# Regenerative Transformation: A Framework for Integrated Political and Economic Power Building

## Introduction and Foundational Concepts

The pursuit of regenerative transformation demands a strategic framework that moves beyond conventional political lobbying and transactional mobilization. True systemic change requires the fundamental replacement of exploitative economic and governance structures with democratically governed, socially, and ecologically profitable alternatives. This report synthesizes foundational organizing principles, architectures for building political power, and mechanisms for integrating parallel economic systems—specifically the Solidarity Economy (SSE)—into a cohesive, long-term strategy for achieving self-determination and structural replacement.

### 1.1 Defining Regenerative Transformation: Systemic Depth and Ethical Imperatives

Regenerative transformation is defined not merely by securing incremental policy wins but by executing a comprehensive strategy leading to the democratization of power across political, economic, and spatial domains. This requires a deep structural critique of existing systems.

The essential challenge facing transformative movements is the conflict between short-term tactical pragmatism and long-term systemic change. While certain organizing models, such as those historically associated with Saul Alinsky, are highly effective in mobilizing people to demand local change and creating pragmatic relationships with political actors to derive immediate solutions 1, they often operate within the existing power structure without fundamentally challenging its roots. The analytical implication is that models focused solely on generating conflict to win localized concessions may, if not linked to a deeper structural goal, leave the underlying systems of power intact.2 The strategic imperative, therefore, is to shift the goal from simply negotiating with power to building *counterpower* 3—a durable, autonomous system capable of replacing the current one. The struggle for transformation is recognized as an enduring one, where the focus must be on building infrastructure that sustains the movement long after an immediate campaign victory.4

### 1.2 The Distinction: Organizing as Power Building vs. Mobilizing as Campaign Output

A cornerstone of regenerative strategy is the clear demarcation between organizing and mobilizing, as the distinction determines who holds power and for what ultimate purpose.

Organizing is defined as a process where developing community power and leadership is both a means (e.g., toward winning a campaign) and an end in itself.5 The role of the organizer is not to dictate the strategy but to help local leaders and the community develop their skills, including the ability to perform a thorough power analysis from which they can develop their own action strategies.5 This approach ensures ownership and longevity.

Conversely, mobilizing focuses on activating large numbers of people—often based on appeals to emotion or identity—to participate in a specific, often transactional, campaign goal determined by central leadership.5 While mobilization is a powerful *tactic* for projecting mass influence, it is not an effective *strategy* for enduring transformation because the community's dependence on central leadership for analysis and direction limits the development of self-determination. For regenerative change, which requires sustained commitment over generations and sophisticated strategic capacity, the community must own the power analysis and the ensuing strategy.

Table 1: Organizing vs. Mobilizing: A Strategic Comparison

| **Feature** | **Organizing (Transformative)** | **Mobilizing (Transactional)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Goal** | Develop community power and leadership (means and end).5 | Achieve immediate campaign wins or turnout. |
| **Strategy Control** | Determined by community leaders/members after power analysis.5 | Typically decided by staff or central leadership. |
| **Impact Focus** | Systemic change, self-determination, enduring infrastructure. | Short-term policy changes or reactive demands. |

### 1.3 Foundational Pedagogies: Freirean Conscientization and the Critique of Top-Down Models

The success of organizing hinges on the community’s collective ability to critically analyze and understand the political reality. This capacity is cultivated through radical humanist pedagogy, notably the work of Paulo Freire.

Freire’s methodology, influenced by historical movements in the Brazilian Northeast, centered on literacy and popular education to build a populist political base.6 His core contribution is the concept of *conscientization*, the process of achieving critical awareness of one's socio-political reality. This critical education is the necessary foundation that allows a community to transition from being merely activated by outside forces (mobilized) to being truly empowered to lead and develop its own strategy (organized).5 Without this foundational critical understanding, any resulting political strategy risks being superficial, treating symptoms rather than root causes, or being dictated by external actors who have not experienced the specific systemic harms.

Systemic power structures, particularly capitalist and neo-capitalist systems, rely on ideology to justify their expression, often leading to the quantification and homogenization of space and the suppression of difference.7 Freire’s method provides the intellectual tools for oppressed groups to dismantle this justifying ideology internally. This ability to critically analyze the forces shaping everyday life 6 is the precursor to generating authentic, internally-developed strategy, thereby overcoming the limitations of models that may generate conflict but fail to address underlying structural integrity.2

### 1.4 Intersectionality and Justice: Centering Oppressed Communities

Effective regenerative transformation requires an analytical framework capable of identifying and responding to complex, multi-layered oppression. Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw’s framework of intersectionality describes how multiple types of discrimination—such as racism, classism, and sexism—overlap, creating unique and intensified barriers for marginalized groups.8

Applying an intersectional analysis is not merely an ethical imperative but a crucial strategic tool for accurate power mapping. Failure to recognize overlapping barriers results in incomplete political analyses and strategies that inevitably benefit the most privileged segments within the oppressed group. The Reproductive Justice (RJ) movement exemplifies this, defining its strategy by a human rights framework applicable to everyone and demanding a multi-issue, cross-sector base-building approach.8

The Jackson-Kush Plan (J-K Plan) further solidifies intersectionality as a prerequisite for regenerative strategy design. Its blueprint for Black self-determination explicitly calls for acknowledging past harm rooted in stolen land and stolen labor, centering those communities most impacted, and organizing using an intersectional analysis.9 By focusing on those who bear the greatest systemic burdens, regenerative movements ensure that the new system is fundamentally more just than the one it replaces, thereby tackling the deepest structural roots of injustice.

## Section II: Architectures of Political Power

Regenerative movements require a clear architecture for constructing political power that can successfully challenge and replace the existing state and capitalist infrastructure.

### 2.1 Mapping the Terrain: Pillars of Power and Strategic Analysis

Before executing any action, movements must engage in rigorous analysis. Essential tools for defining the political landscape include the Pillars of Power and the Spectrum of Allies, which help identify the key forces at play and the constituencies that must be engaged.10 This analysis informs the distinction between strategy and tactics.

Strategy concerns the long-term vision and structural goals (e.g., transformation of urban space from commodified homogeneity to democratic public control 7), while tactics are the specific, often immediate, means of implementation (e.g., a specific lawsuit, demonstration, or direct action).11 Capitalist strategy seeks to conquer and shape urban space for its own ends, leading to bland homogeneity and the exclusion of groups deemed inappropriate to commercial priorities.7 Regenerative strategy must be the political counter-movement to this spatial control, identifying targets for political, economic, legal, and cultural tactical repertoires.11

### 2.2 The Strategy of Dual Power (Counterpower): Theoretical Origins and Modern Manifestations

The overarching political strategy for systemic replacement is Dual Power, often termed counterpower. This strategy is predicated on the idea that alternative, self-managed institutions must coexist with and eventually replace existing state and capitalist authority.3

Historically rooted in Bolshevik analysis of post-revolution Russia, the term has expanded to describe libertarian socialist and municipalist approaches that prioritize the creation of directly democratic structures—such as workers' councils, people's assemblies, and mutual aid networks.3 For contemporary regenerative transformation, Dual Power is the mechanism for *prefiguring* the desired future society.

The J-K Plan demonstrates a fully integrated Dual Power architecture built on three prongs: People’s Assemblies, which build power outside the state; a network of progressive political candidates to strategically challenge the existing two-party system; and a local solidarity economy to provide the necessary material base.9 The viability of this political counter-structure is inextricably linked to the economic structure supporting it. Political power is tied to control over resources, labor, and land. If a People’s Assembly lacks economic structures (like cooperatives or land trusts) accountable to it, it risks remaining dependent on or vulnerable to the existing capitalist regime. The integration of the Solidarity Economy provides the necessary democratic material infrastructure to sustain the political institutions, ensuring self-determination.

### 2.3 Case Study in Autonomous Governance: Zapatista Assemblies and Decentralized Control

The Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities (MAREZ) offer a profound example of deep, decentralized Dual Power implementation. Their system of governance is structured around community assemblies that strive for consensus and are federated into autonomous municipalities and regions.13

The key to the durability of the Zapatista model is its structural comprehensiveness. Each community assembly integrates three critical administrative structures: the commissariat (day-to-day administration), the council for land control (managing resources and disputes), and the *agencia* (community police agency).13 This holistic approach demonstrates that counterpower can functionally govern all aspects of everyday life, from resource management to security, effectively creating a parallel state structure built on democratic accountability outside the control of the existing nation-state.

### 2.4 New Municipalism as a Hybrid Dual Power Strategy

New Municipalism provides a crucial strategic approach for scaling regenerative principles beyond localized autonomous zones. It functions as a progressive localism, aiming both to contest local state power and to connect local struggles globally through translocal solidarity, ultimately developing political alternatives beyond the state level.14

Movements such as Barcelona en Comú illustrate this hybrid approach by strategically contesting local electoral politics to capture "everyday sovereignties" over critical local resources like housing, water supply, and energy.14 This strategic engagement with municipal power serves a dual purpose: it directly challenges capital’s control over urban space 7, and it uses the existing political mechanism as a *tactic* to gain leverage points. This leverage can then be used to protect and resource the parallel organizing efforts of civil society and the Solidarity Economy (SSE).

New Municipalism addresses the inherent difficulty of scaling purist extra-state models. By utilizing local institutional power selectively—for example, through initiatives like Barcelona’s Refuge City Plan, which involves civil society in welcoming refugees—the movement mitigates structural vulnerability and ensures the political infrastructure can defend and resource the underlying economic and social projects.14 This selective use of the state infrastructure acts as a protective layer, allowing localized Dual Power efforts to connect and move toward a supra-state alternative, exemplified by translocal networks such as Fearless Cities.

## Section III: Integrating Economic Building: The Solidarity Economy (SSE)

The Solidarity Economy (SSE) provides the necessary material foundation for regenerative political transformation. Without economic autonomy, political movements remain perpetually dependent on the capitalist system they seek to replace.

### 3.1 Conceptualizing the Solidarity Economy: Beyond Social Enterprise

The SSE refers to economic activities prioritizing social profitability, mutual aid, reciprocity, and democratic governance over purely financial profits.15 It is a conceptual framework designed to transform exploitative monetary qualities, practices, and institutions.15 The SSE is fundamentally organized to address and transform the exploitation inherent in capitalist economics, rather than merely mitigating its effects through charity or traditional social enterprises.15

A key political feature of the SSE is the participatory and democratic nature of governance in its entities. Active participation in decision-making processes empowers participants as *active political subjects*.15 This democratic involvement cultivates the skills necessary for self-governance, directly supporting the political goals of the Dual Power strategy.

Table 2: The Solidarity Economy (SSE) and Dual Power Strategy

| **SSE Dimension** | **Political Function in Dual Power** | **Mechanism/Example** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Democratic Governance** | Cultivates participatory political subjects; prefigures future societal organization.15 | Worker cooperatives, People’s Assemblies, community land trusts.9 |
| **Economic Self-Reliance** | Creates autonomy from capitalist market vulnerabilities and state dependency; builds material security. | Localized production/distribution networks, mutual aid systems. |
| **Value Orientation** | Prioritizes social profitability, mutual aid, and reciprocity over financial profit.15 | Cooperative housing, fair trade businesses, shared infrastructure ownership. |

### 3.2 The Jackson-Kush Plan Model: Blueprint for Integrated Power

The J-K Plan is a crucial contemporary example of how to implement the SSE as a political strategy. Its blueprint for Black self-determination explicitly connects cooperative economics—defined by social solidarity, mutual aid, and reciprocity—into every sector of society.9

This triple integration of People's Assemblies (political counter-institution), progressive electoral candidates (strategic engagement/defense), and the local solidarity economy (material base) provides a robust architecture. By anchoring its methodology in an intersectional analysis and historical harm (stolen land and labor), the J-K Plan ensures the resultant economy is inherently restorative and transformative, not merely an alternative business model.9

### 3.3 Linking Political and Economic Interventions: Organizational Strategy

For the Solidarity Economy to thrive and the Dual Power strategy to function effectively, the movement must utilize diverse legal and organizational structures that maximize strategic flexibility.

The constraints placed on charitable organizations (501(c)(3)) limit their ability to engage in direct political action and lobbying.16 Therefore, maintaining strategic autonomy requires channeling funding and activity toward direct political intervention through more flexible structures, specifically the 501(c)(4) social welfare organization. The 501(c)(4) status permits organizations to lobby extensively, compare their mission with candidates, and even back candidates who reinforce their goals.16

This structural diversification is essential for political defense. Purely economic cooperative models are inherently vulnerable to political attacks, such as hostile regulatory changes, legal restrictions, or resource denial. By pairing the SSE infrastructure (cooperatives, land trusts) with a dedicated, politically flexible advocacy arm (such as a 501(c)(4) structure), the movement ensures it has the capacity to challenge adverse policies, influence elections, and strategically defend the assets of the regenerative ecosystem, thereby preventing the co-optation or destruction of its material base.

## Section IV: Strategy Development and Tactical Implementation

Effective regenerative strategy relies on rigorous planning frameworks coupled with powerful narrative techniques to sustain commitment and guide tactical escalation.

### 4.1 Developing a Transformative Theory of Change (ToC): Backwards Mapping

A Theory of Change (ToC) is indispensable for transformative movements, as it provides a comprehensive description of *how and why* a desired change is expected to happen within a specific context.17 Unlike simple planning, ToC uses "backwards mapping" from the long-term goal—in this case, regenerative transformation—to meticulously identify the preconditions necessary for its achievement.17

This methodology requires defining the precise links between immediate activities (interventions) and the long-term goals. For a regenerative movement, a ToC ensures that activities, such as establishing a specific community land trust (SSE intervention), are analyzed as preconditions for the viability of the political counter-institution (People's Assembly). This process prevents tactical drift, ensuring that short-term victories contribute meaningfully to the necessary prerequisites for systemic change rather than merely generating transactional, non-structural outcomes.

### 4.2 Public Narrative as a Strategic Tool: Crafting the Story of Self, Us, and Now

While the Theory of Change provides the intellectual roadmap, Marshall Ganz's Public Narrative framework provides the essential motivational mechanism that translates complex analysis into sustained collective action.18 Public Narrative revolves around three interconnected elements: Story of Self, Story of Us, and Story of Now.

The Story of Us is particularly critical, as it communicates shared values, highlights common challenges, and lifts up stories of collective success, creating a vital sense of unity and focusing the community on shared values.18 Systemic change is an inherently long and challenging process, making hope one of the most precious gifts organizers can provide. The narrative framework links the systemic plan (the ToC) to the emotional activation required for sustained action. It transforms abstract goals into deeply felt personal and communal stakes, defining *who* the participants are ("Us") and *why* the critical choices for action must be made *now*.18 This collective identity is crucial, as tactics, besides affecting outcomes, play a key role in mobilizing and unifying support.11

### 4.3 Tactical Escalation and Repertoires

Strategic planning dictates the selection and sequencing of tactics. Tactical repertoires for regenerative movements must be diverse, encompassing direct-action tactics (those bypassing established channels), institutional tactics (such as legal action or electoral processes), and economic actions.11

The Ladder of Engagement is a vital strategic tool for managing commitment and risk. It sequences actions, starting with low-commitment steps, enabling the movement to escalate actions at critical junctures—for instance, when negotiations or lobbying efforts stall—because a reservoir of prepared, active members is ready for higher-risk endeavors.19

The choice of tactics must also directly engage the battle for spatial control. Henri Lefebvre's analysis suggests that capitalist strategies aim to quantify and homogenize space for capital's ends.7 Regenerative tactics, particularly those associated with the SSE, function as ideological acts that reclaim everyday space and decision-making authority.12 For example, the tactic of establishing a community land trust or cooperative housing directly contests the capitalist strategy of commodifying land and homogenizing urban landscapes. Tools such as the Spectrum of Allies, Pillars of Power, and SWOT analysis are used to define the precise points of intervention and target constituencies.10

Table 3: Tactical Repertoires for Systemic Change

| **Tactical Category** | **Primary Function** | **Strategic Goal Link** | **Relevant Frameworks** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Direct Action** | Bypassing established channels; increasing social conflict.11 | Forces targets to respond; builds collective identity; escalates commitment.19 | Ladder of Engagement; Spectrum of Allies.10 |
| **Institutional/Legal** | Employing established procedures (lawsuits, electoral challenges).11 | Seizing local leverage points; defending SSE infrastructure; gaining "everyday sovereignties".14 | New Municipalism; Organizational Finance (501(c)(4) use).16 |
| **Economic Action** | Creating parallel infrastructure; reclaiming space/resources. | Building the material base of Dual Power; contesting capitalist control of space.7 | Solidarity Economy; J-K Plan; ToC Preconditions.9 |

## Section V: Operationalizing Resilience and Sustainable Movement Building

Regenerative transformation is inherently a multi-generational project. Consequently, the operational resilience of the movement, particularly the prevention of burnout and protection against institutional attack, is a strategic necessity.

### 5.1 Movement Durability and Burnout Prevention

Burnout must be understood as a structural failure of leadership and organizational design, not merely a personal deficiency.20 For a movement to maintain capacity over the decades required for deep systemic change, leaders must adopt specific mindsets that foster organizational well-being and sustainability.20

Key practices include prioritizing "sticky recognition"—meaningful, personalized appreciation that connects acknowledgment to purpose and identity; and establishing workload sustainability—setting realistic expectations, ensuring fair task distribution, and empowering members to voice concerns about workload.20

Crucially, organizing, which emphasizes developing community power and leadership as an end 5, is the mechanism for distributed leadership. This ensures succession planning and prevents the movement from collapsing should central figures be targeted, depart, or experience exhaustion. Distributed leadership and the democratic governance structures inherent in the SSE (where participation empowers many political subjects 15) are mutually reinforcing components of political resilience. By ensuring shared decision-making across political (Assemblies) and economic (Cooperatives) domains, the movement decentralizes risk and safeguards the entire Dual Power ecosystem against the vulnerability inherent in centralized, hierarchical models.

### 5.2 Defending Movement Infrastructure: Countering Co-optation and Legal Threats

As regenerative movements succeed in challenging established power centers (Pillars of Power 10), they face increasing legal and political resistance designed to halt momentum. Opponents frequently utilize legal intimidation, such as Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), which aim to silence criticism through expensive, baseless legal proceedings.21

Strategic planning must explicitly include defensive measures, such as knowing and leveraging anti-SLAPP laws to protect activists and organizations from targeted litigation.21 This defensive legal planning must be budgeted and integrated into the overall strategy, allowing the movement to absorb and deflect sophisticated attacks that target its capacity and resources.

Furthermore, movements must actively mitigate the risk of co-optation. Tactical victories, such as minor policy concessions or the receipt of large grants, can subtly redirect resources away from structural goals or create dependency on hostile institutional funding. The rigorous clarity provided by a transformative Theory of Change 17 serves as an essential internal fidelity check, ensuring that any short-term engagement remains aligned with the long-term goal of building autonomous, regenerative power.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Regenerative transformation requires an integrated, multi-scalar strategy that synthesizes political power building with material economic infrastructure. The analysis demonstrates that effective organizing necessitates a departure from transactional mobilization toward a structural framework built on participatory democracy, economic self-determination, and ideological clarity.

### Synthesis of the Regenerative Framework

The optimal framework for regenerative transformation proceeds through a clear sequence of integrated models:

1. **Pedagogical Foundation (Freire):** Implement radical pedagogy to achieve *conscientization* 6, enabling communities to perform their own power analysis and strategy development.5
2. **Structural Analysis (Intersectionality):** Apply an intersectional framework 8 to correctly diagnose multi-layered oppression and center the most impacted communities 9, ensuring the transformation resolves the deepest inequities.
3. **Political Architecture (Dual Power):** Adopt the Dual Power strategy 3, constructing parallel political institutions (People’s Assemblies 9).
4. **Material Infrastructure (Solidarity Economy):** Build the Solidarity Economy (SSE) 15 as the democratic material base that confers economic self-reliance and sustains political counter-institutions.
5. **Scaling and Defense (New Municipalism and Organizational Autonomy):** Utilize New Municipalism 14 as a hybrid strategy to leverage local state power *tactically* to protect and resource the SSE and challenge capital’s control over space.7 Simultaneously, structure organizations (using 501(c)(4) flexibility 16) to ensure the political advocacy arm can defend the economic infrastructure.
6. **Sustained Action (ToC and Public Narrative):** Employ a rigorous Theory of Change 17 to map long-term preconditions, reinforced by a compelling Public Narrative 18 to maintain collective identity, hope, and commitment for generational struggle.

### Actionable Recommendations

Based on this analysis, three strategic priorities are recommended for practitioners aiming for regenerative systemic transformation:

1. **Prioritize Base Education Over Campaign Wins:** Resource the sustained, critical education of community members (Freirean models) above funding time-limited mobilization campaigns. The development of self-governing political subjects is the ultimate asset, minimizing reliance on outside expertise for strategy generation.
2. **Mandate Economic Integration:** Ensure that every major political organizing initiative is paired with a corresponding Solidarity Economy project (e.g., land trust, cooperative incubator). These projects must be governed democratically to empower participants as political actors, thus stabilizing the material base of the Dual Power strategy.
3. **Institutionalize Resilience and Defense:** Treat organizational burnout prevention (distributed leadership, workload sustainability 20) and proactive legal defense (anti-SLAPP readiness 21) as core strategic functions, rather than peripheral administrative tasks. The failure to mitigate internal collapse or external legal targeting directly compromises the multi-decade lifespan required for regenerative success.

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