WISEs end up meeting or flanking the market, rather than radically altering or challenging it.

Not only are WISEs increasingly subject to neoliberal rationalities, but, like many other social economy and non-profit institutions, WISEs often lack diversity in their staff, pedagogical framework and curriculum. As research by Caroline Shenaz Hossein has shown, staff are often from white and middle class backgrounds, while participants are largely Black, Indigenous and people of colour. Likewise, Hossein highlights the Eurocentric theoretical approaches often drawn upon by WISEs.. WISEs also employ top-down forms of instruction that risk reproducing—rather than challenging—racist, colonial and patriarchal modes of 'inclusion', thereby crowding out collective forms of solidarity and empowerment . Like prevailing neoliberal mandates, these dynamics make it harder for WISEs to engage in more transformative practices.

IST: Cultivating a Space of Care and Collective Action

How then, within this broader landscape, can WISEs (and other non-profits) carve out a space of resistance; one that challenges the dominant order and fosters new subjectivities and relations of care? The case of Interpreter Services Toronto is instructive in that they seek to challenge economic precarity and social exclusion by incorporating a multi-pronged approach within their training program. Here, we focus on four elements of their anti-racist, feminist praxis.

The first element is their intersectional approach. The program centers the multiple and interlocking forms of inequality that different immigrant women confront. Participants attend an in-house anti-oppression program delivered by the organization's front line staff, who are in many cases themselves immigrant women. Guest speakers are also brought in from the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic and other organizations to add further diversity in terms of gender identity, race, sexuality and other aspects of identity. This approach is responsive to the individual challenges women in the program confront, as well as the trauma associated with working as a language interpreter for victims of sexual violence. Recognizing that no one is exclusively advantaged or oppressed, the program foregrounds the complex ways that immigrant women are situated in different relations of power, encouraging participants to examine their own privileges and biases, and how these might impact their role as interpreters.

The second aspect of the program is its emphasis on consciousness-raising. Stemming from the women's movement of the 1960s and 70s, consciousness-raising is premised on the idea that in order to change the world, one first needs to transform the self. To accomplish this transformation, IST tries to build strength among participants, most of whom are new immigrants and lacking in self-confidence. Acquiring the skill of being a certified language interpreter enhances participants' sense of agency and accomplishment. Interpreting for immigrant women facing domestic violence enhances their sense of contributing to

meaningful change. To support this consciousness, participants are taught practices of self care (e.g., debriefing and exercises).

The third aspect of their approach is forging networks among participants and between participants and relevant social services. The sense of self that IST constructs is not only individual, but collective; established through the creation of shared bonds and spaces. It hosts potluck dinners and other events designed to give participants an opportunity to share their experiences with one another, build community and craft practices of 'being in common'. IST not only connects participants with one another, but with supporting institutions, such as counselling services offered at the Barbara Schlifer Clinic, as well as other feminist, housing and immigrant organizations in Toronto. Participants also visit relevant organizations, such as courts and health care facilities, which connects theory to practice and enhances their understanding of domestic violence and language interpretation. Gaining first hand experience in a range of relevant institutions and spaces in the city, participants are oriented toward 'action', which can include, but also exceed, their work as language interpreters. The ties built in this training program develop a sense of shared struggle, which can be mobilized to tackle a range of issues in the community. To keep this focus in view, IST regularly seeks input from participants into the nature of its programs, gathering feedback which it incorporates into a process of ongoing renewal. In this way, participants are conceived not as passive recipients of social services and care, but rather, as active collaborators in the construction of the program and an ethics of care.

The final element of Interpreter Services Toronto's approach is not only oriented toward training immigrant women and providing relevant connections and supports, but to transforming the broader regulatory terrain in which they operate. To engage in this larger project of 'social change' (rather than 'social service') work, IST works with a variety of other organizations confronting violence against women, racism, and precarity. One organization they work with is their umbrella organization, Barbra Schlifer, an organization well known for its work helping women (as well as for its advocacy work at the local, provincial, national and international scales). Interpreter Services' ties to Barbra Schlifer enable it to expand beyond its training function to mobilize for broader policy changes. While IST is run separately, and raises its own funding, the sharing of resources, anti-oppression expertise and staff enhances the organization's ability to realize its social mandate. Together with Barbra Schlifer, IST also forms partnerships with other community organizations such as the Ontario Association of Interval and Transitional Houses (OAITH), an organization committed to ending gender-based inequality and violence. Member organizations include sexual assault centers, shelters and other agencies engaging in research, teaching and advocacy. Together these organizations lobby government to address systemic violence against women.

In addition, the organization works with the Toronto Enterprise Fund (TEF) to exchange knowledge and resources with other social enterprises and to grow an alternative economic ecosystem. Building networks across a range of organizations helps expand possibilities for lobbying and scaling up political mobilization, which can be challenging when WISEs work independently. These connections are key to upholding the organization's commitment to a feminist ethics of care; one that situates individuals—as well as support organizations—as part of wider structural bodies. In this way, the fate of individuals is conditioned by wider socio-political institutions.

Conclusion

Many alternative economic development organizations and non-profit labour market intermediaries (such as WISEs) are constrained by their ties to an increasingly neoliberal state. They are also stymied by their top-down approach, which often reproduces relations of dependency, as well as histories of racism, colonialism and heteronormativity. Like all WISEs, Interpreter Services Toronto struggles with these limitations, especially with its ties to state imperatives and funding. However, the organization seeks to transcend the fate of many non-profits, which end up merely flanking the market and reproducing existing relations of gendered, racial, sexual and class inequality. Through its emphasis on a feminist and anti-racist praxis and its attempts to build ties both among participants and with a multitude of other organizations, IST attempts to forge a space and ethics of care (see also [Heather Mclean's article](#) in this series), one that not only supports the well-being and social reproduction of the individual, but enhances their capacity to engage in broader practices of mutual aid and advocacy (see also [Kern and Mclean's work](#)). It is in these broader networks and relations that the transformative potential of IST comes into view, and with it, the possibility of constructing alternative urban economic logics and policies.

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The views and interpretations offered in this article represent those of the authors alone, and do not reflect the views of those working for or participating in the programs associated with Interpreter Services Toronto.