Social Cohesion that Advances Equity and Well-Being: Promising Practices in Community Development, Health, and the Arts

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Introduction

The arts are indispensable for their power to build community with unique depth and meaning, and numerous local projects and other endeavors are testimony to that power. But how does that creative process of bringing people closer together or bridging across divides actually happen? Where has that process been found to advance health equity and community well-being? Are there lessons in the research and in the experience of the people who do this work that can be turned into tools for positive social change?

The new report from Metris Arts Consulting, *WE-Making: How Arts & Culture Unite People to Work Toward Community Well-Being*, addresses these questions with uncommon depth and comprehensiveness, with an extensive literature review, a multilayered theory of change, and insightful case studies from three diverse communities. The report, originally drafted in 2018, was revised and influenced in 2019 and 2020 through additional exchanges and feedback organized by PolicyLink and the Center for Arts in Medicine of the University of Florida, with the active participation of the supporters of the project: Bush Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and ArtPlace America. In this second phase, the voices of community-focused artists and cultural strategists, community developers, public health leaders, and researchers in all those fields were brought to bear on these questions. As the Center for Arts in Medicine reports on its website:

> The goal of [the convening held in 2019 for this project] was to advance dialogue and strategy around several ideas through local site visits, performance, presentations, and structured dialogues. These ideas included:
>
> - people are healthier when they are less isolated and more connected;

- people can improve the health of their communities when they find common ground for organizing;
- arts can be a powerful instrument for the expression of cultural identity; and
- arts are a source for the bonding and mutual support that leads to more cohesive, stronger, and healthier communities.

The discourse was infused with a closely related additional question: What are the equity considerations in promoting social cohesion through the arts? The key questions for assessing equity are sometimes characterized as: Who participates, who pays, who decides, and who is better off? All of these were applied to the ways in which place-based arts and culture strategies have been seen to advance social cohesion. Some participants also asked whether social cohesion is even the appropriate concept by which to frame this kind of organizing for equity, or for the liberation of marginalized communities.

The *WE-Making* report was strengthened by the dialogue engendered by these and other questions. Its relevance was also tested and found to be even more important in response to the crises that engulfed the United States in 2020. As was stated in the Preface to the report:

> At a time when "social cohesion" is challenged in new ways by "social distancing," and when "place-based" art has come to mean arts participation with neighbors whom we only see at a distance or virtually, one well might ask whether resources of this nature are hopelessly obsolete. Far from it. The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic fall-out and the protests related to racially motivated violence and discrimination have brought into national focus the persistent long-term threats to health equity. These crises have laid bare the ill effects of social isolation, social scarring, and social divides. These tools — and the lessons learned in their development — remain broadly applicable to those seeking to advance social cohesion, health equity, and community well-being.[1]

This is one of two memoranda that have been prepared by PolicyLink to augment the release of *WE-Making*, to extend its reach, apply its concepts, and amplify its relevance with special attention to issues of racial equity. This is the memorandum on **practice** while the other memorandum is focused on **research.** Both memos address the sectors of community development, public health, and the arts. The memos draw upon the voices and experiences brought into the discussions about *WE-Making* as well as the array of local innovations which the PolicyLink arts, culture, and equitable development team, along with our colleagues who work on health equity, have encountered over six years of documenting and assisting the field.

Social Cohesion: Meanings and Mechanisms

We will not reconstruct or address the whole framework laid out in *WE-Making* but will make references to it, and we encourage readers to examine at least the *Theory of Change and Case Studies* document, if not the other components of the report, to track the ways in which we are using the concepts here.

The mechanisms of social cohesion are worth understanding and promoting because they can strengthen individuals and communities in the four ways listed in the bullet points quoted above from the Center for Arts in Medicine. But social cohesion is formally a neutral term which can also apply to efforts which have the effect of resisting social and racial equity. That dual nature gave participants in our project wariness and need to clarify the distinctions. The concerns about the negative, or the potentially antisocial of social cohesion took three forms:

- Social cohesion can mean that homogeneous communities have strengthened their capacity to exclude other types of people and defend against change, even when that change represents broader democratic values. And that stance has, unfortunately, often been backed by public policy as well as private practices. For example, redlining, for decades a legally sanctioned practice of maintaining residential racial segregation by denying access to home insurance or mortgage loans, is an antisocial manifestation of social cohesion. In contrast, the activities of Black churches are a good example of prosocial impact as they have for generations offered not only support for members and the broader community but also sanctuary and resistance in the face of threats from enforcers of white supremacy.

- Racial equity and equitable development require recognition that different communities have different ways of defining positive social interaction and relationships of family to community and of the role of faith or work in society. These differences must be accommodated in any framework for the practical application of social cohesion. A racial equity framework calls for learning and working with how each cultural community distinctly organizes and understands itself in light of its past trauma and current exclusion. Some Black, Indigenous, and Asian and Latinx communities, having survived not just exclusion and displacement but brutality or genocide in the United States, may have perceptions of what social cohesion looks like and how it can be nurtured that do not conform to the mainstream characterizations.

- The political polarization of the US can be seen, in part, as a splintering driven by increased cohesion within smaller ideological, religious, or cultural groups,

> increased distrust if not vilification of others, and the abandonment of common ground. The country has a vastly diverse population and geographic scope, and for a long time it managed to sustain an imperfect working democracy consisting of 300 million people operating in family, civic, and professional groups, associations, cohorts, of all kinds, all enabled by some variant of social cohesion. But that sense of a common identity defined by democratic ideals is being tested in alarming ways, and the fragmentation is partly a consequence of the social cohesion of like-minded groups reinforcing their own reality with their own "facts."

These caveats reflect historic and contemporary structural challenges to equity and democracy, and while it was important to recognize and incorporate them, they did not prevent the project's continued exploration of the positive potential for community developers, health practitioners, and artists to promote social cohesion to increase well-being.

Five types of strategies were identified in *WE-Making* that organizations use to influence the social cohesion process:

- **Build and share power through community ownership:** Strategies that center around community member co-design and co-creation, and that build community leadership
- **Connect people across difference:** Strategies that invite community members to collaborate and share experiences
- **Include all types of community members:** Strategies that encourage participation from parts of the community that might not otherwise participate
- **Have a consistent presence in the community**: Anchor spaces and organizations grounded in a community that can build on achievement over time
- **Align with community change goals to reinforce desired impacts:** Strategies that are reflective of community well-being goals.

The strategies emerge from activation or strengthening of four "drivers" of social cohesion:

- Place attachment
- Social capital
- Mindset
- Civic engagement

These drivers are in turn dependent on the nurturing of four interrelated dimensions of community interaction:

> Without **orientation toward the common good**, relationships and networks may exclude people. Without **willingness to participate**, sense of belonging may be individualistic and passive. Without **relationships** and a **sense of belonging** orientation toward the common good can't be leveraged collectively. Social cohesion transforms individual feelings and orientations into collective feelings and orientations. The presence of social cohesion ensures that relationships and networks set us up for participation and action. This then will serve the common good of the group or community.[2]

The *WE-Making* paper goes into depth about the ways in which place-based arts and cultural strategies influence the drivers and dimensions that contribute to social cohesion.[3] The mechanism is succinctly described as one that

> "lays the groundwork for collective organization and activity in communities. This plays out in enabling communities to develop shared values and efficacy and take collective action. Cohesive communities, through collective organization and activity, can improve equitable well-being. We see this in action above: residents come together—through song, food, stories—to honor the past, envision the future, and act on that vision. Change will move at the speed of trust.[4]

How can practitioners in the arts, health, and community development fields—the areas of focus for this memo—utilize this understanding to advance equity? These three sectors have evolved with different priorities and ways of perceiving how change happens that color their interest in these drivers. Those differences are more complementary than in conflict, and in recent years, collaborations across these sectors have become the hallmark of innovation.

- Community development corporations have taken on the social determinants of health as the organizing principles for their neighborhood revitalization activity.
- Arts strategists have taken up residence in housing development agencies, addressing their internal processes as well as initiatives for art with residents and on the streets.
- Municipal health agencies have brought on artists in residence to further community-level awareness and responses to racial inequities such as poor birth outcomes.

In every instance, they are working with at least an implicit model of increasing social cohesion. Innovators in all three sectors were working intensively before the COVID-19 pandemic, but that has changed everything, at least for the foreseeable future. The pandemic provides an obvious challenge for efforts to advance social cohesion but also

presents transformational opportunities. While the pandemic has revealed to mainstream society many longstanding systemic injustices, how the arts, health, and community development systems respond to COVID-19 will define the next several decades of racial equity and equitable development. In broad terms, these opportunities are:

- Raising awareness of the connection between individual health and population health and generating support for approaches that take on population health through a racial equity lens.
- Acceptance for shifting paradigms. According to the FrameWorks Institute, paradigms can shift most easily when people feel the disconnect between their values and how society is behaving.[5]
- A chance to move away from incremental change (the standard before) toward paradigmatic change (starting now).

The two questions that underpin any approach to applying social cohesion practices in response to COVID-19 are: How do we bring our people back together in person? And how can we maintain and strengthen the social cohesion that communities rely upon during sheltering-in-place? Focusing on the dimensions of social cohesion—relationships, sense of belonging, orientation toward the common good, and willingness to participate—will be key. The profiles below point the ways for arts, health, and community development organizations to answer these questions, and delineate a path forward in a way that does not simply re-create or bolster broken systems but rather taps into an understanding of how different cultures cohere, and from a place of community and safety, can reinforce bridging bonds that adhere different communities together.

Social Cohesion in Health Equity, Arts Management, and Community Development: Profiles and Innovative Efforts

At PolicyLink, we have learned from local organizations in health equity, arts management, and community development whose leaders have taken risks. Sometimes that has been by building bridges to unexpected partners, and by tossing aside the playbook of rules and definitions of expertise by which their day-to-day goals had been accomplished to reach for the chance to make more fundamental changes. Bringing the techniques and sensibilities of art and artists into domains of practice generally governed by real estate finance or medicine takes managerial acumen and patience as well as creativity. And for artists, learning how to operate effectively in nonprofit or government agencies similarly calls for stretching well beyond one's normal environment and skill set.

The three organizations profiled below offer insights into strategies for redefining and operationalizing social cohesion. All are engaged in strategies that influence the **drivers** of social cohesion and have core priorities that touch on the **dimensions** of social cohesion. Each of these entities has what we call a systems focus and seeks to influence how the field changes or learns, and are explicitly committed to or have experience in racial equity.

These examples are based mainly on conversations with B.J. McBride (BE-Imaginative Collective), Meghan Tompkins (Cheyenne River Youth Project), and Jerome Chou (Kounkuey Design Initiative) at our convening in Lexington, Kentucky, in September 2019, complemented by published material about their projects and our other contacts with them. The convening was held as part of the University of Florida Center for Arts in Medicine's *Creating Healthy Communities: Arts and Public Health in America*, one of the sector research scans commissioned by ArtPlace. (https://arts.ufl.edu/sites/creating-healthy-communities/collaboration/lexington-ky/)

Following each of the profiles is a list of organizations, not comprehensive but a sample, illustrating the potential for strategies to advance social cohesion to have broad impact across different sectors. The breadth and depth of these entities in their respective sectors and in their geographic or social spheres of influence suggest exciting prospects for the uptake of the *WE-Making* social cohesion framework.

Health Equity

Over the past decade, as awareness of the central role of social determinants in shaping health outcomes has become far more widespread and sophisticated, the possibilities for improving those social conditions with arts and culture have proliferated as well. The uses of arts and culture to advance social cohesion are almost infinite in variety: building communities for mutual support, overcoming isolation and exclusion, integrating health services more effectively into communities, reframing issues that had been viewed as consequences of individual behavior as structural and economic, and many more.

Profile: The BE-Imaginative Collective

Benjamin "BJ" McBride, co-founder of the BE-Imaginative Collective, is a multifaceted, creative community development practitioner with a particular focus on health and healing through the intersection of arts, social justice, and communications.

The BE-Imaginative Collective (https://be-imaginative.org/) is an assemblage of artists, activists, and others committed to social change. The Collective was launched after the police slaying in San Francisco of an unarmed Black man, Mario Woods, and strives to lift

up the voices that are typically marginalized. It provides holistic healing retreats for mothers who are isolated and in need of coping mechanisms after losing children to gun violence. The Collective also offers community arts and activation spaces with the aim of turning "empathy to action, pain to passion." The Collective supports peer-to-peer mentoring and "healing for the heart."[6] Artists and creatives are invited into healing circles to create artistic representations from the stories that they hear. In addition, the Collective gathers the community together with stakeholders to have dialogue about key issues and how to collaborate with others working to end violence.

The Collective began in Oakland and was initially funded by the organizing network formerly known as PICO California, now Faith in Action, and has expanded to seven other cities in California, as well as New York City, New Orleans, and Washington, DC. Their goal is to reach 10 cities that are experiencing gun violence and implement the program in partnership with local people in the community.

Social cohesion as a concept does not adequately express the intense empathy and passion that the mothers provide to each other, or the ways in which the contributing artists contribute to the creation and preservation of a community of people who can not only grieve and heal but then act. But that is exactly what BE-Imaginative produces.

Other Innovators in the Health Equity Field Working Toward Different Aspects of Social Cohesion, Whether or Not They Use that Terminology

- **Ambassadors for Health Equity** is a mid-career fellowship, administered by PolicyLink and supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Leaders from a wide range of human services, economic development, and artistic backgrounds learn and apply the principles of health equity to their fields and share their insights and gifts. The second cohort, for example, featured two musicians, one Indigenous and one Black and Latinx, whose work was centered on environmental justice and social change, and they interacted with leaders in education, social investment, and philanthropy. The third cohort is currently underway, concentrating on the relationship between housing and health (https://www.policylink.org/our-work/community/health-equity).
- **Jackson Medical Mall Foundation (JMMF)** in Jackson, Mississippi, is a repurposed shopping center that has become not only a large and comprehensive health center but a true community hub. JMMF's numerous cultural strategies, from music and public art to quilting and gardening, draw in, engage, and motivate thousands of residents and have improved not only the social and physical environment of their facility but the surrounding neighborhood. The Foundation changed their mission

statement to directly reflect their commitment to arts and culture as part of their expansion from medical services to community well-being (http://jacksonmedicalmall.org/).

- **Inner-City Muslim Action Network** in Chicago (https://www.imancentral.org/) is a community organization supporting health, wellness, and healing by organizing for social change, cultivating the arts, and operating a health center. Their investment in arts and culture supports the "creation, collaboration and presentation of community-engaged art that unites disconnected communities, facilitates transformative healing, and fosters the ability to radically reimagine the world."[7]

Social and Civic Practice of Art and Arts Management

Artists often show grace, creativity, depth of feeling, and unique insights when their work expresses a socially conscious message, and the arts have great power to move and motivate people and help them see the world in new ways. But the most influential ways of building toward social cohesion in communities have come when artists, as individuals or as part of cultural organizations or collectives, have become well-integrated partners with agencies in the social sector. The learning in both directions can be deep and extensive, and through these partnerships, art can be elevated from social practice to a more collaborative and strategic "civic practice." As leading innovators have written, "with the right approach, the same tools and capacities that artists use to make art can be utilized to transform systems and improve the impacts of government and community-driven efforts and programs." [8]

Profile: The Cheyenne River Youth Project

Meghan Tompkins is the past deputy director of the Cheyenne River Youth Project (CRYP) and she presented the context for the approach that they take in utilizing the influencing factors and dimensions of social cohesion. CRYP (https://lakotayouth.org/) is located on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation, home to a large Lakota population in an isolated region of South Dakota. It is one of the poorest counties in the nation, with high unemployment and suicide rates and a history of forced relocation and repression. It was illegal to practice the native religion until the 20th century. However, the arts are entwined in everything to the extent that there is no word for art in the Lakota language. CRYP itself is similarly intertwined in the community, woven into the social fabric. According to Tompkins: "We are a community staple. We work alongside the tribal government. They were involved from the beginning."[9]

CRYP began in 1988 when a bar was converted into a youth center. It now offers paid internships, job training, and cooking classes in Indigenous cuisine. Community meals, weekend arts and culture camps, arts fellowships, and a graffiti jam connect youth to their art and culture. The graffiti jam, which just celebrated its fifth year, consists of two days of creating murals followed by a two-day festival. Youth involved in the project are mentored by artists in the community and media partners. Graffiti jam beautifies the city by selecting empty buildings to improve through art. The project simultaneously preserves the Lakota language through its use in street art. The project functions through multiple partnerships and contributions from volunteers; some forty volunteers participated in this year's graffiti jam. The impact of the project is much more than just art on the walls, as it facilitates reflection of heritage and tradition, particularly for youth in the community. "It's healing… when you're painting, your mind is going somewhere else, creating just enough room for a positive thought to come in."[10]

CRYP is a national leader as well as a local asset, and public art as a means for making heritage and culture the foundation of positive youth development has been taken into other Indigenous communities, such as by the Zuni Youth Enrichment Project. ZYEP and its local partners created H'on A:Wan Park to provide a healthy recreational space for young people, and indeed the entire pueblo, that was designed from the ground up to embody Zuni history, tradition, and culture.[11] It provides children with tangible expressions of where they come from and who they are, and the artist-guided process of designing and building the park generated intent among residents to have future development in the village undertake similarly high levels of engagement.

Other Innovators in the Arts and Arts Management sector that Have Focused on Social Cohesion

- **Design Studio for Social Intervention** (https://www.ds4si.org/) is an artistic research and development organization in Massachusetts committed to changing how social justice is imagined, developed, and deployed in the United States. They explore beliefs, imaginations, tacit and explicit agreements that shape institutions, laws, and cultural norms. They partner "with artists whose work expands our imaginations, with cultural workers whose understandings have kept communities alive in the most dangerous games, and with systems gurus of all stripes, including writers, tricksters, clowns, and trouble makers who trouble the rules at play." Their most impactful work involves supporting place-based investments of entities like the Boston Transportation Department and the Fairmount Cultural Corridor.

- **Letcher County Culture Hub** (https://www.letcherculture.org/) is a network of community-led organizations in Letcher County, Kentucky, who work together to build a culture and economy grounded in community and resident ownership over the inputs, outputs, and benefits of the economy: "Initiated by community organizers at Appalshop, Culture Hub partners have worked together to start businesses, revive cultural events, influence public policy and bring more and more citizens of Letcher County into the process of imagining and building our future together." As proof of their potent mix of arts and organization, they have utilized cultural strategy to build coalitions among artists and former coal miners to successfully advocate for statewide policies to promote solar energy.

- **Forklift Danceworks** (https://www.forkliftdanceworks.org/) is a civic practice dance company based in Austin, Texas. Forklift collaborates with people and organizations that have no dance background through a process that is rigorous and based on shared learning and listening "in which trusting relationships are built and our collaborators have agency to tell their stories in ways that are authentic to them." Their average project takes three years of production, a long-term commitment for a dance company, that "amplifies the voices of community collaborators."[12] Their "My Park, My Pool, My City" trilogy in collaboration with Austin Parks and Recreation's Aquatics Division, brought enough attention to the inequitable distribution of crumbling swimming pools particularly in East Austin to change the City Council's investment decisions.

- **LA Commons** (https://www.lacommons.org/) engages communities in the creation of art for public spaces that tells their unique stories, serving as a vehicle for dialogue, interaction, and better mutual understanding among Los Angeles communities. LA Commons strengthens community by enhancing everyone's sense of belonging and builds stronger bonds between the many different people and places of Los Angeles. Featuring "Innovative Grassroots Cultural Discovery" such as the use of story circles, they design processes for artists and communities to work together to create and advocate for a vision of Los Angeles where everyone thrives: "Art is a critical tool to bring underground community stories to light and shift to a societal narrative that values everyone, not only the wealthy and powerful."

- **New England Foundation for the Arts' Public Art Grants** (https://www.nefa.org/grants/grant-programs/public-art) invests in artists and a community of practice to evolve the field of public art and inspire "more vibrant public spaces and public life throughout the region." This area of investment is grounded in their belief that "public art can help us all see, feel, experience and

imagine decolonized and/or indigenized places. These tangible experiences are essential on the journey towards realizing more just futures for our public spaces and public culture." They are explicit in naming that "diverse cultural and artistic expressions of Black, Indigenous, People of Color are essential to more equitable and vibrant public spaces" and that "addressing the intersectionality of spatial justice and racial justice is critical to cultivating a more vibrant public art ecosystem." And perhaps most radically for a long-established, arts funder, they publicly state that "public art practices that reduce people, places and stories to tools for artmaking are harmful" and that "the arts sector has a legacy of benefiting from and perpetuating white privilege, and therefore we are committed to working towards racial justice."

Community Development

Perhaps no field has embraced arts and culture strategies as widely as community development, with hundreds of local projects, extensive training curricula, and other capacity building from the national intermediaries, including LISC, Enterprise Community Partners, and NeighborWorks America, widespread support from philanthropy and banking, and a body of research and documentation that grows more expansive each year.[13]

Profile: The Kounkuey Design Initiative

Jerome Chou is the planning director of Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI). KDI (https://www.kounkuey.org/) was founded in Nairobi, Kenya in 2006, and now has offices in Los Angeles and the Coachella Valley of California. The organization works closely with residents in underdeveloped communities to create resources that address physical, social, and economic priorities through design. Meaningful participation is at the heart of the work with community organizers to cultivate leaders and make planning and design accessible. The organization works toward the creation of permanent spaces and toward policy change to create more of these spaces: "We have some close partnerships (like the DOT in LA). In other places where communities are not recognized or are neglected, we drag the city along and try to change how they work."[14]

Chou shared the work that KDI has done in Kibera, a low-income neighborhood of Nairobi with frequent flooding. They recruited unofficial celebrities from the neighborhood and made billboards with their pictures and warnings about potential flooding and how to prevent it. After seeing how effective KDI has been using design for community development, government agencies became very interested in replicating this model.

In Los Angeles, KDI adapts this placemaking approach to the United States context. When the local government was not interested in building the parks that the community wanted, KDI invented a "wobble" (a durable plastic play object that can be assembled to create the world's largest rocking chair) that they deployed along with other objects to create pop-up "play streets." They are in the process of working with the Department of Transportation to expand this work. "Play streets" improve the quality of community, feelings of safety, activity, and reduce stress.

KDI's work in the low-income, unincorporated settlements of the Coachella Valley also employed participatory community design for processes and outcomes that were as much in the social environment as the physical. As their website puts it, "the result is a growing network of community parks and programs that are improving economic opportunity, social cohesion and environmental resilience in the disadvantaged communities of the Eastern Coachella Valley."[15]

Other Innovators in the Community Development Sector that Have Utilized Arts and Cultural Strategies to Build Social Cohesion

- **National Alliance of Community Economic Development Associations (NACEDA)** (https://www.naceda.org/) serves as a national convener of the community development sector. Since 2015, NACEDA has worked to make creative placemaking a frontline strategy for community developers. They support their members to use arts and cultural strategies to improve the physical and social character of places: "Artists have engaged neighborhoods in development plans. CDCs became arts advocates. Banks became arts investors. NACEDA networks throughout the country began thinking how artists and cultural strategies could enhance the impact of traditional community development."[16]
- **Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO)** (https://www.apano.org/) is a community organization advocating for and with Asians and Pacific Islanders in Oregon. They utlize storytelling and imagining and shifting narratives to highlight their members' lived experiences and connect them to issues: "APANO aims to advance a long-term cultural strategy to impact beliefs, actions and policies through centering the voices of those most impacted and silenced, resisting and shifting harmful narratives and ideas, and moving beyond defensive strategies to envisioning alternatives."[17]Their place-based work includes providing a neighborhood space where artists and communities are shifting perceptions and re-envisioning an equitable community in the Jade and Midway Districts and greater East Portland.

- **Cook Inlet Housing Authority** (Anchorage) (https://www.cookinlethousing.org/) is a tribal housing agency serving urban and rural areas. Through adopting an approach grounded in cultural strategies the agency discovered how Alaska Native village values of communal support and solidarity could refocus and guide its work, and how a wide range of arts activities could bring diverse residents together and revitalize the homes and commercial district of the Spenard neighborhood of Anchorage.

An Overarching Fourth Sector: Power-building and/or Civic Engagement Organizations

While we will not delve into it with comparable detail, it is important to acknowledge that organizing for political change and civil and human rights, and for the empowerment of workers and the constituents of low-income communities, is critical as a force for generating social cohesion. Indeed, we see organizing groups referenced explicitly in the other sectors, as with BE-Imaginative having been seeded by PICO/Faith in Action. The strategies about building and sharing power, operating inclusively, and tying actions to larger community goals, identified in *WE-Making* and quoted in the opening section of this memorandum, are like the guiding principles of many community organizing and movement building groups. Three diverse examples illustrate those strategies.

- **Coalition of Immokalee Workers**[18] [19]

  The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) has achieved groundbreaking political solidarity derived, in part, from a culture of playfulness in their strategies, often featuring Son Jarocho folk music, popular education theater, and protest art making. Sociologist Melissa Gouge's research on CIW advances our understanding of how emotions and culture interact to generate democratic political solidarity.

- **Detroit Action** [20]

  Detroit Action grounds their work in what they call Cultural and Relational Organizing that asserts that "elections, politics and organizing don't have to be boring. By definition, community organizing exist in order to build relational power with community. We can set the terms of our discussion with elected officials and our community by engaging them with our culture. Through both technological innovations, cultural and traditional organizing, our organization aims to build community and engage members on issues by meeting them where they are."

- Arts and culture are central to the work of building the **Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival**. This national anti-poverty campaign, considers arts and culture as essential for building up the power of people and state-based movements to serve as a vehicle for a powerful moral movement in the country and to transform the political, economic, and moral structures of our society.[21] The legacy of the Campaign is even grounded in a prescient act of radical placemaking when, in 1968, thousands converged on the National Mall in Washington, DC to erect "Resurrection City," in response to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s call to demand federal funding for full employment, a guaranteed annual income, anti-poverty programs, and housing for the poor. The temporary city of 3,000 wooden tents lasted for 42 days from May to June of that year and stands as a moral precedent for the way creative placemaking can advance racial and economic equity.

Supporting practices for social cohesion: Implications and strategies for funders and policymakers

Implications

In the context of the equity movement, social cohesion practices offer important opportunities to build coalition movements across different sectors, communities, geographies, and generations. Faced with a chaotic political context usually focused on short-term issues and crises, the equity movement needs to move advocacy efforts "upstream" to take on, as effectively, the democratic system and political economy of the nation. It is at that level, where policies affect social, civic, and political systems, that justice can be wrought.

Opportunities for funders and policymakers are rapidly emerging, further sparked by the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, in which the fundamental reset of the mores of society are possible. The central challenge for funders and policymakers will be to recognize when proposed efforts are recreating or only modestly improving the dominant systems and structures, rather than transforming them. As well, the challenge will be to understand the potential, and have the patience for identifying and encouraging local, grassroots efforts in support of these transformative changes. Social cohesion practices can be essential bridging practices that bring efforts to scale, stretching local and regional activities to reach statewide or even national scope. The essential need for getting to that kind of scale is for communities to recognize their sameness while also embracing their differences.

For policymakers, it will be important to grasp the fundamental need that people feel to be grounded in a place and community of their own while simultaneously feeling connected to other places and communities not of their own. This should inform policymaking. At PolicyLink, we had useful experiences with this concept when we made recommendations for applied research into the benefits of an innovative relocation assistance in public housing for national housing policy. The case, in Seattle, was the first of its kind to build social cohesion through cultural strategies with the once and future residents. But while the arts were specific to the largely Asian American community and the environment of the Yesler Terrace development, the concepts and principles may prove to be widely applicable around the country.[22] In another of these "research agendas," PolicyLink pointed out the practical application of broadening the measures of progress in healthy food retailing to encompass how immigrant ethnic food systems serve as a bridge from local efforts to national practice.[23]

Strategies

A key lesson for social cohesion practices reinforced by our examples from each of the three fields is that place-based arts and culture strategies take time, that trust cannot be rushed, and authenticity will not result from a simple transaction. If these qualities are valued, both for more effective and democratic processes and for better outcomes in the community, then the assumption that faster is better must be disrupted. More community involvement and funding are necessary to advance the work. The need to hire community organizers whose practices are grounded fundamentally in social cohesion practices will be key to advancing social cohesion approaches in these three sectors. New relationships with entities outside of their sector, bridging to other areas of work, would also help accelerate the practice.

- Funders should invest in community organizing efforts in arts, health, and community development, and these should support strategies that ground communities in safe and healthy places while also advancing cross-sector, trans-geographic, and intercultural approaches. One example is the recently reorganized California Wellness Foundation, which has a new Leadership for Wellness and Change program area.

- Policymakers should utilize a culture-in-all-policies approach that equips every policy with the perspective that one size cannot fit all and that policies that take an intentional approach to supporting social cohesion can be a bridge between specific and general approaches.

- Funders and policymakers need to consider insights from international examples of truth and reconciliation commissions that directly confront the need for justice. The

> failure to support truth and reconciliation will create an insurmountable obstacle to the social cohesion necessary for a transformation into an equitable and just society.

The proliferation of creative experiments and innovations has led to a powerful body of evidence about how the process of building social cohesion to advance equity and well-being can work. The theory of change explicated by Metris in *We-Making* provides the language by which to describe and analyze those efforts. If we want to support groups in a range of fields to adopt arts and culture strategies to advance social cohesion, then we need to generate more community-driven innovations along with the systematic thinking and research by which to understand how social cohesion works and communicate what it means.

Notes

[1] Metris Arts Consulting, *WE-Making: How Arts & Culture Unite People to Work Toward Community Well-Being: Theory of Change and Case Studies,* page 6. Accessible at https://communitydevelopment.art/issues/social-cohesion

[2] Metris Arts Consulting, *WE-Making: How Arts & Culture Unite People to Work Toward Community Well-Being, Theory of Change and Case Studies,* page 29.

[3] See page 11 of *WE-Making: How Arts & Culture Unite People to Work Toward Community Well-Being: Theory of Change and Case Studies* for the overall diagram of the processes by which place-based arts and culture strategies can amplify the drivers of social cohesion to nurture coordinated community organizing and activity and thereby lead to increased equitable community well-being.

[4] *WE-Making: How Arts & Culture Unite People to Work Toward Community Well-Being, Theory of Change and Case Studies,* page 29.

[5] Frameworks Institute. www.frameworksinstitute.org

[6] https://be-imaginative.org/

[7] https://www.imancentral.org/arts-culture/

[8] Center for Performance and Civic Practice, https://www.thecpcp.org/

[9] Comments of Meghan Tompkins of CRYP at University of Florida, Center for Arts in Medicine convening in Lexington, Kentucky, September 9, 2019. For an account of the three cases profiled here, including CRYP, see the Working Group Proceedings at https://arts.ufl.edu/sites/creating-healthy-communities/collaboration/lexington-ky/

[10] Meghan Tompkins, quoted in the Lexington Working Group Proceedings at https://arts.ufl.edu/sites/creating-healthy-communities/collaboration/lexington-ky/, page 24.

[11] See https://www.communitydevelopment.art/communities/zuni as well as articles in *Health Affairs and Forecast Public Art* which can be accessed at https://www.communitydevelopment.art/About_CDI/press_and_media

[12] https://medium.com/dance-usa-fellowships-to-artists/all-of-us-are-dancers-a-trio-of-dance-artists-creates-work-with-non-traditional-populations-4e8ffe6d33bf

[13] For the perspectives of a cross-section of these local practitioners and national organizations, see Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco. 2019. "Transforming Community Development through Arts and Culture," *Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco Community Development Innovation Review* 2019-2.

[14] Comments of Jerome Chou quoted in the Lexington Working Group Proceedings at https://arts.ufl.edu/sites/creating-healthy-communities/collaboration/lexington-ky/, page 26.

[15] https://www.kounkuey.org/projects/eastern_coachella_valley_pps_network

[16] https://naceda.memberclicks.net/index.php?option=com_dailyplanetblog&category=creative-places

[17] https://www.apano.org/programs/community-organizing/

[18] https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1317&context=cusrd_abstracts

[19] https://www.isa-sociology.org/en/junior-sociologists/dissertation-abstracts/list-of-abstracts/1116

[20] https://detroitaction.org/programs/

[21] https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/arts-culture/

[22] https://communitydevelopment.art/applied-research-relocation-assistance

[23] https://communitydevelopment.art/applied-research-immigrant-food-systems