

An “Option for the Poor”: A Research Audit for Community-Based Regionalism in California’s Central Coast

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Community-based organizations are increasingly interested in tackling issues of regional economic development to address the inequality and resource shortfalls that plague their constituents. Some groups have conducted regional audits to understand the economic and political terrain and select entry points that will maximize their impact. This article reports on a collaborative effort between university and community partners in California’s central coast that involved the development of a research-based audit, and explains how the complex interplay of economic clusters, environmentalist traditions, and demographic changes led to an initial emphasis on housing. The authors note how the conscious power-building aspects of this approach can help with economic and community development and draw lessons for community-based regionalist efforts in other parts of the country.

Keywords: regionalism; economic development; community organizing; housing

In recent years, regional economies have been increasingly recognized as an important scale for social and economic action (Scott, 1998; Storper, 1997). Some within the community development field have suggested that this “emergence of the region” is an opportunity to improve on the traditional neighborhood-based approach to economic development (Bollens, 1997; Nowak, 1997; Pastor, Dreier, Grigsby, & Lopez-Garza, 2000). A new community-based regionalism, it is argued, can help local groups improve the socioeconomic status of their constituencies by leveraging regional tax dollars, improving transportation linkages to sources of employment, revamping job training to new regional clusters, spurring affordable housing, and enhancing equity in the allocation of credit (Bernstein, 1997; Kalinosky & Desmond, 2000; PolicyLink, 2000a; Rusk, 1999).

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Community-based organizations (CBOs), however, face a number of challenges in trying to engage on a regional scale. Pursuing regional strategies frequently requires building new relationships and developing a sophisticated ability to cross many social divisions, including ethnic, language, and religious differences. The slower nature of change can make regional strategies frustrating, and some CBO leaders complain that working at a regional level can both weaken a local political base and interfere with more neighborhood-oriented work, particularly given constraints on time. Government structures and political processes also rarely provide accessible channels for neighborhood-based organizations to engage in regional discussions around economic and land-use policies. Because this is new terrain, identifying the most fruitful areas for community-based interventions is a task that requires new thinking and new resources.

This article describes one effort at overcoming these challenges that involved an innovative collaboration in the Monterey Bay (on the central coast of California) between a community organizing initiative, the Central Coast Interfaith Sponsors (CCIS), and the Center for Justice, Tolerance, and Community (CJTC) at the University of California, Santa Cruz. CCIS is an effort rooted in the faith community launched under the aegis of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). CJTC is a social justice research institute that has developed and implemented a regional audit approach for several community-based efforts targeting regional economic issues.

The fundamental building blocks of this audit include a statistical portrait of the demographic, economic, and social trends in the region and a broader political economy analysis of the region's receptivity to new community-based initiatives. The audit offers an opportunity landscape that can become part of the calculus used to select specific entry points for community efforts at regional economic development, with an eye toward building the power, the message, and the strategy necessary to leverage community interests and goals at a regional level.

In the case of the Monterey Bay, the audit suggested that lower income residents needed a new regional voice, stressed that organizing efforts needed to both recognize the growing Latino population and emphasize common-ground issues, and recommended that housing be among the first strategic issues. The latter, perhaps surprisingly given the original emphasis of the study on economic development, occurred partly because of the pressing need in this arena but also because of a complex interplay of sociopolitical factors, including a fragmented business class, relatively limited union power, a strong environmental movement rooted in a progressive tradition, and the broad range of residents affected by the issue.¹ CCIS has indeed taken a lead on housing and other questions, making surprisingly quick progress at generating a sense of regional empowerment and furthering the organization's own institutional development, which is now being applied to additional arenas for change.

This article begins by first providing some background on the collaboration between CCIS and CJTC. We then proceed to describe the content of the research undertaken by the CJTC team and highlight the ways in which CCIS used this regional audit to strengthen its organizing initiatives. This task takes up the bulk of the article. Finally, we consider the implications for economic development and the broader community-based regionalism movement. We suggest that the audit, which combines conventional methodologies for understanding a regional economy with a more innovative social analysis linking community concerns and regional receptivity, could be a valuable means for helping neighborhood organizations elsewhere effectively influence economic trends. Indeed, the lessons learned from this research and action collaboration may be of particular interest because the audit was not conducted in the biggest metropolitan areas, giving it potential relevance to a wider range of regional initiatives than might be suggested from the more common new regionalist focus on larger urban areas (Orfield, 1997; Pastor, 2001).

BACKGROUND AND METHOD

CCIS is a project of local clergy and community leaders that was officially launched in the spring of 2000. The initiative, however, began with a series of meetings in early 1996, coordinated by an IAF organizer under the aegis of the Monterey Bay Organizing Project (MBOP), to discuss the role of religious congregations and other civil society institutions in the future of the region.

Following 3 years of base building within local congregations, the MBOP changed its name to CCIS. CCIS remains affiliated with the IAF and, like other such IAF efforts, seeks to build participation in the decision-making process, often by uniting groups across divisions of race, class, and geography in action on behalf of economic and social justice (Warren, 2001). Over the course of organizing, the CCIS leadership has recognized that its diverse membership resulted in a more Latino-immigrant focus. A challenge will be to keep all members equally engaged without alienating interests that may appear racially divided. A key component of building these different links involves creating a community narrative—a story that captures community sentiment regarding the central features of contemporary society, unites fragmented individuals into a shared understanding of their predicament, and embodies a vision of a brighter future and a moral imperative for change.

The CJTC at the University of California, Santa Cruz, was founded in January 2000 to link the themes of social justice and community building. With an explicit purpose of contributing research and support for CBOs, public institutions, and others working toward these goals, the collaboration with CCIS was logical, building on a long-standing relationship between the CJTC director and the lead IAF organizer for CCIS. The research piece of the partnership focused on developing a regional analysis that could serve as the scaffold for the community story and could facilitate strategic decision making regarding issue selection and prioritization.

CJTC researchers had already developed and deployed variants of this audit strategy in several other areas of California, including Los Angeles, San Diego, San Jose, Sacramento, and the Central Valley (see Benner, 1998; Marcelli, 2000; Marcelli & Joassart, 1998; Pastor et al., 2001). These audits, and the one conducted for the Monterey Bay, have three fundamental premises. The first is that the region has become the relevant scale at which businesses cluster and economies take root (Barnes & Ledebur, 1998; Storper, 1997). This has led to a regional approach becoming more common in business efforts to revitalize local economies (Henton, Melville, & Welsh, 1997). Many economic development analysts have suggested that CBOs interested in local economic development should also pick up the regional banner (Nowak, 1997; PolicyLink, 2000a).

The second premise of such an audit is that the region is malleable or changeable. Although regions have emerged as an effective economic unit, regional governments, such as Portland, Oregon, are few and far between. This incongruence between politics and economics may seem problematic, but it is also an opportunity: Filling the gap has been an emerging range of governance structures, most of which are public-private partnerships and some of which represent opportunities for communities to find a voice at a regional level (Foster, 2001; Pastor et al., 2000; PolicyLink, 2000b).

A third premise is that seeking such a voice at a regional level is increasingly important for pursuing social equity. Low-wage jobs, high housing prices, and other community problems are often a function of the overall regional economic structure and dynamics, not the neighborhood economy. Improving the lives of low-income people, therefore, requires action at a regional as well as a local scale (Luria, Rogers, & Cohen, 1999; Orfield, 1997).

The specific focus of a regional audit, at least for the community-based efforts with which we have worked, is on the receptivity of the region to the agenda of community-based actors. One part of the audit is a related straightforward economic analysis, albeit one specifically concerned with employment options for lower skilled and lower income workers. We are concerned with whether the region has industrial clusters that are "rooted"—but not for the usual growth reasons. We argue that because such clusters must remain in the area for reasons beyond low wages, they are more susceptible to community pressure for improving conditions.

The second part of our audit is more explicitly about the landscape of power in the region. Here we consider the role of business, the state of governance, and the power of labor and community organizations, among other factors. For example, very strong business organization at a regional level, such as in the Silicon Valley, makes it easier for policy makers to think regionally; at the same time, the very strength of the business voice has created a special challenge in raising social justice questions. In other places, such as Los Angeles, a fragmented and relatively weak business class has made it more possible for community and labor allies to take the lead in such matters as living-wage laws, unionization, and subsidies for community development (see Pastor, 2001). There is no

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single best business profile for community-based regionalism, but understanding the terrain through the lens of receptivity is clearly part of identifying issues, allies, and challenges.

The state of governance refers to the existence and power of regional institutions, such as organizations of governments and the sort of new public-private partnerships (such as Chicago Metropolis 2020, Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network, Envision Utah, and others) that increasingly populate the landscape of metropolitan America. But it also refers to the character of public officials, particularly the nonelected bureaucrats who implement decisions long after politicians move on. Although community groups may have tended to pay little, if not hostile, attention to such bureaucrats, many of these officials can be more sympathetic to communities than are elected leaders, partly because they deal with neighborhoods and their problems on a daily basis.

Finally, regional receptivity depends on potential partners, that is, on the relationships among actors such as community groups and labor organizations in the region. Community organizations can have histories of conflict or cooperation; given the path-dependent nature of organizing, a history of conflict may be difficult to overcome. As for labor, there has often been a history of tension between community groups and unions, particularly because of the racially exclusive practices of unions in the past. However, new directions in labor organizing and an opening of the labor movement to more community-level concerns mean that potentially fruitful collaborations may be possible between labor and community organizations, such as in San Jose, California, Milwaukee, and many other metro areas (AFL-CIO Human Resources Development Institute, 1998).

As implemented in the Monterey Bay region, the regional audit involved collection and analysis of data from multiple sources and interviews with 30 to 40 key regional leaders to get at the broader political economy. The resulting report had three main components. The first was a broad picture of the current social, economic, and political dynamics shaping the Monterey Bay region. The second part developed the potential receptivity to community-based initiatives. The final part of the audit coupled these two analyses to help determine a set of issues that could be prioritized for community-based regionalists. In the shorthand presented to the CCIS leaders at the beginning of the project and in a series of presentations to their leadership teams, the researchers sought to answer three questions: What is the region? What is the reception? What is the opportunity? We take up those questions below.

WHAT IS THE REGION?

I want to say that if there's room enough for farmworkers in the fields to harvest the crops, there has to be enough room for us to live in Santa Cruz County.

—Jesus Fernandez, farmworker, Santa Cruz County, quoted in Boerner, 2001a

For our purposes and those of CCIS, the Monterey Bay consists of Santa Cruz and Monterey counties, which border the Pacific Coast and extend to the east into the agriculturally rich Salinas and Pajaro valleys. The region has become a major destination for immigrants, particularly from Mexico, who come to work in the labor-intensive agriculture industries. Because of this and a popular sense of an invasion by “dot commers” from the nearby Silicon Valley, many residents place the blame for population growth on “outsiders.” The Monterey Bay was indeed under some growth pressures during the 1990s, with the populations of Monterey County growing 13% and Santa Cruz County growing 11.3% from 1990 to 2000.

According to estimates from the state's Department of Finance, however, these county growth rates were below the state mean, and the overall regional population growth in the 1990s did not come from migration: International immigration to the region added nearly 37,000 residents, but the exodus of local residents to other counties and states amounted to nearly 46,000 residents.² The area's population growth is actually driven mostly by births over deaths, a trend that suggests that the expanding populace is largely homegrown. Of course, demographic changes are ongoing as in the rest of California: With higher birth rates in the Latino population and continued international migration, the Latino community is now 39% of the total population of Monterey and Santa Cruz counties, up from 28% in 1990 and 21% in 1980.³ There has also been a geographic dispersal of the

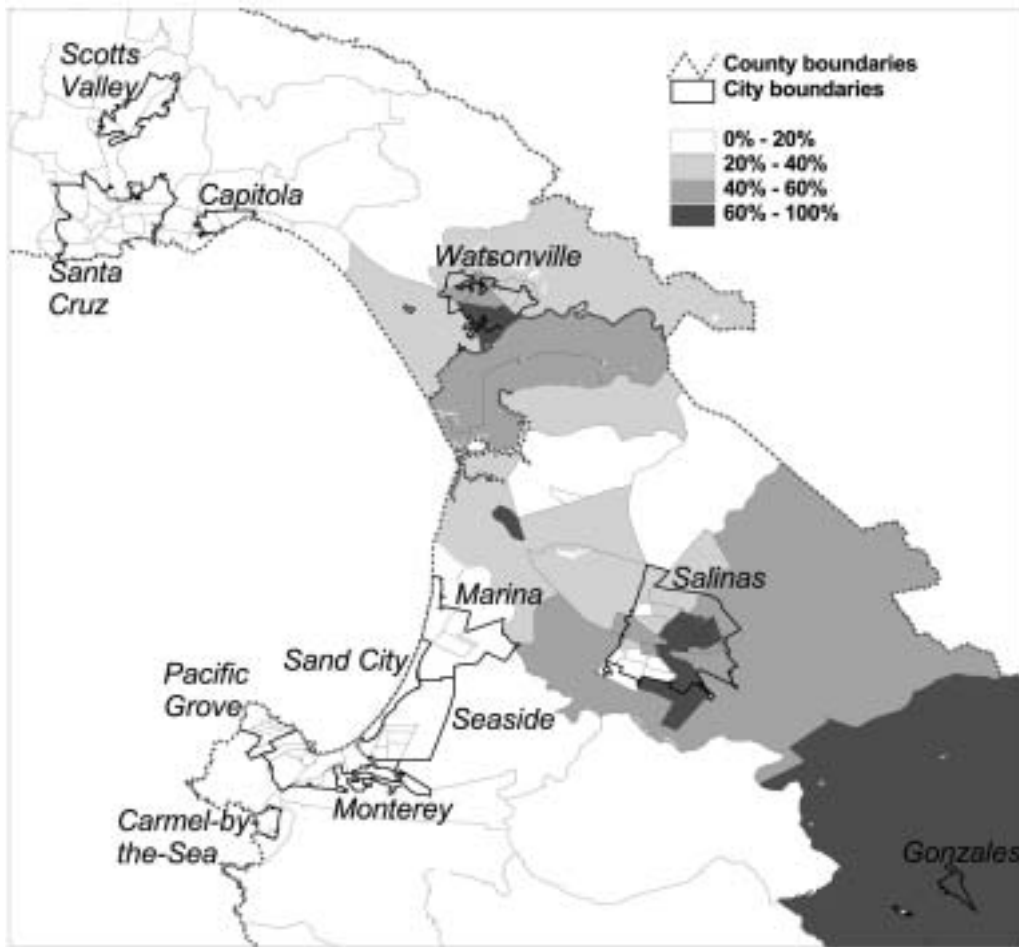


Figure 1: Percentage Latino by Census Tract in 1980 in Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties
 NOTE: This view focuses on the most populated areas of Santa Cruz and Monterey counties.

Latino population throughout the Monterey Bay, as can be seen by maps denoting the population presence in 1980 and 2000 (see Figures 1 and 2).

Despite the dispersal, the population in the region remains highly segregated by ethnicity. Although Monterey Bay encompasses two counties in terms of political jurisdiction, there seem to be two counties divided by ethnicity: a Latino Monterey Bay running from Watsonville of south Santa Cruz County through north Monterey County to the Salinas Valley, and a more Anglo (or non-Hispanic White) area consisting of the northern coastal and mountain cities and picked up again in the Monterey Peninsula (see Figure 2). African Americans, who constitute only 3% of the area's total population, are concentrated in the northern part of the peninsula in the areas of Seaside and Marina, partly because of the past presence of the Fort Ord military base and partly because residential segregation had forced Blacks working in the service industries of high-income Monterey and Carmel-by-the-Sea to live in the lower income cities of Seaside and Marina. As elsewhere in the state and the country, race is correlated with income levels. Figure 3 uses 1999 median household income to show the distribution patterns in the two counties; again, there seem to be two different Bays, with portions of Seaside and the Beach Flats area of Santa Cruz now joining the low-income Salinas-Watsonville axis.

This initial demographic scan lifts up three lessons that have become part of the CCIS story of the region. The first is that growth is actually coming from existing communities. Strategies that refuse to prepare for that growth are denying a home to "our own children" and not simply to "outsiders." The second is that the community interests of low- and moderate-income individuals are

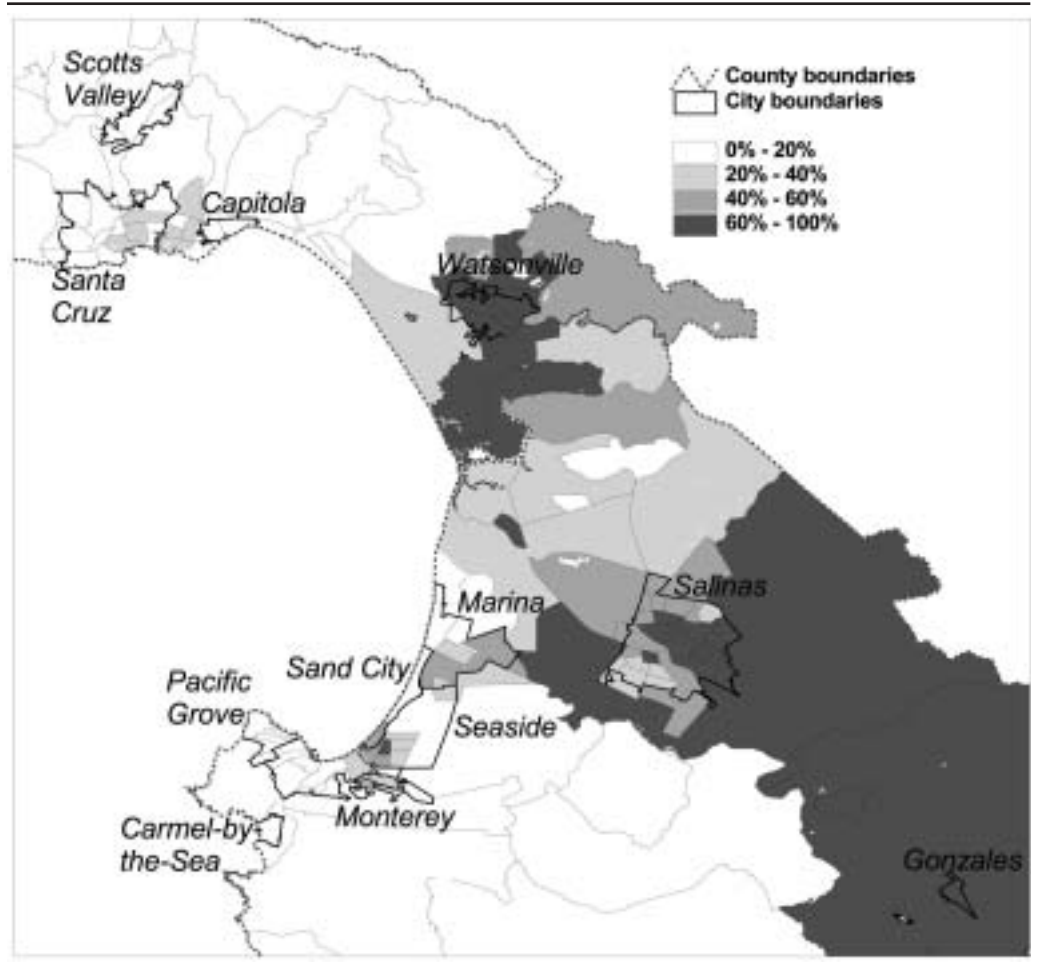


Figure 2: Percentage Latino by Census Tract in 2000 in Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties
 NOTE: This view focuses on the most populated areas of Santa Cruz and Monterey counties.

stretched across political boundaries and must be united. The third lesson is that any new initiatives must make special effort to reach out to the steadily growing Latino population but, given the continued minority status of Latinos, must also be presented in the context of organizing for the common good.

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Economy

As noted, our regional audit approach includes both a general overview of the situation for low-wage workers and an attempt to identify clusters that might be leveraged for, or work against, community betterment. In the Monterey Bay these two issues are deeply connected: The area's unemployment rate generally exceeds that of the rest of the state (see Figure 4), partly because of the seasonality of the key sectors of agriculture and tourism. Understanding the possibilities for moving up the economic and workforce development scale requires a more detailed analysis of local clusters; we do this below for each of the two constituent counties.

Santa Cruz County. Despite its frequent image as a residential suburb of Silicon Valley, only 21% of Santa Cruz County residents were employed outside the county in 2000, down from 28% in 1989. Within Santa Cruz County there are essentially four clusters driving economic opportunity:

- (a) Public sector. The public sector accounts for 16.9% of all employment and is growing faster than most private sector industries. The University of California (UC), Santa Cruz is the

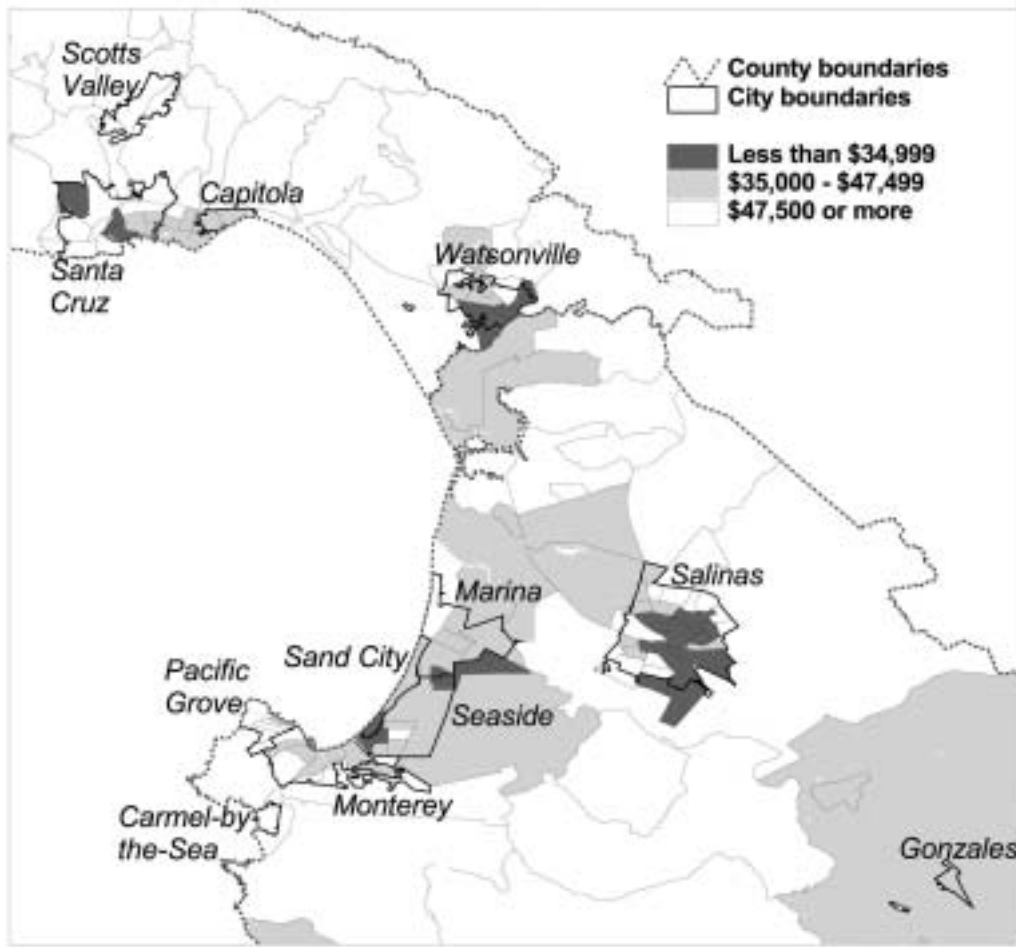


Figure 3: Median Household Income by Census Tract in 1999 in Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties (in 1999 dollars)

NOTE: This view focuses on the most populated areas of Santa Cruz and Monterey counties.

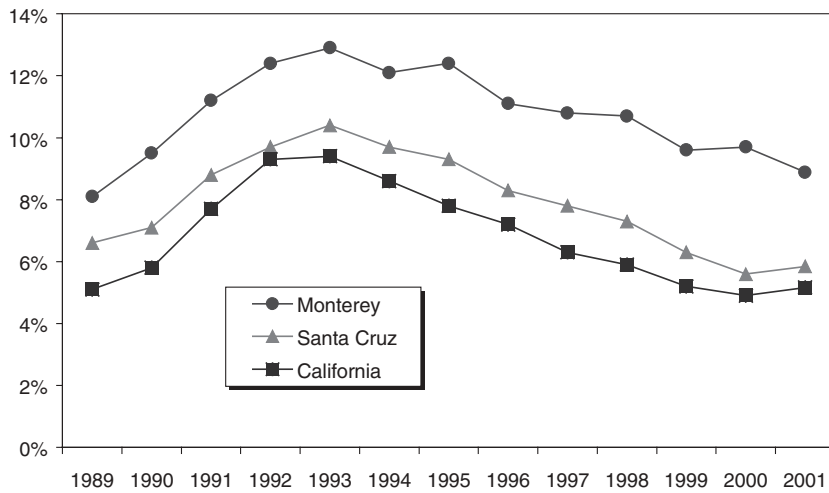


Figure 4: Percentage of Labor Force Unemployed, Annual Averages for 1989-2001

single largest employer in the county, and employment is slated to increase as the student body grows to accommodate demand in the overall UC system. Employment in local government grew by 15% between 1992 and 2000, faster than the 11.7% growth rate of total employment. The jobs in these education and local government sectors are relatively stable, with decent benefits and opportunities for career mobility, although this is currently threatened by California's fiscal difficulties and the trickle-down effect on local government spending.

- (b) Food production and processing.⁴ Santa Cruz remains a significant agricultural region, with more than 10% of jobs in the county in food production and processing. Wages in agriculture production are low, averaging less than \$10 an hour, and employment is seasonal (although it can be as much as 10 months of the year for particular crops and more skilled workers). Watsonville used to be a significant food-processing center, but with the increasing demand for fresh foods, a historic canneries strike in the mid-1980s, and the flight of food processing to Mexico, employment in the industry has declined by close to 20% since 1994. There has been some expansion in fresh packaging in the region, and there has also been a trend toward higher value added and labor-intensive crops (i.e., shifting from apples to berries). However, the overall sector declined by 6.8% between 1994 and 1998. With the industry constrained by rapidly increasing land prices and encroaching urbanization, production is shifting to Coachella Valley in California as well as to Arizona, Mexico, and even Chile.
- (c) Technology industries. There are actually at least three subclusters that make up technology industries in Santa Cruz County: software, advanced manufacturing, and assembly of high-tech products. Combined, these sectors provide almost 10% of total private sector employment in the county. However, employment patterns in this sector are highly polarized. In the hardware portion, the research, design, development, and marketing of various complex technology products require that employees have a 4-year degree; the software industry, growing at 2.4% a year, has similarly high educational requirements. On the other side of the industry is production work, which requires lower skilled assembly workers and technicians in manufacturing facilities. These jobs tend to be lower paid and highly volatile because of rapid shifts in the competitive technology market.
- (d) Health, recreation and leisure industries.⁵ Health, recreation, and leisure is a broad category covering a range of companies that cater to the tourist industry and produce health and leisure products, from natural foods to surfboards. Although clearly rooted in the area's quality of life and natural resources, wages and working conditions throughout the leisure and tourism sector remain poor, and employment is primarily seasonal and part-time.

Monterey County. The economy of Monterey County has traditionally been based on three major components: agriculture, tourism, and the public sector, which in the past included a significant federal military presence. The first two of these industries are obviously highly seasonable, with volatile employment patterns and low wages.

- (a) Agriculture. The Monterey County economy is dominated by agriculture, with 21.5% of the workforce employed in agriculture production and agriculture-related services. Another 4.5% are involved in canning and processing food and related products. Employment in agriculture production and related services grew 12.7% from 1993 to 2000, though this is slower than overall growth in the country. As in Santa Cruz, there is an emphasis on labor-intensive products, which creates a continued demand for low-wage workers.
- (b) Tourism. Monterey County's travel and tourism industries, including the hotel, retail, restaurant, and related industries, accounted for 9.3% of total employment. Carmel and Pebble Beach are known worldwide, and the development of the Monterey Bay Aquarium and the associated renovation of Fisherman's Wharf and Cannery Row along the Monterey waterfront have added to this popular vacation area. Most of these attractions are located on the Monterey Peninsula itself. The Salinas Valley, which is heavily Latino and poor, sees little

multiplier impact from the tourism industry except through low-paid employment for residents.

- (c) Public sector. With the closing of the Fort Ord military base, federal employment declined significantly, but this was more than made up for by growth in state and local government. As a result, 18% of the workforce was employed in the public sector in 2000. The conversion of the Fort Ord military base to civilian uses provides an important opportunity for future economic development in the county. The Fort Ord Reuse Plan prioritizes the development of education institutions and related knowledge-based industry spin-offs, including the relatively new California State University–Monterey Bay and the Monterey Bay Education, Science, and Technology Center.⁶ Another major source of public sector growth is the prison system: Expansion of a facility in the Salinas Valley originally built in 1946 and the opening in 1996 of a new prison have provided jobs for more than 1,600 custodial workers and 900 support staff.⁷ Current fiscal problems may affect public sector growth, but prison spending seems to have been shielded from cuts.

Wages and Wage Trends

In a broad sense, the economies in both counties are sound but unspectacular: Although there are some high-tech spin-offs in Santa Cruz County and the region's agricultural emphasis is increasingly on value-added crops, an important element of growth is the public sector, and there is significant presence of lower skill and lower wage employment. In fact, according to projections from California's Employment Development Department (2003), of the top 10 occupations with the greatest absolute job growth, the majority are in low-wage service sector occupations.⁸

This economic structure has several implications for community-based regional strategies. The first is that typical cluster strategies for growth do not neatly fit the structure of the region. Santa Cruz County, for example, saw the emergence of a clusters project in 2000-2001, in which economic consultants identified all the fast-growing "driving" sectors and argued that development dollars should be channeled in their direction. In a meeting on the topic, one CJTC researcher noted that with the exception of leisure activities, all the clusters were growing more slowly than public employment. Although there is no harm in promoting clusters in this region, strategies for lower income communities might also focus on how best to connect residents to public sector employment, particularly in the universities and colleges that will need to expand to accommodate the long-term pressures from a demographic bulge of college-age individuals.

The second implication is that the regional economy is essentially reliant on a pool of very low-skilled workers in agriculture, tourism, and elsewhere. Because there are fewer opportunities to "train up" in those industries, another economic alternative might usefully focus on raising the bottom of the labor market by improving the conditions for unionization, mandating higher wages (through, for example, living wage ordinances), and improving access to health insurance. These tactics, of course, could run straight into a buzz saw of business opposition. Although this is a worthy fight, another approach to improving the lot of low-income individuals—and one in which there might be common interest with local businesses and the middle-class—is housing.

Housing

Between 1996 and 2001, median housing prices in Santa Cruz County more than doubled, a pace that far exceeded the approximately 50% increase in California prices over the same period. In Monterey County the price growth over the period was less severe, partly because the farther distance from the Silicon Valley helped alleviate spillover pressures. Still, the 70% increase was well above that of the state, and the California Association of Realtors (2002) has estimated that fewer than 20% of families living in the region can afford to purchase a median-priced home in the region. As Figure 5 makes clear, this is now the most unaffordable region in the state, and a January 2002 report by the National Association of Realtors listed Santa Cruz as the most unaffordable place in the country.

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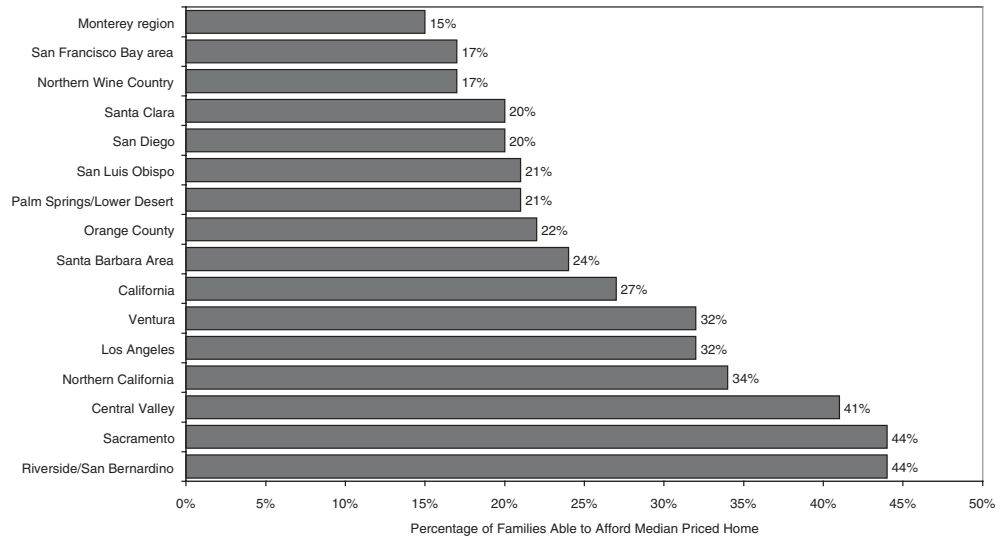


Figure 5: Housing Affordability in California's Major Regions, May 2002

Why is the region so unaffordable? Part of the problem, of course, is the relatively low incomes associated with the area's economic structure. But another issue is strict environmental controls, including urban-growth boundaries in Santa Cruz County and coastal restrictions throughout the area.

As for rents, the National Low Income Housing Coalition (<http://www.nlihc.org/oor2000/index.htm>) estimated that 42% of renters in Monterey County and 55% of renters in Santa Cruz County are unable to afford the Federal Fair Market Housing Rate for a two-bedroom house (Twombly, Pitcoff, Dolbeare, & Crowley, 2000). As a result, there is significant overcrowding in the current housing stock, with extended families or multiple families sharing single-family residences. The difficulty of the situation is highlighted by the experience of one new facility produced by a nonprofit in southern Santa Cruz County: The housing development received 831 applications for 76 affordable units.

Why is the region so unaffordable? Part of the problem, of course, is the relatively low incomes associated with the area's economic structure. But another issue is strict environmental controls, including urban-growth boundaries in Santa Cruz County and coastal restrictions throughout the area. One approach to working within those limits could be in-fill housing, but environmentalist urges to protect the area have sometimes produced a NIMBY-ist (Not In My Backyard) reaction to development projects. Partly as a result, Santa Cruz County is well out of compliance with affordable-housing requirements under California's mandated general planning system.

There are, of course, other key issue areas in the Monterey Bay region that were identified in the regional audit, including poor educational systems, struggles over water supply, and immigrant issues. Indeed, the need for improved treatment of immigrants has become central to the CCIS organizing efforts, partly because incorporating immigrants is key to encouraging civic engagement in the growing Latino communities. Still, the audit suggested that the key issues for most families—ones that could galvanize a broad-based community movement for regional economic and social justice—were the creation of decent, living-wage jobs and improvement in the costs of housing.

WHAT'S THE RECEPTION?

We are challenged to make a fundamental 'option for the poor'—to speak for the voiceless, to defend the defenseless, to assess life styles, policies, and social institutions in terms of their impact on the poor.

—U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1986

Although one of the keys to realizing an option for the poor at the regional level is the strength and quality of organizing, even the most able movement will find it tough going if the overall

atmosphere is not fertile for such activity. Such "regional receptivity" depends on the state of business, governance, labor, and community organizing.

Economy and Business

Clusters are important to determining the potential for economic development, but they are also key to determining the likelihood of community development and advocating for more equitable outcomes. When unattached to an area, businesses can flee at the threat of higher wages or stronger community voice; in fact, however, many businesses are rooted in a region by virtue of access to particular resources (such as fertile agricultural land) or their membership in particular industry associations. When rooted in a region that is producing high-value products, as in the Silicon Valley or Seattle, Washington, businesses tend to worry more about the quality of life and the well-being of employees; this can be an optimal situation for community-business partnerships for "high road" economic development. When businesses are rooted in a region and dependent on low-wage labor, as in the agricultural Central Valley of California, business leaders may, in fact, stand in the way of diversified development because of fears that this will lift the regional wage floor; this is a recipe for pockets of poverty.

The Monterey Bay situation is complex. On one hand, the economy is reliant on agriculture and tourism, both low-wage sectors; on the other hand, the region's agricultural sector is higher value-added than most, tourism is based on local quality of life, and the emerging technology firms are premised on their proximity to the Silicon Valley. For all these reasons, business is rooted—but also relatively fragmented. For example, there is no single business association that represents the entire Monterey Bay. Local chambers of commerce in the region tend to primarily (though not exclusively) represent small, locally based employers and focus on city-level planning, transportation, and zoning issues. Although both Monterey and Santa Cruz counties have countywide business councils, which, with 80 to 100 members, are smaller than the chambers of commerce and represent the largest employers in the area, these seem to have only modest influence.

In terms of sectoral business associations, the agriculture industry has the most and strongest of all the industries, and these agricultural associations provide a unifying force around controversial issues, such as water, pesticide use, and labor. The tourism industry is much less organized, with the Monterey Peninsula Visitor and Convention Bureau dedicated to marketing, serving visitors, and promoting tourism in the region, whereas the Monterey County Hospitality Association has explored some training initiatives to upgrade service quality and improve employment in the industry. The high-tech industry has a nascent and rather loose Technology Alliance. Few of these organizations are involved in what are usually thought of as regional planning issues: housing, land use, public transportation, and employment.

In a series of interviews with community and public actors, one well-placed Monterey County official spoke of the desire to have a highly conscious business class of the sort reflected in groups such as Joint Venture Silicon Valley and the Silicon Valley Manufacturing Group, both of which are concerned with broad infrastructure issues. There is no real parallel in Monterey County, and the Santa Cruz Clusters Project, a recent business-driven effort, has failed to take root. Monterey Bay business, in short, is not providing leadership in the ways that occur elsewhere. Although this seems to be a problem, it is also an opportunity: Because those same businesses are unlikely to leave, there is room for community pressure and a void that a community-based regional voice might fill.

Governance

In terms of the overall political panorama, the area is generally liberal. In northern Santa Cruz County, for example, the progressive Santa Cruz City Council sets the tone, with a highly visible political organization, the Santa Cruz Action Network, playing an important role in endorsing progressive candidates. The main source of consensus for this group has been environmental protection, with area environmentalists proud that they have shielded Santa Cruz from becoming "another San Jose." However, environmental protection has come at a high price: The land has been

saved but the people are being forced away by high housing prices and a lack of employment. This has created tensions between environmentalists and a growing number of Latino politicians and families in the southern part of Santa Cruz County, particularly Watsonville, who see development as necessary to meet the needs of their constituents. Interestingly, business, which was marginalized by the victory of liberals in the north and an emerging Latino political voice in the south of the county, has limited voice in the public debate. But this has simply produced a new balance of forces in which environmentalists and Latino political activists remain allies around expanding social services but in open conflict around land-use issues.

Monterey County has historically been more conservative, although this has begun to change in recent years as Latino representation in elected positions has expanded. Salinas now has a majority Latino city council and a Latina mayor, and many of the key public figures are Latino, including the police chief, fire chief, city manager, head librarian, some department heads, and most school board representatives. Here, restrictive land-use policies have come into conflict with new Latino politicians, with agricultural forces seeking to protect farmland and worrying that growing Latino power could tip the balance in terms of the dependence on low-wage labor.

Because agricultural forces can be expected to continue to protect farmland and work to dampen wage growth, the trick in the region is to move environmentalists, many of whom have progressive sympathies because of past involvements in antiwar and civil rights protests, to understand the trade-offs resulting from rigid land-use decisions. As one leading local environmentalist told us in an interview for this project:

The challenge in the 1970s was the protection of land resources. By and large, we won that fight. The community-public challenge today, given the commitment to land protection and sprawl reduction, is how to shift from a situation in which we've used regulatory power to say "no" to using incentives and other mechanisms to say "yes" to the sort of change we would support. (personal communication, April 12, 2001)

If the environmentalist movement can come to this new perspective, it will be an important part of a new equity agenda for the region. If not, it will stay on a collision course with burgeoning Latino needs, numbers, and power.

Although the coalitional bases noted here are important, a frequently overlooked factor in regional receptivity is the quality and vision of high-level public sector employees; for CBOs, it is important to connect with civil servants within the system who continue past the usual electoral cycles. In this regard, the region is blessed with a set of highly competent and forward-looking public bureaucrats. There are several city managers and officials in various county offices and redevelopment agencies who hold progressive, creative, and pragmatic ideas. A progressive housing agenda, for example, might find more resonance with planners who are aware of the local problems than with elected officials seeking to maximize the interests of high-propensity NIMBY voters.⁹

Is there a regional institution that can stitch together concerns and serve as a table for discussion of a more productive future concerning housing and other matters? The logical vehicle is the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG), the regional government agency of the Monterey Bay. AMBAG, however, seems to command little respect from its constituent members, was not referred to in any respondent interview as a logical place for regional discussion, and in early 2002 was being torn apart by a conflict between Monterey and Santa Cruz counties over the allocation of housing requirements to meet state-mandated goals.

In other regions, public-private partnerships have come together when associations of governments and local political leaders have not proved up to the task. This has been particularly true in California, where the Irvine Foundation has funded a set of "civic entrepreneur" initiatives and spun off the Center for California Regional Leadership to encourage further development of these efforts and further dialogue between them. The Monterey Bay has, in a fashion consistent with its fragmented business class, been the host for several such civic entrepreneur efforts, with none encompassing the entire region and none catching enough momentum to make a difference.

In Santa Cruz County, for example, the Clusters Project was explicitly based on the model of regional alliances started by Joint Venture Silicon Valley (Henton et al., 1997; Joint Venture:

Silicon Valley Network, 1999) and even employed Collaborative Economics, the firm that advised Joint Venture in its initial stages, as a consultant. Although no elected officials were involved, the project included some two dozen community leaders, including business people, prominent non-profit leaders, and some public sector officials. The process was initially sponsored by the Human Resources Agency of Santa Cruz County and coordinated through the local community college. The various leaders met several times through 2000, agreeing after several rounds of discussion to shared goals in three areas—the two most significant of which were housing and job creation.

However, the effort seems to have lost traction, and the lessons from that experience may be instructive. One of its most significant achievements was the creation of a housing group that had as cochairs a major business figure and a long-time leader of the environmental movement. The chairs and the group negotiated a set of principles that they would use to rank housing projects—such as density, transit proximity, and so on—and then agreed to support the projects in public settings. However, when the housing group began going out to shore up external constituencies, environmental forces reacted negatively to the possibility of being portrayed as supporting growth, and the effort largely collapsed.¹⁰

Action Pajaro Valley, another private-public effort covering the Watsonville area, was launched in part to facilitate a visioning process around land use in the area, particularly with regard to the balance of farmland and industry. Although it has served as an important forum for discussion and successfully placed and won a new smart-growth ordinance on the ballot in 2002, it is largely confined to this specific geographic area. Some individuals in Monterey County have attempted to move an initiative forward, but little progress has been made.

Community and Labor Organizations

The ineffectiveness of the association of governments, the fragmentation of the business class, and the embryonic nature of existing public-private partnerships suggest space for an articulate and well-organized community-based regional voice. The area is endowed with many well-established organizations that operate youth programs and community-based health clinics, support legal and political advocacy, promote environmental protection, and sponsor cultural and art activities—but most CBOs work within one city or county. The community foundations of both counties have similar structures, including a neighborhood granting program, which is called *Vecinos*, in Santa Cruz, and they do combine some of their resources around technical assistance for nonprofits. There are some promising collaborations around workforce development initiatives, such as the Ladders project based at Cabrillo College and the Monterey Bay Regional Partnership, a federally funded school-to-work project. Still, the general picture suggests few cross-county collaborations despite common interests and issues.

In many regions, labor has filled the void: Rooted in the region by virtue of their membership, unions in San Jose, Milwaukee, and Los Angeles have taken the lead in new, progressive, regional coalitions. Labor-community connections in the Monterey Bay have been growing, spurred by efforts such as The Citizenship Project, an immigrant-organizing effort and worker center that grew out of the Teamsters local in Salinas. The Hotel Employee and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE) has attempted to branch out by joining community organizations, such as the League of United Latin American Citizens, an old-line Latino civil rights organization, and by supporting candidates who were elected in Marina and Seaside city council elections. Perhaps the most noteworthy collaboration between unions and CBOs has been in the north of the region, where the Santa Cruz Living Wage Coalition successfully passed living wage ordinances in Santa Cruz County and the cities of Watsonville and Santa Cruz.

Labor in the central coast is, however, a tenuous partner for community organizations. The region historically has had two central labor councils (CLCs), which share a single staff person. Merging the two CLCs had been under consideration for quite some time and was only recently accomplished. There are examples of intense organizing in the region, such as the Teamsters' successful struggle to unionize the King City food-processing factory in the southernmost part of the Salinas Valley (Wilson, 2001). A recent 3-day strike by Santa Cruz County workers of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 415, in which two thirds of the 2,000 represented

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workers walked off the job, was widely considered a victory for labor: The resulting 3-year contract includes cost-of-living raises and will give union members salary parity with the neighboring county of Santa Clara, where salaries are an average of 7% higher.¹¹

There have been spectacular failures, however, such as the United Farm Workers' inability to make progress on organizing the area's strawberry industry. In Monterey County, the SEIU successfully organized home health care workers, but the union struggle to get a "livable wage" of \$8.50 an hour was struck down by the county, which agreed to \$7.50 per hour. This defeat was demoralizing, and it symbolized labor's relatively weak position in the broader body politic. Moreover, even labor's biggest victory—the gain for public sector employees in Santa Cruz County—may prove to be fleeting as local government retrenches in the wake of a fiscal crisis wracking the state.

Finally, the relevance for the poorer individuals in the area's lower wage private sector that have been the focus of CCIS's concerns may be limited unless connections are made to get such individuals into better public sector opportunities. In any case, the overall scenario for labor suggests that its capacity to take a leadership role in community-based regionalism is limited, which implies that the typical issues of workforce development and higher wages that regional unions would tend to promote might not be the lead issues in the Monterey Bay.

As for ethnic-based organizing, there have been cross-county attempts at building a political voice for Latinos, primarily in Watsonville and Salinas. There have been several successful campaigns, including mobilizing Latino residents to participate fully in the census count and the coming together of Latino parents to support the development of a new high school in the overcrowded Watsonville school district. However, a regional organizing strategy would not be successful if it was overly racialized, because Latinos are not a majority in either county and because if overemphasized, this could sacrifice potential alliances with other political actors.

On the other hand, housing is a common-ground issue, and it is one that connects old-time residents worried about whether their children will be able to live in the Bay and newer residents, including immigrants, seeking to get their share of the American dream. Focusing on housing also presents an interesting opportunity to take advantage of the peculiar dynamics of the local situation: One of the main barriers to enhancing the housing situation in Santa Cruz and Monterey counties is environmental forces. Yet many of the leaders of these groups pride themselves on their progressive roots and are distraught at the increasing conflict between a largely White environmental movement and a growing Latino population.

A focus on housing, the audit argued, could prick the conscience of progressives who have allowed themselves to be boxed into policies that contribute to skyrocketing rents and home values and also could stir the wallets of those in business who have struggled with the difficulties of finding and keeping reliable workers in an unaffordable area. There are also several tenant and affordable-housing CBOs active in both counties that could provide a base on which to build. To bring all this together, leadership was needed—and one of the research team's main suggestions was that CCIS could provide that leadership.

WHAT IS THE OPPORTUNITY?

Building regional organizations by and for poor and working-class residents is exactly the approach taken by newer IAF-style groups (Warren, 2001). It generally starts with patient building of relationships, developing a sponsoring committee, and eventually mobilizing residents to action. The effort in the Monterey Bay has been no different: By the time the organization reaches its full debut in June 2003, the organizers will have been active building social capital and engaging in political and economic development for nearly 7 years. This long gestation period is typical of IAF efforts: The belief is that relationships have to be built and strengthened prior to taking collective action, putting this approach at odds with the shorter term coalitional strategies that use specific policy actions and alliances as a way of building a movement (Morales & Pastor, 2000).

What was different in this IAF initiative was the early deployment of a parallel research effort in the form of a regional audit. This brought two new things to the process. The first was simply the

construction of a new research scaffold for the "storytelling" IAF traditionally uses to elicit residents' sense of societal ills. In the words of one CCIS leader after a presentation of the research material, "It's like going to the doctor. You know you're sick, but the X ray finally gives you a sense of the real diagnosis and the potential cures."¹²

The second new aspect the research brought was the early identification of a key strategic issue—housing—not simply because it was important in people's lives but also because a power analysis pointed to the relative weakness of labor, the potential for coalition between business leaders and environmentalists worried about the housing supply, and the relative absence of leadership on this question. Housing had not been the issue CCIS leaders anticipated when they began organizing; one had even said in an early meeting that "housing is unaffordable; what's new about that?" Indeed, leaders thought their initial focus would be on job development and school reform, both areas targeted by IAF groups in other parts of the country. But taking the audit seriously, leaders decided to tackle the question of shelter, wrapping it in their general and ongoing strategy of building the capacity for civic engagement.

This broader strategy included a series of team-building retreats by key religious leaders, classes on "public life" to develop new base-level leadership, selected mass gatherings and actions to support the general project, and the constant one-on-one relationship-building meetings that are typical of the IAF strategy. On November 4, 2001, however, CCIS made a break with this general approach and gathered 350 activists for a meeting in which residents could share their stories regarding housing. It had the effect the IAF organizer had hoped for in that it built collective understanding and public will. As one religious leader commented, "One of our members came up to me and started crying, saying 'Thank you, pastor. I don't feel like one little person any more'" (Redfern, 2001).

It also had the effect of launching CCIS as a major player in the housing arena, particularly because few other organizations could mobilize such large numbers. Two days after the initial gathering, CCIS members went to the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors and lobbied for action. A few months later, the county decided to require that any area zoned for high density be built at maximum density, a decision that flew in the face of the growth restrictions and down-zoning environmentalists had been championing. The swing vote was, in fact, one of the region's leading environmentalists, exactly the sort of person whose previous voting and actions had led to strains with the local Latino population. For the political actors, the big surprise was finding someone on the other side of local NIMBYs—community activists arguing for density even though they were not themselves slated to be buyers in the new development.¹³

CCIS has continued to use the housing crisis as a way to teach about the relationship between the individual and the societal good. When an out-of-town owner decided to convert his apartment building from Section 8 to market rate, the apartment residents were offered vouchers to move. CCIS leaders and organizers were contacted by residents worried about their own future. The CCIS allies noted that although these individuals might be bought off by vouchers, this was the first salvo in an upcoming battle to preserve nearly 20 other apartment buildings covered by soon-to-expire Section 8 covenants. The clinching argument came when the IAF organizer suggested, "They don't respect you. They think that because you're poor, you only care about yourselves" (CCIS organizer Ken Smith, speaking to a group of Section 8 recipients who were offered vouchers to move while their building is converted to market housing, March 2002).

CCIS won that battle, with the developer agreeing to reverse the decision and maintain Section 8 status. CCIS has continued to build a new sense of the common good, moving beyond housing to consider such issues as the rights of legal and undocumented immigrants. However, it is striking that after a few short months of monitoring and pressuring public and private decision makers, CCIS was identified as one of the leading voices that had shifted the region's political will to deal with the housing problem (Boerner, 2001b). Although this perception and evolving leadership role reflected a void, it also suggested the power of coupling the narrative of community stories with the scaffold of academic research. Applying such political economy research to identify the opportunities for community-based regionalism proved to be a useful method for the Monterey Bay and could be helpful elsewhere.

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Of course, the process is just beginning, and CCIS will have to tackle the difficult questions of economic development that undergird the low incomes in the area. It will also have to help the populace come to terms with the changing demographics and embrace the notion of Latino empowerment in political and social life. This will require challenging not only economic strategy but also current economic power and social relations. Here, however, the audit may prove useful in its identification of where job development is really emerging—a public sector perhaps more amenable to community pressure—and which of the cluster industries are likely to become allies, if only because they have nowhere else to go.

In general, the regional audit mechanism has helped develop community-based strategies in the Monterey Bay and may be a sensible model for other community-based regionalist efforts across the country. Many of those efforts have arisen because CBOs have been invited to new “tables,” often after being asked to join an ongoing discussion of smart growth or new urbanism. Once there, CBO leaders may find themselves besieged by a confusing array of issues and not sure which to prioritize for their constituencies. As a result, some CBOs may decide to drop out of the process, preferring to apply their scarce resources of time and staff to other activities with more immediate payoffs.

As suggested by the Monterey Bay experience, a research-based audit of community-based regionalism can serve as one of the first strategic steps in reaching, defining, and shaping the discussion at regional tables. The regional audit approach helps identify which issues might be promising, and it may even suggest whether whole regions might be open to a new approach. The analysis can inform communities, foundations, and other groups when making the difficult decisions of how to distribute resources—and it can become part of the teachings that help promote community leaders’ “thinking and linking” to the region.

NOTES

1. It may be noted that we do not use the word *citizenry* here. Given that the effort wound up focusing on bringing together the region’s Anglo (or non-Hispanic White) and Latino (often immigrant) population, the broad term of *resident* was generally used. On the other hand, there was explicit discussion of engaging in “civic life”—that is, being active in the democratic process, a process that, given the possibilities for testimony in planning and other public sessions, does not necessarily require formal citizenship.

2. The data on sources of demographic change are from the Demographic Research Unit, California Department of Finance (2003), <http://www.dof.ca.gov/HTML/DEMOGRAP/Druhpar.htm>

3. The ethnic composition numbers for 2000 come from the census (U.S. Bureau of the Census, n.d.); the components of population change (net domestic, international, and “natural” increase) come from state estimates and cover only the 1990-1999 period (California Department of Finance, 2003).

4. This section borrows heavily from Collaborative Economics (2000a).

5. This section relies heavily on Collaborative Economics (2000b).

6. The Center aims to foster job creation by promoting strategic partnerships among private businesses, government agencies, and education and research institutions in the Monterey Bay (<http://www.ucmbest.org/>).

7. Statistics for each facility are available from the California Department of Corrections (accessed February 4, 2003): http://www.cdc.state.ca.us/institutionsdiv/instdiv/facilities/fac_prison_ctf.asp (Correctional Training Facility at Soledad) and http://www.cdc.state.ca.us/InstitutionsDiv/INSTDIV/facilities/fac_prison_svsp.asp (Salinas Valley State Prison).

8. In Monterey County, for instance, 7 of the top 10 had a median wage less than \$10 an hour, and 8 out of 10 had entry-level wages less than that. The situation looks only slightly better in Santa Cruz County, where 5 out of the top 10 had a median wage of less than \$10 an hour and 6 out of 10 had entry-level wages less than \$10 an hour.

9. Other important public governance structures are the workforce development system and the community college system. For reasons of brevity, we do not explore these at length in this article, although the actual audit covered these areas extensively.

10. The job development effort that emerged from the Clusters Project, Local Jobs/Local People, based at Cabrillo College, has more promise, partly because it is blessed by particularly strong leadership and clearly ties together interests of lower income residents and business.

11. As one union leader commented, “This year’s strike showed the county we can mean business. We didn’t win it all, but we still won . . . and started a new empowerment here. Wait until three years from now” (Davis, 2002).

12. Quotation from a leader in attendance at the briefing for Central Coast Interfaith Sponsors (CCIS) leadership at the St. Francis Retreat Center in San Juan Bautista, California, February 9, 2002.

13. In Monterey County, the Center for Community Advocacy, a group that worked with CCIS in bringing together residents for the November 2001 meeting, and Community Housing Improvement Systems & Planning, a nonprofit housing

organization located in Salinas, completed one of the largest rural affordable housing projects in the state, offering an alternative model.

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