

Community Wealth Building: Doing Economic Development Differently on both sides of the Atlantic

[Reconomy practitioners](#) online event [25th October 2017](#)

Community wealth building is no longer the next big thing - this systems approach to local economic development is being widely taken up now, certainly in the UK.

The approach matches demand for products or services from institutions anchored in a community, to potential local suppliers - usually workers' co-operatives. It often involves an intermediary community development organisation which can help local people create those co-operatives. The result is that money which would otherwise have leaked out of the area to be spent (and often re-spent) locally, paying workers in sustainable, democratic enterprises, while supporting families and the community.

Sarah McKinley, of the [Democracy Collaborative](#) and the [Next System Project](#) described the approach in her [recent online event](#), attended by people from five countries across three continents. She described how [Cleveland](#) (see also the [fascinating and informative video here](#)) had led the way, with large-scale worker co-operatives, including a [laundry](#), an [energy co-op](#) and a [food co-op](#), winning contracts to supply large "anchor" organisations, such as the city's university and hospital.

She showed how the approach could work in rural areas, such as [Jackson, Mississippi](#) (again, [there is a good video here](#)), and small, very deprived areas, such as [Pine Ridge Reservation](#) in South Dakota. The latter is one of the poorest places in the Western hemisphere, but in the process, nevertheless, of developing a co-operative network, which is training and will employ local people to construct and manage a new Regenerative Community that they are building. Such a contract would previously have gone to a private company many miles away, but instead will help create skills, incomes and new opportunities locally.

Moving on to the UK, Sarah explained how Matthew Brown, a councillor from Preston, had been inspired by a visit to Cleveland. He learned that only 5% of Preston City Council's procurement expenditure was spent within the city, and only another 34% within the county. Working with partners such as [CLES](#), this had been transformed, with 18% spent in the city, and 62% within the county.

Community wealth building is a timely approach, certainly in the UK. Several other communities are planning to copy [the Preston model](#) (modifying it to suit local conditions), or could do so. More opportunities are becoming apparent - for example, STIR's [Unlocking the Next Economy](#) project, which is identifying under-used churches and helping them become involved in community economic development. As examples proliferate, it becomes possible to believe that new economic order based on a grand partnership between the state and a co-operative commonwealth, [proposed by John Restakis](#), could be achievable.

Sarah McKinley's presentation was inspiring as well as informative. If you have the chance to join any future online event she presents, I would highly recommend doing so.

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- Presentation by Sarah McKinley is shared [HERE](#).