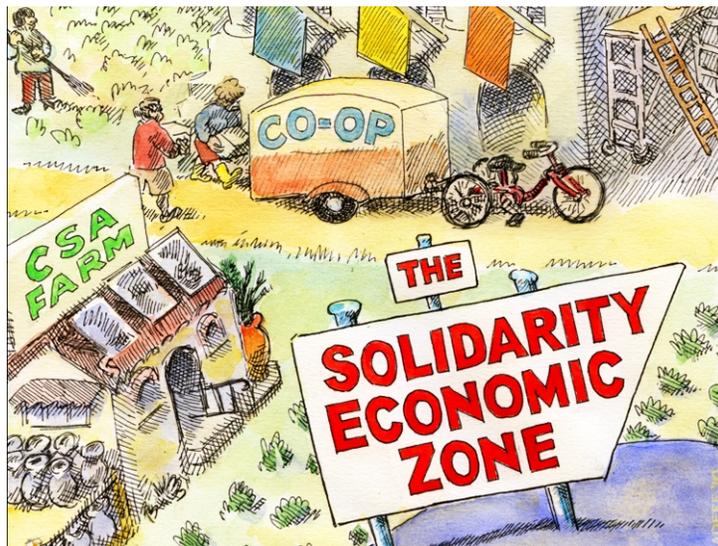


INTRODUCTION: Mapping The Economy for the Common Good



All around us, many organizations are working to confront problems that our present economic and political system cannot solve and in many cases makes worse. These problems are threatening the future of life on this planet, as we know it. Climate change, resource depletion, species die-off, human alienation, global pollution and so many more devastating consequences of our current economic and political system have to be brought back into a sustainable balance with the natural systems of our planet. In every community there are farmers, non-profits, small businesses, co-ops, public agencies, and social and political action groups that are working to build this new economy on their own. We can help all of these organizations and bolster their solutions by recognizing and supporting them as members of the Economy for the Common. Several years ago, the United States Solidarity Economy Network (USSEN) started mapping these organizations that make up a national Solidarity Economy. This is an economy built on cooperation and solidarity of purpose in confronting climate change, income inequality, resource depletion, social alienation, Wall Street titans, and the privatization of our commons. By bringing all these organizations of the local economy for the common good together, we make them all stronger, with a broader reach, creating a synergistic impact, speeding up the transition from the old, extractive, monopolistic, money as power political and economic system into the new healthy, sustainable, cooperative political and economic system for our common good.

Our existing economic, political and cultural paradigm so captivates the popular narrative that any true rise of an Economy for the Common Good will require a vast cultural change, and creating a new popular narrative. This cultural change is largely about changing our relationships with nature, production, consumption and our fellow humans, and is evident in the organizations that the US Social Solidarity Economy Network (USSEN) has brought together nationally. You can find the change in your local community as you map the organizations that make up your local Economy for the Common Good. Your effort to identify and organize the Economy for the Common Good in your community is an important part of this global change.

In this process, we talk about “economy” in the original sense of the Greek word *oikonomia*: management of our home. We speak of “home” in its universal concept that includes the environment, society, and all of the animals and landscapes of the natural world. Building an Economy for the Common Good means that we are creating economic, political and environmental systems that will solve our most vexing problems and that all of the organizations within that economy share a mutual relationship and concern about these problems and support each group’s efforts to solve those problems.

We created this course of workshops to give communities, towns, cities, counties, etc., a mechanism to identify, support and expand the Economy for the Common Good that already exists in their region. The workshops bring together a group of committed citizens who identify their community’s most pressing problems, consider the causes of those problems; postulate solutions to those problems and then go out and mobilize the community to take action.

There are two aspects of mapping the Economy for the Common Good. First there is the actual product, the map. Second, there is the process of people working together to create the map.

One of the underlying goals for creating the map is to construct a different vantage point to view the economics of the community. We eschew the traditional criteria of profit and money to measure the success of the local economy. We want to rearrange the context, the framing, to reflect the values that honor and value people and nature. We are striving to present a view of the local economy based on the common good.

Challenges

You need to engage the collective imagination of the course participants to:

- Create situations where the students can explore new ideas together; build trust; work together; guide the conversations toward the future and solutions;
- Create opportunities to have conversations about the open-ended questions embedded in the project;
- Decide the criteria for identifying organizations that will be on the map;
- Consider the facts and try to separate strong feelings from empirical findings;
- Identify and focus on the values you want to practice;
- See where these values are manifested in the community, as it exists;
- Work together to imagine other possible avenues for expression of these values;
- Examine the organizations, the values, the people and how they are interrelated;
- Divide the organizations by sectors that allows you to see groups of people working towards similar goals, with similar underlying values.

Questions

You have to look at each organization and ask:

- What problems of the existing money-as-power system is the organization addressing and how are they doing it?
- What is the essence of the cultural change they are creating?
- What relationships are changing that move the economy towards the common good?
- How can these new relationships be enhanced, cultivated, and replicated?
- How can all these organizations be connected to public consciousness?
- What kind of public consciousness do they make possible?

Culmination

In the end you have to:

- Celebrate the common ground.
- Think about what else can be learned
- Understand what you have learned about yourself
- Realize where it is best to focus your energy
- Choose the aspect of cultural change you want to work on.
- Identify which kinds of organizations have to be created to fill out your Economy for the Common Good.

Continually listen to and monitor the conversations to focus on reforming our cultural mindset. Find ways to model and practice the values and relationships we claim to embrace. Within the practice, mistakes will be made. Find ways to learn from the mistakes. Acknowledge when you make mistakes. When you fall down, you have to get up. Develop this ability in as many ways as possible with the group. Embrace the process.

At the heart of the project is the gathering of information and values of each organization. The people representing the organizations on the map have to be given an opportunity to express how they are manifesting the values and relationships that underlie their work. It may be good to create a video that demonstrates recording this aspect of the mapping process. Most of all: celebrate what we have in common; focus on and highlight what is, and share it in new, creative ways.

There are four over-arching questions to confront as you undertake this project:

1. What are you trying to accomplish by mapping the local Economy for the Common Good? If you just want to add your local organizations on to the USSEN map, you can collect the data, communicate with USSEN about the format they want your database set up in and then send them the data. Conversely, if you want to make your own local Economy for the Common Good map because you want to network all of the local organizations, or you want to create an informational piece for consumers, community organizers, or others who are interested in the reality

that the new economy is already emerging from the old, then you will go down a different path and use one of many mapping programs to develop your own map.

2. What physical region do you want to include in your map? One key is to choose an area that already self defines as a community. This can be a political region, like a city, county or state. Or it could be a geographically defined region like a watershed, a coastal plain, or a mountain range.

Another key in choosing the area of your map will be the number of organizations that will qualify as being part of your Economy for the Common Good. If there are not many organizations already working to create an Economy for the Common Good in your community, maybe your first project is to start creating them. Or enlarge your area so you can bring more organizations into the mix.

3. Can you engage enough people to help carry out the project? Local knowledge is critical to find and build the Economy for the Common Good in any community. Locals have the knowledge to find the various organizations doing the important work of the Economy for the Common Good and they have the energy to go out and do the work to build an Economy for the Common Good for their future. Finally you have to decide if the size of the area you are mapping can realistically get done in a way that is inclusive of all the organizations in the area.

Our initial project has been to map the solidarity economy spread across 3500 square miles of Mendocino County in Northern California. It takes an hour and a half to drive from the Coast to the county seat. It takes three hours to drive to the far corners of the County. Coastal and Inland Mendocino County are often thought of as two different worlds. We brought those two worlds together in one map by holding workshops both on the Coast and Inland. Over the past two years we engaged over 50 people and identified over 200 organizations that are part of the Economy for the Common Good in the county.

4. Where do you want to present these workshops? We present our workshops as Community Extension classes at our local community college, Mendocino College. Community extension classes are a great venue because they include an academic atmosphere as well as fully equipped classrooms with audiovisual equipment. Mendocino College also has several campuses that we have been able to use across the county. These workshops could also be presented at community centers, churches, libraries or private homes.

Our motto for this first venture in mapping an Economy for the Common Good has been that “we are building the bicycle as we are riding it.” Fortunately, this study guide presents the rudimentary bicycle that we have already built and it is quite rideable. This is a journey that needs to carry on far into the future. After two years, we are just reaching the point of making our map public. We will let you know what happens in the future.