

# Solidarity Economy Briefs: ECONOMY OF ABUNDANCE

The U.S. Solidarity Economy Network stands in solidarity with the Occupy Wall St. movement. As a network of groups, activists and solidarity economy practitioners, we seek to transform our economic system into one that *puts people and planet front and center – an economy for the 99%*. *Another World* is not only possible, it already exists, in many, many forms. The solidarity economy, grounded in principles of solidarity, participatory democracy, sustainability, equity in all dimensions, and pluralism (not a one-size-fits-all model) is a fast growing global movement. We offer these Solidarity Economy briefs to provide a glimpse into some of the aspects of the solidarity economy that exist all around us.



*Symbols of life and abundance*

## WHAT IS ITS AIM?

“The economy” that dominates our lives is an economy of scarcity – because only things that are scarce can be sold at a profit, and only profitable things are considered valuable, only scarce things are considered valuable. So, there’s an incentive to make things scarce. In this economy, it makes sense to keep people homeless next to empty houses, to keep people starving while millions of tons of food are thrown away, to have millions of people working overtime for fear of losing their jobs while others are unemployed, to make entire nations suffer so that shareholders get their dividends, to create a dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico so that more subsidized corn can be grown by large agribusinesses and be used as fuel rather than food. The Hopi people have a word for this, it’s “koyaanisqatsi,” world out of balance.

An “economy of abundance” seeks to overturn this logic of scarcity, insecurity and fear. It creates social institutions that value and foster mutual support and abundance, that value people over profits, use values over exchange (money) values, the living over the dead. It seeks to create the condition when all people, no matter their backgrounds, can thrive, both now and in the future, and an abundance of plant and animal species can likewise thrive.

## HOW DOES IT WORK?

A fundamental part of an economy of abundance consists of overcoming contradictions between employers and employees, between sellers and buyers, between producers and consumers, between polluters and the rest of us. A key way of doing this is through changing the rules of property.

### ***Abundant jobs***

If workers are co-owners of a business (a worker cooperative), then they do everything in their power to keep their workplaces. In a temporary economic downturn, they may all work less so that all have some income. If their product no longer appears viable, they look for ways to change that product or to produce something new in order to retain their jobs. If there are

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numerous cooperatives in a place (such as the Mondragon coops in the Basque country of Spain), they find ways of transferring workers from struggling coops to expanding ones. They also minimize income differences within the coop, so that everyone earns a good living and nobody becomes filthy rich. Finally, they create systems of workplace democracy so that every worker-owner can actually exercise the rights of ownership. This is a strategy for making good, satisfying jobs abundant.

### ***Mobility for everyone***

One of the biggest consumer items today is the car. The major car companies have worked together with the oil, real estate, construction and other industries to lobby government to build cities that make us dependent on cars. This has huge impacts on global warming. Cities can, however, be redesigned to make walking, cycling and the use of public transport effective, pleasurable and safe, and to reduce the need for cars. Car sharing (through car sharing companies or person-to-person car sharing) can allow people to use a car even if they don't own one. So, by asserting everyone's right to the city, and creating a kind of co-ownership of cars, we can reduce car dependence.

### ***Building community around food***

Community-supported agriculture (CSA) can help overcome the contradiction between producers and consumers of food. Customers buy a share of a farmer's produce which the farmer supplies weekly based on what is in season. Customers get high-quality fresh food and know where it is coming from, and farmers get a dependable income (and if it's paid in advance, they get it when they make the expenditures on growing the food instead of considerably afterward).

### ***Abundant clean air and water***

A proposal by Peter Barnes to overcome the incentive to pollute would declare clean air, clean water and so forth the property of everyone (with each person an equal co-owner). Then, polluters would have to pay into a common fund for their pollution, and the revenue of that fund would be paid out equally to every resident of a country. Because rich people consume more resources, they would pay into the fund more than they receive, and vice versa for the poor. Such a system could make it expensive to pollute (pushing polluting companies to clean up their act and to become energy efficient), and at the same time redistribute income from the rich to the poor.

## **Successes**

- Mondragon Cooperatives: <http://www.mcc.es/ENG.aspx>
- Evergreen Initiative (Cleveland, Ohio): <http://www.evergreencoop.com/>
- Sustainable Transport (website with lots of resources):  
[http://www.sutp.org/index.php?option=com\\_frontpage&Itemid=1](http://www.sutp.org/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1)
- P2P Car Sharing: <http://www.shareable.net/blog/diy-car-sharing-how-to-start-your-own-car-sharing-program>
- Community Supported Agriculture: <http://www.localharvest.org/csa/>
- Peter Barnes' proposals: <http://capitalism3.com/about-book>

## **Further Resources**

- US Solidarity Economy Network: <http://ussen.org/>  
Shareable online magazine: <http://shareable.net/> (note article on abundant cities:  
<http://shareable.net/blog/how-to-create-abundant-cities>)  
New Economics Institute: <http://neweconomicsinstitute.org/>

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