

# Disruptive Moments of Change

2015 ANNUAL REPORT

# Community Innovators Lab

The goal is to build local economies that provide the means for even the most marginalized to lead healthy and dignified lives.

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What does it take to organize economies to improve human and ecosystem well-being?

Who will decide how resources are used, and by what process?

What is our role as citizens?

DISRUPTIVE MOMENTS OF CHANGE  
December, 2015

Disruptive moments of change generate opportunities for transformation. At CoLab, we've seen an increase in requests from people who are urgently combating rising inequality by reshaping their local economies. The goal? To produce shared wealth and collective well-being.

In 2015, we ramped up projects co-created with community partners seeking impact at scale. CoLab and the Bronx Cooperative Development Initiative (BCDI) took community, anchor institution and local government leaders from the Bronx (the nation's poorest urban county) on a learning journey to Mondragon in Spain's Basque region. The region has a strong network of worker-owned cooperatives and half the unemployment rate of Spain. Bronx leaders now plan to collaborate with Mondragon's start-up accelerator and programs to learn how to scale technology innovation and youth entrepreneurship in the Bronx.

In Colombia's Afro-descendent Pacific Region, we are working with local leaders and entrepreneurs to incorporate the priorities of Afro communities in post-conflict regional and national development planning. Closer to home, CoLab facilitated a collaboration between MasterCard and Local 1199 SEIU to design innovative financial services for under-banked Massachusetts homecare workers. Launching this spring, the project eventually could reach hundreds of thousands of low-wage workers.

CoLab has doubled in size this year to meet growing demand. Our strategic planning process will help align organizational growth and strategic intention. We've reframed our core approach, moving from "Sweet Spot" to "Pivot Point." This more accurately conveys how during disruptive moments of change we seek planning interventions with our partners to hasten the convergence of democratic engagement, shared wealth creation and sustainability. The goal is to tip the balance in communities from marginality and exclusion to well-being.

We will continue learning from the insights of people fighting institutional failure at society's margins, and combating the persistent position of people of color at the bottom of the economy. CoLab's partnerships with socially engaged artists will explore creative methods to cultivate empathy.

American philosopher John Dewey saw widespread social empathy as a crucial precondition for democracy. Today, empathy and love can barely hold up against rage and fear. Yet, as James Baldwin said:

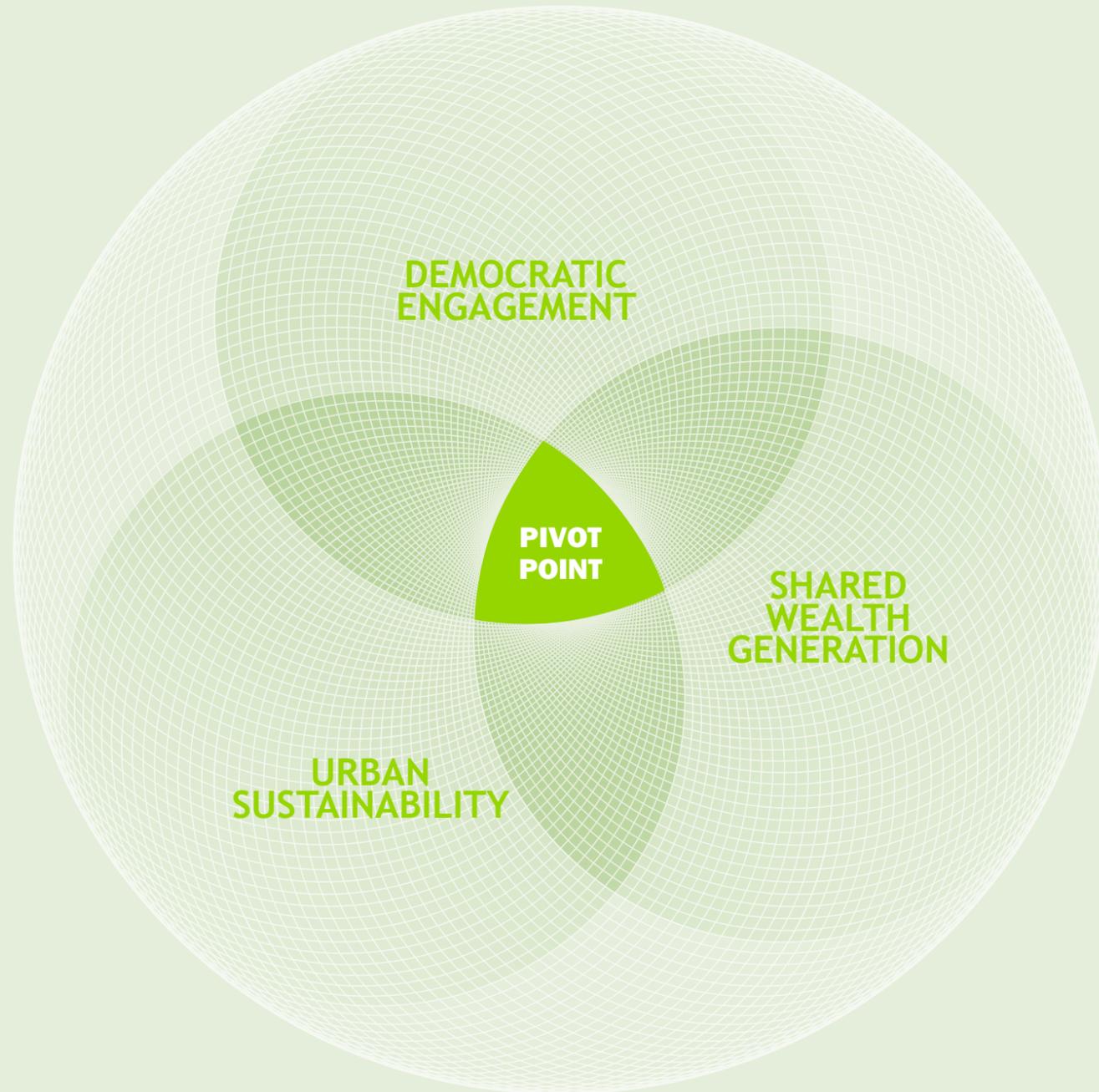
"If you can't love anybody, you're dangerous. You have no way of learning humility, no way of learning that other people suffer, and no way of learning how to use your suffering and theirs to get from one place to another.

It is a terrifying thing, love. It is the only human possibility, but it is terrifying."

With gratitude for the support of the partners, faculty, students, staff and funders who hold out for human possibilities and help CoLab get from one place to another.



Dayna Cunningham  
Executive Director



## VISION

CoLab supports communities working on equitable, democratic and sustainable development in the US and abroad.

### MISSION STATEMENT

CoLab uses the planning discipline to connect MIT faculty, staff and students with civic leaders and residents. The goal is for these individuals to work together and co-create innovative solutions to the complex challenges of urban sustainability.

**The premises underlying CoLab's work:**

- Planning is a participatory discipline.
- Marginalized communities possess critical experience, insights and knowledge for driving innovation and addressing systems failures.
- Collaborative innovation is the most effective way to generate sustainable solutions to local and global problems.

### WORK

Together with MIT students, faculty and community partners, CoLab is testing and refining our unique approach to urban planning: democratic engagement within communities to co-create models of urban resilience and shared wealth generation. The goal of this approach is to build local economies that provide the means for even the most marginalized to lead healthy and dignified lives.

**Four essential methods enable our work:**

1. Model-building and technical support
2. Collaborative research and inquiry
3. Linking and leadership development
4. Media and culture

CoLab and our community partners work together to reflect, sharpen, document and share ideas. By privileging the perspectives of marginalized groups in our theory-building and strategy development, we set our work apart from other forms of university engagement with communities.

As part of our strategic planning process, we've replaced the "Sweet Spot," a term we've used for the past seven years to describe our approach, with the "Pivot Point," which more effectively evokes our methodologies and our end goal of wellness-based development.

Develop models of shared wealth that are participatory and sustainable.

*DUSP students explore wealth generation ideas at Houston's Project Rowhouses with 2014 Mel King Community Fellow, artist Rick Lowe.*

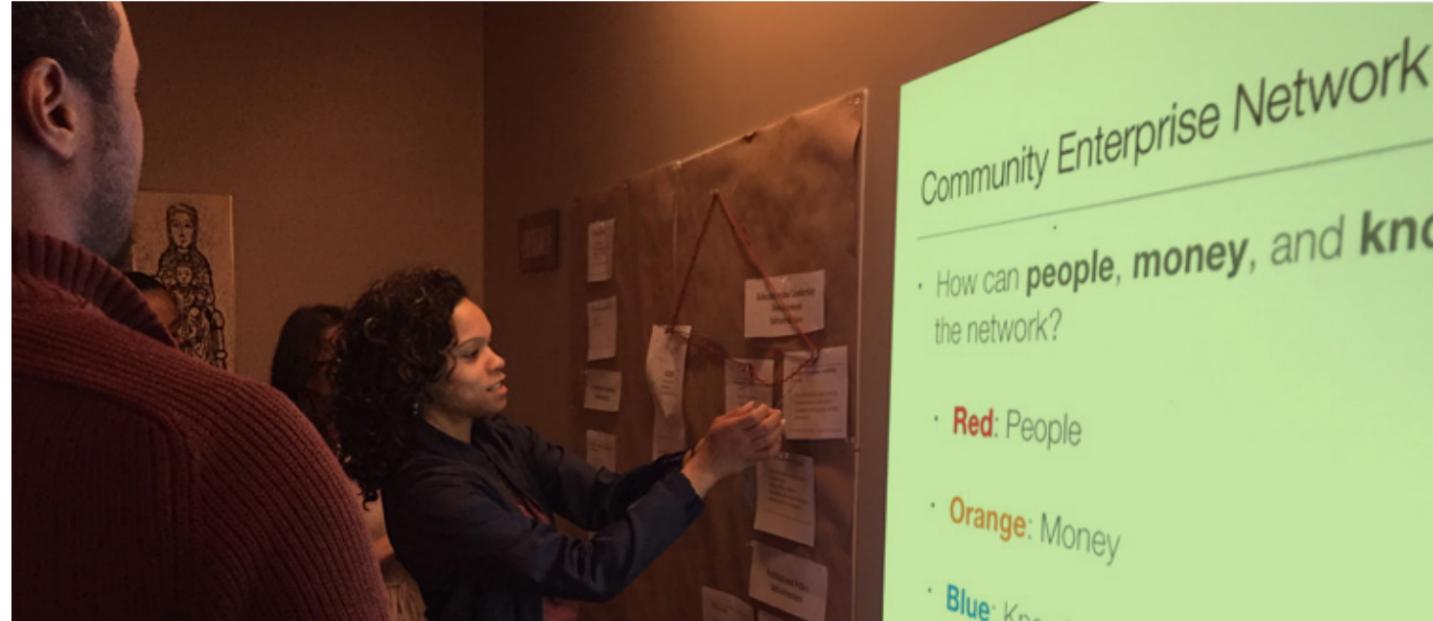
*Photo: William Chamber*

## BRONX COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

The Bronx Cooperative Development Initiative (BCDI) is grounded in a participatory and inclusive community planning process that enables residents in the nation's poorest urban county to advance their own vision for economic democracy. BCDI's approach to democratic wealth creation takes into account social and environmental impacts, shared decisionmaking, and opportunities for sustainable jobs and employee ownership. The program has developed a powerful network of community organizations, anchor institutions, labor organizations, small businesses, technical assistance providers, government officials and finance entities. Supported by this enterprise network, BCDI projects aim simultaneously to improve health outcomes while increasing energy efficiency and creating jobs and opportunities for local ownership. For example, the Bronx Healthy Buildings Program, led by CoLab partner, Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition will employ Bronx residents to remedy "sick buildings" (which are responsible for repeated emergency room visits) with energy-efficient and health-promoting retrofits. Additionally, cross-learning opportunities with leaders in Colombia's Pacific Region jumpstarted inquiry into the ways African diaspora communities throughout the Americas can serve as an engine for economic development in the region.

**Top**  
BCDI Working Group maps flows of people, money and knowledge within the Community Enterprise Network they are building.

Photo: Nick Iuviene



## 'PACIFIC POWER' COMMUNITY INNOVATION SCHOOL

Through the Escuela de Innovación Comunitaria (EIC), CoLab has developed a network of 60 Afro-Colombian community leaders committed to sustainable and inclusive regional development across the Colombian Pacific. Between August 2014 and May 2015, leaders participated in a series of workshops, online engagements and prototyping activities as part of a program designed by CoLab. The goal was to develop local assets that could create and sustain local wealth, with an eye toward leveraging the incipient economic power of the Afro-diaspora market. The Inclusive Regional Development program provides continuing support to the network as it grows and adapts during a transitional moment in the region, following national-level negotiations with guerrilla groups. The knowledge co-created with participants is being captured and synthesized into a curriculum to be shared with other development practitioners, including those in the Bronx.



**Bottom**  
BCDI Working Group maps critical moments in the Bronx's history.

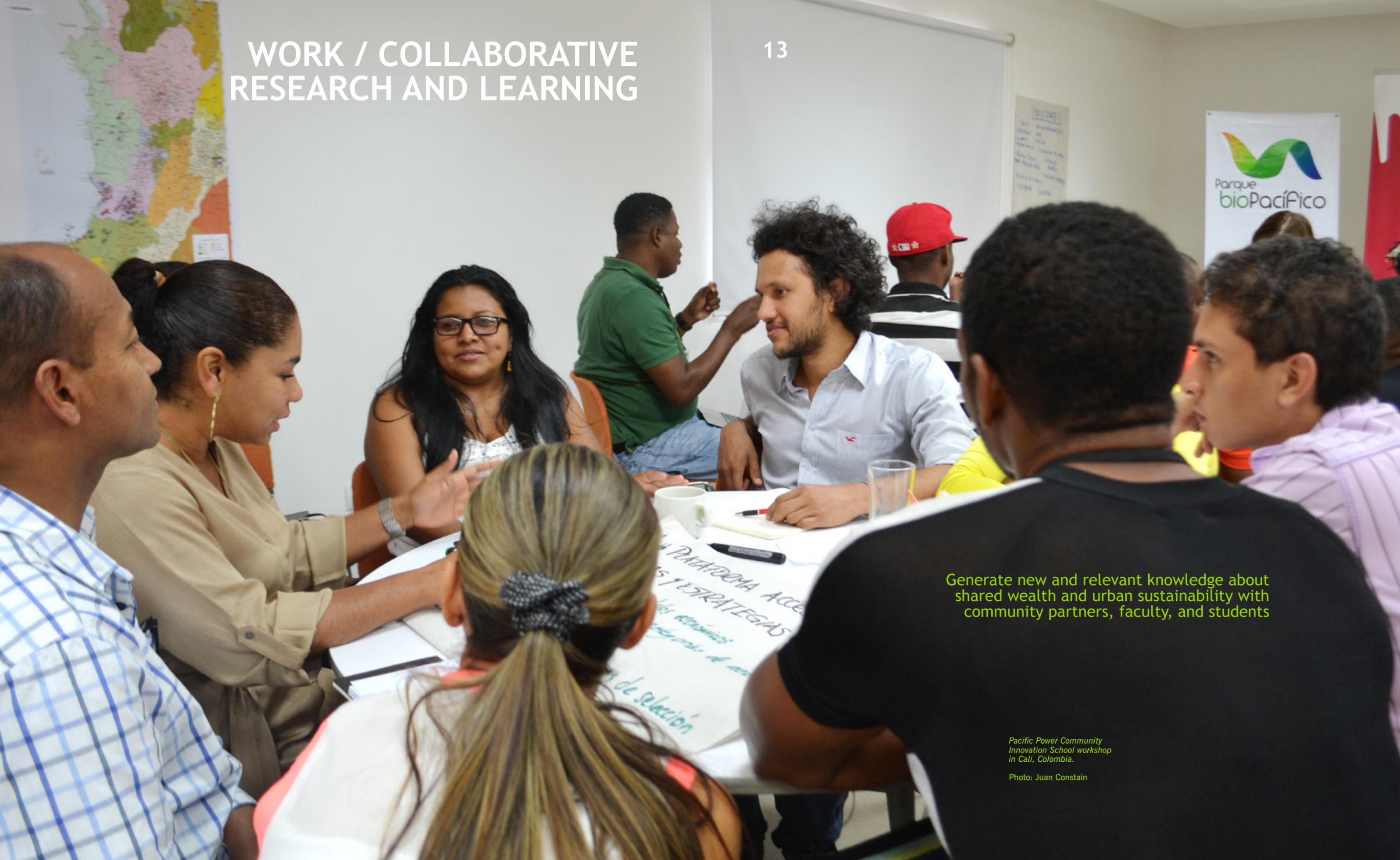
**Bottom right**  
Pacific Power workshop in Cali, Colombia.

Photo: Esthery Castillo

Photo: Juan Constain.

# WORK / COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH AND LEARNING

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Generate new and relevant knowledge about shared wealth and urban sustainability with community partners, faculty, and students

*Pacific Power Community  
Innovation School workshop  
in Cali, Colombia.*

Photo: Juan Constain

# WORK / COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH AND LEARNING

PalmasLab staff map “wealths” and “poverties”.

Photo: Alison Coffey



## RESEARCH FROM THE PERIPHERY: BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY AT INSTITUTO BANCO PALMAS

In 2015, CoLab expanded its collaboration with Instituto Banco Palmas, a community development bank in Fortaleza, Brazil. Palmas uses values of the solidarity economy to promote territorial development through the creation of local networks of production and consumption, micro-lending services, and circulation of a complementary local currency. Over the summer, the collaborative research project Built Palmas’ capacity to assess and intervene in the social and economic dynamics of the neighborhoods where they work, and allowed CoLab to

document the implementation of economic democracy theories in actual places. CoLab worked with a group of young people to design a methodology for exploring how local residents experience, access and work with the material and immaterial “wealths” and “poverties” within their neighborhood. We also developed a toolkit to aid future community-led research. CoLab and Instituto Palmas are now exploring how neighborhood residents can continue using Participatory Action Research (PAR) to systematically analyze the economic forces impacting their neighborhoods, as part of ongoing efforts to democratize the local economy.

“We are all prisoners of something.” Graffiti at a local police station in Valdivia, Chile.

Photo: Alyssa Bryson



## CREATING COLLECTIVE VALUE IN SOUTHERN CHILE

For three years, CoLab and the Center for Entrepreneurial Learning (CEM) at the Universidad Austral de Chile have collaborated to use entrepreneurship training to generate shared wealth—rather than individual profit—to support territorial development. In Fall 2015, CoLab and the Talloires Network led a graduate-level community development class at Tufts University in which participants worked with CEM staff and students to develop a case study documenting the Center’s model for community transformation. With support from the MIT Sloan Latin America Office, CoLab and CEM also launched a pilot project with Mapuche communities on Huapi Island to use renewable energy sources to develop opportunities for shared wealth.

# WORK / COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH AND LEARNING

**Left**  
MIT students visit Kampung Morden, a traditional Malaysian village facing impacts of real estate development.

Photo: Philip Kreycik

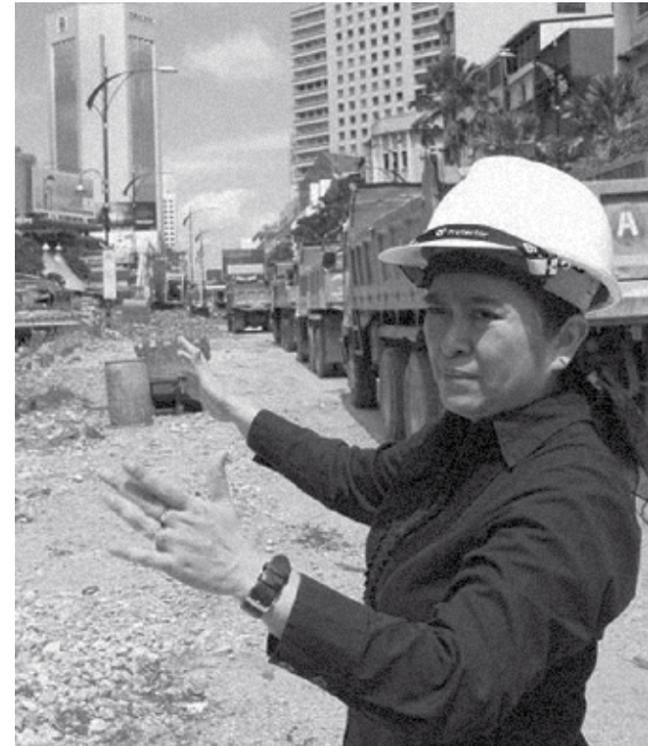
## MIT-UTM MALAYSIA SUSTAINABLE CITIES PROGRAM

This unique partnership between MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning and the University Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) brings together scholars from across the global South to explore how developing countries can reconcile the competing demands of economic growth, urban development and ecological sustainability. An annual practicum course gives MIT students the opportunity to travel to Malaysia and conduct fieldwork alongside UTM students, faculty and international scholars. CoLab provides reflective practice workshops and tools to

**Right**  
Maimunah Jaffar, Head of Planning and Compliance, Iskandar Regional Development Authority in Johor Bahru (IRDA).

Photo: Leslie Tuttle

help students and researchers in the program extract practical lessons from their research. The scholars produce multimedia tools to enhance the teaching of sustainable development, particularly in the global South. These teaching resources are available on the web at <http://malaysiacities.mit.edu/>. The Spring 2015 semester saw the opening of *Female Faces in Sustainable Places*, a multimedia exhibition at MIT's Wolk Gallery focusing on women policymakers and social entrepreneurs contributing to sustainable development in Malaysia. Video interviews of some of the women featured in the exhibit may be viewed at <http://web.mit.edu/femalefaces>.



Crowds forming for Thaipusam in Kuala Lumpur, a Hindu religious festival.

Photo: Philip Kreycik



*Mel King Community  
Fellows from GABV  
Leadership Academy  
during "deep dive"  
on micro finance in  
Bolivia.*

Photo: Katrin Kauefer

Provide space for high-impact stakeholders across multiple sectors to explore responses to shared challenges and develop transformative projects.



URBAN co-founder,  
Public Science Projects'  
community mapping of  
public spaces in  
New York City.

Photo: Flickr/Public  
Science Project

## ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY PROJECT

The Economic Democracy Project is a new program CoLab developed to help the 2013 class of Mel King Community Fellows deepen their understanding of economic democracy. The 2013 group of Fellows (comprised of labor and worker center leaders from across the country) worked with community organizers from the 2011 class, strengthening the cross-sectorial nature of the work. In May 2015, the group of alumni Fellows convened at MIT to explore how labor and community organizations could build a sustained movement of people of color at the bottom of the economy, with a specific focus on the Fight for Fifteen campaign for living wages. Between conventions, members engage in prototyping activities across different sectors of the economy, including new financial products for union members, the future of work, and leveraging health reform initiatives such as the Affordable Care Act to drive connections between health, wealth and climate resilience in California, New York and Florida.

## MEL KING COMMUNITY FELLOWS: VALUES-BASED BANKING

The 2015-2016 cohort of Mel King Community Fellows is focused on knowledge-sharing and leadership development in the field of values-based banking. Much of this work is done in collaboration with the Global Alliance for Banking on Values (GABV), a network of 28 values-based banks around the world. Values-based banks avoid speculation and derivatives and use finance to address social and ecological challenges in the communities in which they operate. Currently, the Fellows are facilitating an 18-month course on leadership in values-based banking for mid-career professionals from across the GABV. The Fellows are also working with CoLab to build *Just Money: Banking as if Society Mattered*, a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on values-based banking to be hosted on MIT's Edx platform. Drawing on theory, cases and interviews with leaders in the field, *Just Money* will facilitate knowledge sharing and network building within the values-based banking community, and disseminate information about values-driven financial models to organizations, individuals and communities around the world.

**“JUST MONEY.  
BANKING AS  
IF SOCIETY  
MATTERED.”**



## URBAN RESEARCH-BASED ACTION NETWORK (URBAN)

The Urban Based Action Research Network (URBAN) is a multi-disciplinary network of scholars and practitioners committed to community-engaged scholarship and collaborative generation of knowledge. CoLab is a proud co-founder of URBAN, and continues to play a significant role in its administration. URBAN now consists of four very active scholar/activist nodes in Boston, New York City, Chicago and Los Angeles, as well as three active disciplinary nodes in the fields of Sociology, Education and Urban Planning. In Spring and Fall 2015, URBAN hosted national gatherings at the University of Massachusetts, Boston with professors and doctoral students from all of URBAN's geographic and disciplinary

nodes. The Spring gathering studied cases from Boston, New York, Baltimore and Philadelphia. Focus areas in the Fall included practices, ethics and institutional supports for collaborative research.

Along with URBAN, CoLab has worked to advance Participatory Action Research (PAR) within the Department of Urban Studies and Planning. CoLab offered Methods and Theory insight as well as a six-week PAR speaker series featuring URBAN leaders exploring the use of PAR in battling racial discrimination, promoting economic democracy, and fighting for labor rights in the United States and abroad. The entire series was recorded, archived and blogged on CoLab Radio: <http://colabradio.mit.edu/category/participatory-action-research/>.

Engage storytellers and artists in the work to build equitable and generative communities.

*Operation Paydirt/Fundreds Project initiated by 2014 Mel King Community Fellow, artist Mel Chin, uses creative methods to raise awareness of lead poisoning.*

Photo: Art Academy of Cincinnati

# WORK / MEDIA & CULTURE

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*Playtime in Africa Initiative, featured on CoLab Radio.*

Photo: The Mmofra Foundation

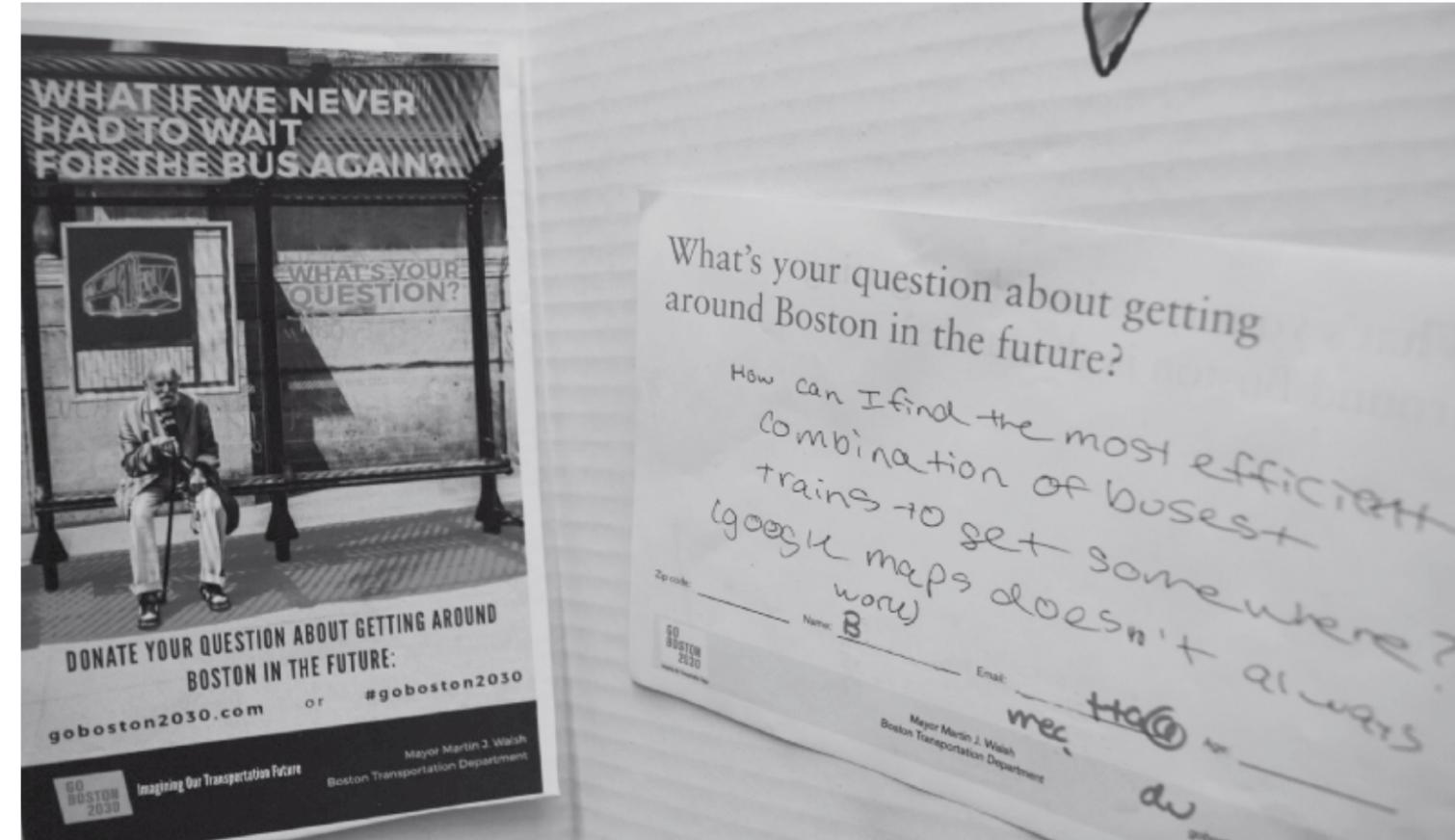


## COLAB RADIO

CoLab Radio continues to serve as a platform for public storytelling. Our volunteer contributors have explored subjects as varied as health equity in the Bronx, economic democracy in the banking sector, translating clinical health research to a community setting, and urban transportation in Africa. In one popular series, three women hailing from Accra, Dakar and Johannesburg interviewed each other about their experiences designing and developing culturally grounded play spaces for children in African cities. Through this dialogue, they formed a coalition of Africa-focused practitioners developing innovative urban spaces for youth.

Urban scholar Leonie Sandercock argues that the way we narrate the city reflects but also establishes urban reality, affecting the choices we make and the ways we act. With this idea in mind, CoLab Radio has expanded the practice of running open calls, inviting people to explore the poetic and communicative dimensions of urban planning. In 2015, contributors from places as diverse as Thessaloniki, Greece, Nairobi, Kenya and Shreveport, Louisiana explored their cities by profiling the reuse and adaptation of historical buildings. They even conducted and recorded soundwalks to reveal critical social, political and economic dynamics in these cities.

Photo:  
<http://colabradio.mit.edu/getting-started-with-the-story-behind-a-question/>



In January 2015, CoLab partnered with the Interaction Institute for Social Change (IISC) on an experimental workshop called “The Story Behind a Question.” Using raw material from a Boston-wide Question Campaign on the future of transportation, participants produced multimedia stories visualizing the knowledge, concerns, hopes and aspirations behind community members’ questions.

## EMPATHETIC AESTHETICS

Over the past year, the Empathetic Aesthetics Program has explored how art and creativity can activate democratic engagement and generate social change. Creative methods of engagement, such as sound walks through Houston's Emancipation Park Neighborhood, have illuminated complex sociopolitical dynamics for students and cultivated empathetic understandings of realities rarely captured through traditional social science inquiry.

Currently, the work of two social practice artists sits at the core of the program. Mel Chin has used the program to deepen collaborations with nationally recognized partners across the sectors of health, art, technology and political advocacy. These collaborations have resulted in the development of a Creative Engagement Toolkit, a digital drawing and advocacy app for the Fundred Dollar Bill, and a revamped web platform to encourage grassroots organizing and awareness around lead poisoning prevention. Social practice artist Rick Lowe has used the program to support the organization of a new neighborhood council and the development of a strategic plan to encourage democratic participation, local wealth generation and cultural preservation without the displacement of current residents in Houston's Third Ward.



In 2015, Empathetic Aesthetics also welcomed Katherine Shozawa and Emily Hass as research affiliates. These artists are pursuing distinct projects that ask the public to reflect on displacement, cultural loss and collective memory. Shozawa uses film to illuminate gentrification and its aftermath in Vancouver's Japantown, and Hass presents the staircases of houses lost by Berlin Jews during WWII. CoLab is also co-creating curricula within the MIT School of Architecture and Planning that will expose a wider community of students, scholars and practitioners to the uses of aesthetic inquiry in planning. This includes a new Houston-based practicum course with Project Row Houses, and a possible Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on social impact design in collaboration with the Curry-Stone Design Prize.



**Top**  
MIT students map assets and existing conditions in Houston's Third Ward.

Photo: William Chambers

**Bottom**  
Abandoned shotgun house in gentrifying Houston neighborhood.

Photo: Allegra Williams

MIT students meet with Emancipation Economic Development Council in Houston's Third Ward.

Photo: William Chambers

# COLAB'S PROJECT LOCATIONS

Photo:  
Rene Robles

CoLab builds partnerships and supports a robust network among community innovators in the US, Latin America, the Carribean, and Malaysia.



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# COLAB'S NETWORK

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CoLab engages students, faculty, alumni, scholars, community organizers, government officials and others around the world.

Based inside MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning, CoLab serves as a convening hub, helping to facilitate the exchange of innovative ideas between the academy and communities.

CoLab's projects are made possible by the generous support of foundations and partner organizations. We continue to diversify our funding sources and seek new ways to generate revenue.

**CORE SUPPORT:**

Ford Foundation  
Kendeda Fund  
MIT Provost  
The Nathan Cummings Foundation

**INCLUSIVE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT:**

Ford Foundation  
MIT MISTI Chile  
MIT MISTI Brazil  
MIT Sloan Latin America Office

**EMPATHETIC AESTHETICS:**

Surdna Foundation

**JUST URBAN ECONOMIES:**

Ford Foundation  
MasterCard  
New York Community Trust  
Rockefeller Brothers Fund  
Rockefeller Foundation

**MEL KING COMMUNITY FELLOWS PROGRAM:**

MIT Office of the Dean of Graduate Education

**MIT-UTM MALAYSIA SUSTAINABLE CITIES PROGRAM:**

Ministry of Education Malaysia

**URBAN:**

SAGE Publications

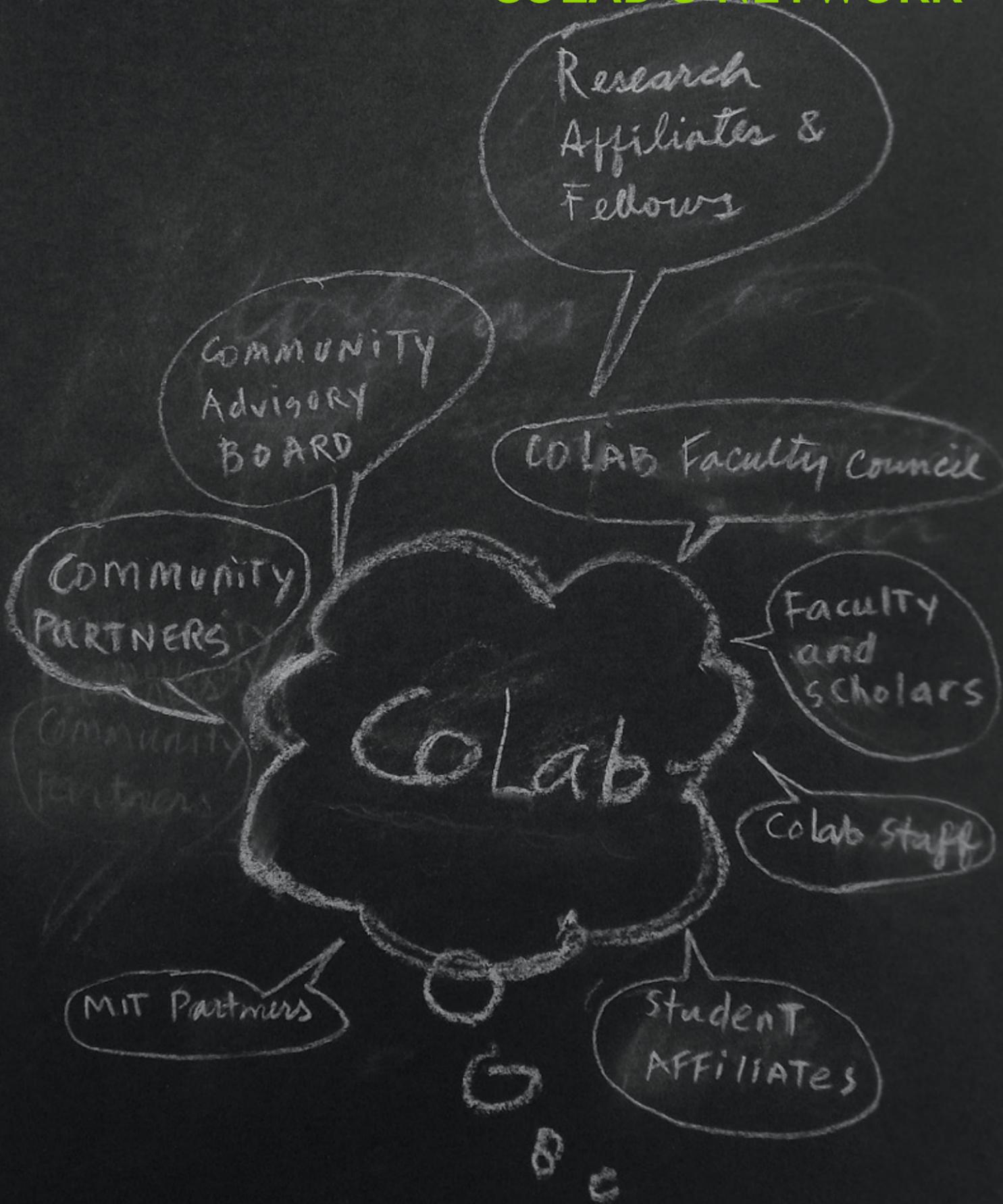
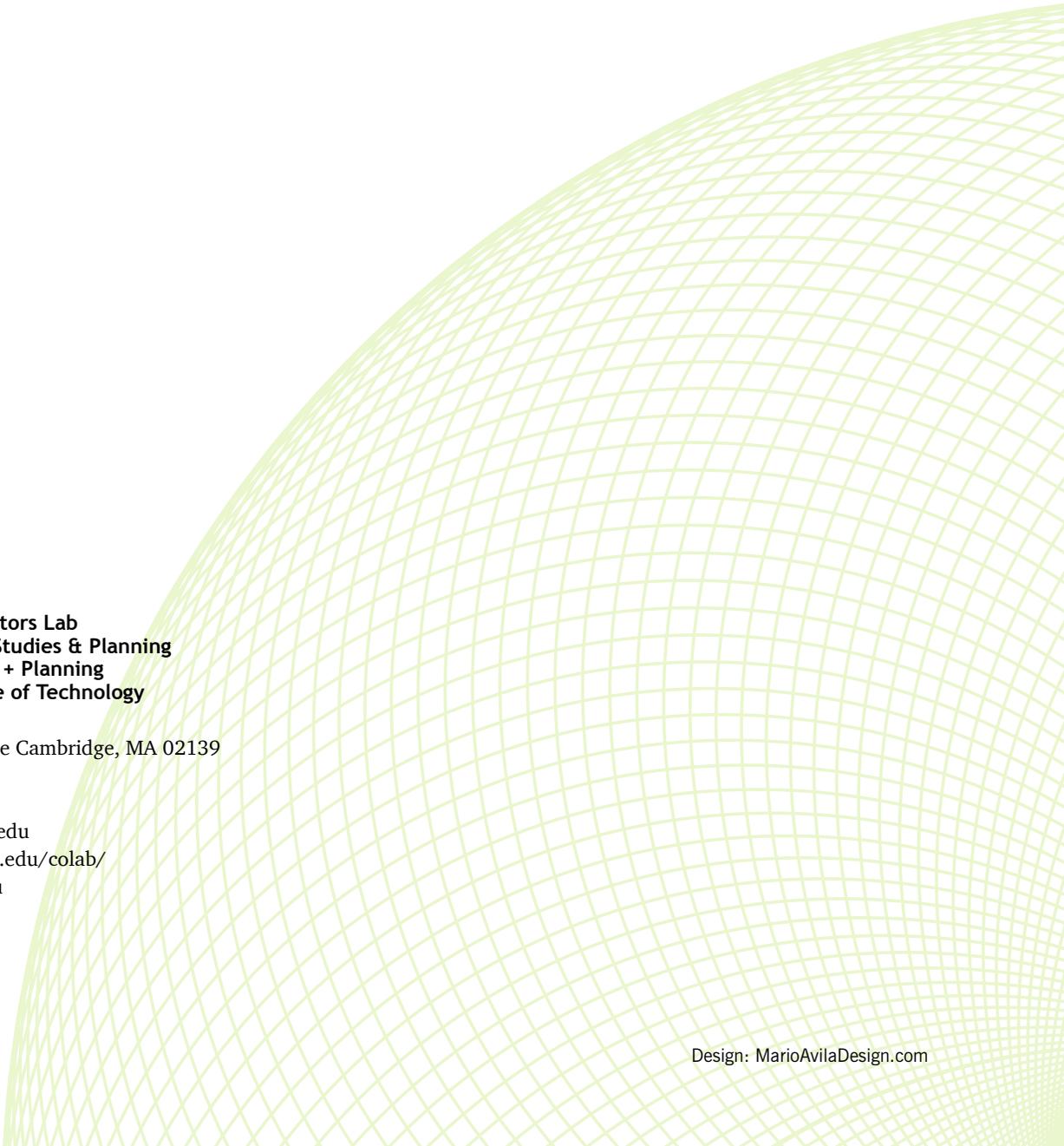


Image:  
Mario Avila Design



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