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Shared Wealth: Participatory Ownership Models in the 21st Century

In Anchorage, Alaska, families eagerly await the mail each fall for a check representing their share of the state's oil riches. In the Bronx, New York, tens of thousands of working-class residents live in a massive housing cooperative where they jointly own their apartment buildings and control the rents. Across the Atlantic in Copenhagen, a curved row of offshore wind turbines spins steadily – half-owned by thousands of ordinary Danes who pooled their savings to build it. These disparate scenes share a common thread: they are products of **participatory ownership models**, approaches that allow communities to collectively own and benefit from valuable assets. From cooperatives and community land trusts to public royalty funds and shared-investment vehicles, such models are reshaping how wealth is created and distributed at the local level. This report provides a global tour of contemporary participatory ownership initiatives (primarily from the late 20th century onward), examining how they work, how they distribute dividends or savings, and how they navigate governance to avoid corruption or capture. Case studies and data are emphasized throughout, illustrating both inspiring successes and instructive failures. The picture that emerges is one of communities taking ownership of the assets around them – and in the process, challenging the notion that wealth must inevitably accumulate in the hands of a few.

Cooperatives: Enterprise Owned by the People

Cooperatives are one of the most established models of participatory ownership. In a cooperative, members jointly own and govern an enterprise – be it a business, utility, or service – typically on a **one-member, one-vote** basis rather than according to shares owned. This structure aligns the enterprise's goals with community or worker interests, since the *users* or *workers* themselves are the shareholders. Cooperatives span many sectors and forms, including worker-owned companies, consumer co-ops, producer co-ops (for farmers or artisans), and service co-ops like utilities and credit unions. What they have in common is a democratic governance and a mechanism to share economic surpluses among members, whether as profit dividends, patronage refunds, or improved services and price savings.

Worker-Owned Enterprises: Profits for the Producers

In March 2020, a Spanish engineer named Jorge Vega Hernández lost his job at a conventional firm and started seeking something different – a company "that treated workers decently." His search led him to the Basque region's famed **Mondragon Corporation**, a federation of nearly 100 worker-owned cooperatives [1]. Upon joining Mondragon, Hernández found himself in an enterprise radically unlike his previous employer. Each cooperative in Mondragon is owned by its workers, who buy a membership share and then participate in electing management and deciding major strategies. No outside shareholders siphon off profits; instead, profits are either reinvested or distributed to the worker-owners. Executive pay is capped at a modest multiple of the lowest wage – **since the late 1980s the ratio has been 6:1** at most [2] [3], compared to disparities of hundreds to one at typical corporations. When times are good, Mondragon's worker-members receive profit shares (called *dividends* or patronage) based on their labor contribution. When times are bad, they have often voted to reduce their own hours or pay temporarily, rather than resort to layoffs [4]. In fact, the network of co-ops maintains a job guarantee mechanism: cooperatives aid each other and can reassign workers among themselves to preserve employment [4]. The result is a resilient system that prioritizes workers' welfare. As of the 2020s, Mondragon's collection of co-ops employs roughly **80,000 people**, about three-quarters of whom are member-owners (the remainder are probationary or outside hires) [5]. With businesses ranging from industrial manufacturing to retail and banking, Mondragon generates billions in annual revenue. Each co-op typically allocates around 10% of profits to a collective solidarity fund and some to community projects, then divides the rest among member accounts [6]. Governance is exercised through a general assembly of worker-members (each with an equal vote) and an elected board. The Mondragon case shows that even large, complex enterprises can be run on participatory lines – though not without challenges, as discussed later. It stands as perhaps the world's most prominent example of a high-functioning worker cooperative federation [1] [7].

Mondragon may be unique in scale, but it is far from the only worker-owned enterprise making an impact. In the United States, where cooperatives are often thought of as small or niche, the Bronx-based **Cooperative Home Care Associates (CHCA)** defies that stereotype. CHCA is a worker-owned home health care agency founded in 1985 with a mission to improve poverty-wage jobs for home health aides – a workforce largely comprised of women of color. Today CHCA employs over **2,000 people**, **90% of whom are Latina or African-American women**, and more than half of the employees have become worker-owners of the cooperative [8]. To join as an owner, a worker saves a $1,000 buy-in (with an initial $50 payment and the remaining $950 financed via payroll deductions over five years) [9]. In return, each member gets one voting share in governance and may receive annual profit dividends when the co-op does well. CHCA's model has translated into tangible benefits for its worker-owners: **wages about twice the prevailing market rate for similar home care jobs, plus guaranteed minimum hours** for more stable income [10]. Turnover at CHCA runs around 20% – roughly *one-third of the industry average* turnover rate of 67% – indicating far higher job satisfaction and retention [10]. The co-op invests heavily in training (in partnership with a nonprofit it spawned) to build workers' skills. Interestingly, CHCA even chose to unionize (joining SEIU 1199) to give its workforce a stronger collective voice in the broader industry [11]. This unusual scenario – a worker-owned company with a labor union – has helped raise labor standards beyond the co-op's walls. CHCA demonstrates that cooperative ownership can scale even in a low-margin service industry: the business generates over $60 million in annual revenue, and worker-owners not only earn better pay but also participate in governing a major employer. Profit margins in such a business are slim, meaning dividends per member are modest, but the primary "dividend" has been steady job improvement. The CHCA story underscores how **participatory ownership turns jobs into assets** – giving people with little wealth a stake and a say in the enterprise they make successful.

Not all cooperatives are worker-owned; many are owned by the *consumers* or *community* that benefit from their services. Consumer cooperatives include everything from retail stores and grocery markets to insurance mutuals and credit unions. A classic example is **credit unions**, the member-owned financial institutions that operate on a nonprofit basis. As of 2023, there are over 86,000 credit unions worldwide, holding trillions in assets on behalf of their member-depositors (for instance, U.S. credit unions serve over 130 million members). In a credit union, profits are returned to members through better savings rates, lower loan interest, and sometimes annual rebate dividends. For example, the Pentagon Federal Credit Union in the U.S. issued its members a special dividend of $15 million in 2022 due to excess earnings, and many credit unions regularly give small patronage dividends or interest refunds. While these payouts might only amount to $5 or $50 per person, they embody the ethos that **the customers are the owners** and any surplus belongs to them. The governance is democratic: credit union members elect a board of directors (often volunteers from the membership) on a one-member/one-vote basis, regardless of how much one has on deposit. This structure helped credit unions largely avoid the predatory lending that shareholder-driven banks engaged in before the 2008 financial crisis – an illustration of how ownership design can influence behavior.

Another widespread consumer-owned model is the **food cooperative** or grocery co-op, where shoppers purchase a member share (often $50–$100) to become part-owners of a community grocery store. These co-ops typically operate with slim margins to keep food prices affordable, but any surplus at year's end is returned to members as store credit or cash rebates proportional to how much they shopped (a *patronage refund*). Large retail co-ops also exist; for instance, outdoor goods retailer REI is a consumer cooperative with over 20 million members. REI members pay a one-time $30 fee for lifetime membership and receive an annual dividend (typically 10% of their purchases from the previous year) if the co-op is profitable. In 2022, REI's member dividend totaled roughly $234 million distributed to its members – effectively a profit-sharing that rewards customer loyalty. Governance in such big co-ops is less directly participatory (REI's board is elected by members, but candidate selection is board-driven), highlighting a challenge: as cooperatives grow very large, ensuring deep member engagement in governance can be difficult. Still, the economic benefits to members scale with size.

Community and Utility Cooperatives: Power to the People (Literally)

One of the most significant but sometimes overlooked cooperative sectors is **utilities** – especially electricity, telecom, and water cooperatives. In many regions, particularly rural parts of the United States and Canada, electric power is delivered by member-owned cooperatives rather than investor-owned utilities. These electric co-ops arose in the mid-20th century to bring power to areas private companies ignored. Today there are around **900 rural electric cooperatives in the U.S. serving 42 million people** across 56% of the nation's land area. Their customers are the members, and they democratically elect the co-op's board. Importantly, as not-for-profits, co-ops set rates only high enough to cover costs and a reasonable reserve. Any **margins (profits) at year-end are allocated back to the member-owners as "capital credits,"** which are periodically paid out or credited to bills. For example, Bandera Electric Cooperative in Texas reports that it has **returned over $33.3 million in capital credits to its members** since its founding [12]. Typically, an electric co-op will retire (pay out) capital credits on a rotating basis – for instance, in 2023 a co-op might refund a portion of margins from 2003 and 2022. The checks can range from a few dollars to a few hundred dollars for each member, depending on electricity usage and the co-op's financial health. While not usually large sums, these payments represent a share of the utility's earnings going back to the community, rather than to stockholders or distant investors. In addition, member-owners of co-ops often benefit through **lower utility rates** compared to for-profit providers, and through local control – co-ops are more likely to invest in reliability and service rather than extract profit.

Telecommunications cooperatives have a similar story. Dozens of rural telecom co-ops formed in the mid-20th century to provide telephone service; many have evolved into broadband internet providers today. Like electric co-ops, telecom co-ops return patronage dividends to members. For instance, Oklahoma's REC Cooperative (a telecom and electric co-op) notes that any profits (margins) are allocated to members and eventually paid out [13]. In an era where internet access is a vital utility, communities are reviving the cooperative model to get connected. One notable example is **Guifi.net** in Spain, a sprawling community-owned internet network structured as a "commons" with cooperative agreements – users collectively build and maintain network infrastructure, ensuring affordable access. While Guifi.net doesn't pay dividends (it reinvests in expanding connectivity), it demonstrates how communal ownership can challenge telecom monopolies and provide public benefit.

Municipal- or community-owned utilities, while not cooperatives in the membership sense, also exemplify participatory ownership at the city level. A powerful case is **Chattanooga, Tennessee's municipal broadband network**. In 2010, the city's public electric utility (EPB) built a fiber-optic network to deliver gigabit-speed internet citywide. A decade later, studies showed that this community-owned fiber network produced tremendous local dividends – not mailed checks, but broad economic gains. By 2020, **Chattanooga's "Gig City" network had generated an estimated $2.69** billion **in economic and social benefits for the area** [14], including **over 9,500 jobs created or saved** [15]. These benefits came from attracting businesses, improving education and healthcare access, enabling smart-grid efficiencies for EPB, and bridging the digital divide. The network's value exceeded its costs by more than $2.2 billion in that first decade [16]. Crucially, because the infrastructure is publicly owned, its gains accrue to the community: EPB reinvests revenues into grid improvements and keeps electricity and internet rates reasonable. In a sense, the "dividend" is paid as **economic development and cheaper utility bills** rather than cash. (However, EPB has periodically transferred modest surpluses to the city budget as well.) Other cities – from Ammon, Idaho to Stockholm, Sweden – have similarly treated broadband as a community asset, often with open-access fiber networks that let multiple private service providers use the infrastructure. In Stockholm's case, the city's fiber company Stokab leases out fiber capacity and returns profits to the city coffers, indirectly benefiting residents by funding public services. The lesson is that when the community owns the essential infrastructure, the value created by that infrastructure (whether monetary profits or public good) tends to stay local.

Even in the **energy sector**, cooperatives and community ownership are proving their worth. Countries like Germany and Denmark spearheaded the renewable energy cooperative movement. In Germany, citizens fed up with nuclear power and fossil fuels formed energy cooperatives to invest in solar panels, wind turbines, and biogas plants. By 2020 Germany had **835 energy cooperatives with around 200,000 members, who had invested a total of €3.2 billion in clean energy installations generating about 8.8 TWh per year** [17]. Many of these co-ops sprung up in the 2006–2013 period when feed-in tariffs made community solar/wind profitable; members typically earn annual dividends from selling electricity to the grid. Though policy changes have slowed new co-ops, the existing ones continue to pay returns. Surveys show their average annual dividend yields range from 3–5%, depending on the project. More importantly, they give communities agency in the energy transition – profits from a wind farm flow to local member-investors and town projects rather than to distant utilities. Denmark's approach goes a step further: national law historically **required that new wind turbine projects offer at least 20% ownership shares to local residents**. This policy helped spawn dozens of wind cooperatives. A flagship is the **Middelgrunden Offshore Wind Farm** in Copenhagen's harbor – a project co-owned 50/50 by the municipal utility and a cooperative of over 8,500 community members. In 2000, local citizens formed the Middelgrunden Wind Turbine Cooperative and collectively raised about **DKK 230 million** (roughly $35 million) by selling **40,500 shares at around $821 each to 8,553 people** [18] [19]. Each share corresponded to 1,000 kWh of expected annual production, and members receive dividends in proportion to their shareholding (often effectively a credit on their power bills) [20]. The project's **20 turbines (40 MW capacity) supply about 4% of Copenhagen's electricity** [21]. Middelgrunden demonstrated how engaging the community can overcome Not-In-My-Backyard opposition – initial public concerns faded after the co-op gave locals a direct stake in the project's benefits [22]. Two decades on, Middelgrunden remains **the world's largest cooperatively-owned wind farm**, and its success has inspired countless community energy projects worldwide. From village micro-hydro plants in Nepal to solar gardens in Minnesota, the principle is the same: when people jointly own the energy source, they share in the rewards (clean power, revenue, local jobs) and tend to be excellent stewards of the resource.

Land and Housing Trusts: Grounding Wealth Locally

Real estate – land and housing – is often a community's most valuable (and contested) asset. Traditional private ownership of land can lead to speculation, displacement, and concentrated gains for a few lucky owners, while renters and the broader community reap little benefit from rising values. **Community land trusts (CLTs)** and **limited-equity housing cooperatives** offer alternative models that keep land and homes under community control, thus preserving affordability and broadly distributing the benefits of development. These models became prominent in the late 20th century and have proliferated in the 21st as responses to housing crises and gentrification.

Community Land Trusts: Homes Without Displacement

On a once-blighted block in the Boston neighborhood of Roxbury, neat affordable homes now stand, each occupied by a family that might otherwise have been priced out of the area. This is the legacy of **Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative's community land trust**, one of the first urban CLTs in the United States. A community land trust is a nonprofit organization that acquires land (through purchase or donation) and holds it **in trust perpetually for community benefit**. Homes or other buildings on the land can be bought and sold by individuals, but the CLT retains ownership of the land itself and leases it to the homeowner via a long-term (often 99-year) ground lease. Because the homeowner is only buying the house, not the land, the purchase price is far lower than a market-rate home. In exchange for this opportunity, the homeowner agrees that when they sell, it must be to another income-qualified buyer and that they will receive only a limited portion of the increase in value (the rest stays with the property as "subsidy retention"). This mechanism keeps the home affordable for each successive buyer, **preventing the kind of speculative appreciation that fuels gentrification**.

Community land trusts typically have a **tripartite governance structure** to balance interests: one-third of the board seats are reserved for residents of CLT housing, one-third for other community members in the area, and one-third for public or expert representatives [23]. This ensures the CLT is accountable to both the people living on its land and the broader public interest. A great example of scale is the **Champlain Housing Trust (CHT)** in Burlington, Vermont – the largest CLT in the U.S. As of 2019, CHT managed over **2,400 affordable rental apartments and 600 owner-occupied shared-equity homes**, along with commercial and community spaces [24] [25]. The trust's assets exceed $100 million and over **6,000 people live in CHT properties on any given night** [26] [27]. Homebuyers in CHT's program purchase a house at an affordable price (often ~$150,000 less than market value) and agree to the resale formula – typically they keep **25% of any home appreciation, while 75% remains with the home** to keep it affordable for the next family. Over the decades, CHT's model has allowed over 1,300 families to attain homeownership who otherwise might never have been able to buy [28]. While individual owners don't gain full market windfalls, they do build some equity (the average CHT seller earns about $15,000 in equity after a few years, according to the trust's reports) and they have secure housing. Meanwhile, the community gains a stock of permanently affordable homes, insulating these properties from the speculative market. **Empirical data shows CLTs succeed at stabilizing neighborhoods:** for instance, a study in Minneapolis found that foreclosures were significantly lower on CLT homes during the 2008 crash, and nearby property values were more stable [29].

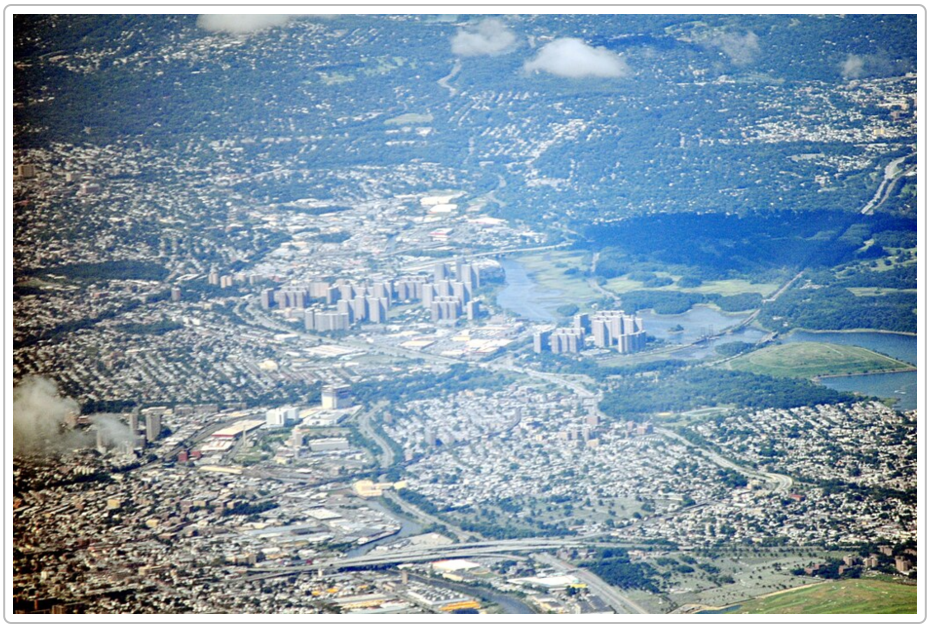
Crucially, CLTs aren't just an American phenomenon. In London, the **East London CLT** developed dozens of homes sold at prices linked to local incomes rather than market rates (the initial homes on a redeveloped hospital site sold for roughly £130,000 – a quarter of market value for that area). There are now over 300

CLTs in England and Wales, supported by government grants and local councils seeking long-term affordable housing solutions. In Nairobi, Kenya, an innovative urban CLT was piloted to regularize an informal settlement's land tenure, drawing on the CLT model to give residents collective land ownership and prevent slum clearance. And perhaps the most dramatic case comes from San Juan, Puerto Rico: the **Caño Martín Peña Community Land Trust**. In the 2000s, some 2,000 low-income families living along the polluted Caño Martín Peña canal organized to form a CLT that would own 200 acres of land under their neighborhoods [30]. This was a strategy to resist displacement as the city eyed redevelopment. It succeeded – the land trust was established, ensuring residents could stay and improve their community. Today those families lease their plots from the trust for $1 and can pass homes to heirs, but cannot sell to outside speculators. The CLT has secured millions in investment for infrastructure and housing upgrades without the looming threat that residents will be priced out once the canal is restored. By **"decommodifying" the land**, the community both attracted development and shared its gains broadly.

While CLTs mostly focus on homeownership and rentals, the concept can apply to other assets like community gardens, commercial spaces for local businesses, and even **community-owned farms**. In such cases, the trust ensures the land use serves local needs (e.g. providing fresh food or jobs) and that the value created (through agriculture or commerce) is not simply extracted by absentee landlords. In all these variations, a key ingredient is **public or philanthropic support**, especially upfront: CLTs often need grants, favorable land purchases, or policy help (like inclusionary housing requirements) to acquire land and seed their portfolio. Once established, however, CLTs can be self-sustaining, using ground lease fees or modest resale fees to fund their operations.

Limited-Equity Cooperatives: Shared Ownership of Housing

Another path to similar ends is the **limited-equity housing cooperative (LEC)**. In an LEC, residents collectively own their apartment building or housing development through a cooperative corporation, but the resale value of their shares is capped to keep it affordable. Each household in a limited-equity co-op buys a share (often priced very low, such as $500 or $1,000, subsidized by government or nonprofit support) and that share entitles them to occupy a unit and participate in co-op governance. They pay a monthly amount (co-op fee) that covers building expenses and mortgage. If they move out, they can sell their share back to the co-op or to another lower-income buyer, but usually only for the same price they paid (plus maybe some inflation adjustment or small increment). This prevents windfall profits and thus keeps the buy-in price low for the next family. Effectively, the co-op members collectively **are their own landlord**, without a profit motive to raise rents beyond what's needed for costs.



An aerial view of Co-op City in the Bronx, New York – the world's largest limited-equity housing cooperative – occupying a swath of high-rise towers (visible at center) amidst surrounding neighborhoods.

Figure: Co-op City in the Bronx. Opened in 1968–73 under New York's Mitchell-Lama program, Co-op City has **15,372 apartments home to roughly 50,000 residents** [31] . Residents purchased their co-op shares at below-market rates and agree to limited resale equity, ensuring long-term affordability. Decades on, Co-op City remains an "affordable oasis" in New York – its members have repeatedly voted **not** to privatize and cash out, preserving the cooperative for future generations [31] [32] .

New York City's **Mitchell-Lama program** (started in 1955) helped create many limited-equity co-ops like Co-op City. Under Mitchell-Lama, private or nonprofit developers built affordable apartment complexes with government subsidies and low-interest loans, in exchange for limits on profit. Residents in a Mitchell-Lama co-op buy shares at a controlled price and can sell them back only for that same price (plus maybe a small interest). Co-op City's shares originally cost ~$500 per room – a three-bedroom unit's share cost about $1,500 in 1960s dollars – and monthly carrying charges were kept modest. The agreement was that after 20 years, the co-ops could choose to convert to market-rate (dissolve the limited-equity restrictions) if two-thirds of members agreed. However, **Co-op City's members have consistently voted against privatization** even after the initial restriction period [33] . They decided that keeping their community affordable and mixed-income was more important than a one-time windfall from going market-rate. This speaks to a strong cooperative ethos: members value stability and collective benefit over personal profit. Co-op City's persistence has provided generations of middle- and low-income families (many of them civil servants, union workers, and immigrants) a rare chance to live in New York with ample space and parkland at an affordable price. The co-op is governed by a 15-member resident board that oversees a operating budget of around $240 million. Importantly, **any "profit" is reinvested or used to reduce charges** – in 2019, for instance, Co-op City issued credits to residents after a budget surplus. Other Mitchell-Lama co-ops include **Penn South** in Manhattan (2,820 units, established 1962), which similarly remains limited-equity by resident choice and maintains monthly charges far below Manhattan market rents. These success stories show LECs can anchor communities against gentrification.

Washington, D.C. provides another fertile ground for limited-equity co-ops, aided by the city's **Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA)**. TOPA, enacted in 1980, gives tenants the first right to buy their building if the owner puts it up for sale (often using assigned rights to partner with a nonprofit developer). Through TOPA, many tenant groups have co-purchased their buildings and converted them into cooperatives. As a result, D.C. today has **approximately 4,400 units of housing in about 99 limited-equity co-op buildings** [34] . These co-ops are spread across gentrifying neighborhoods, serving as bulwarks for longtime residents. Research by the D.C. Policy Center finds that limited-equity co-ops in the District have kept units affordable to people earning well below the area median income, even as surrounding rents skyrocketed. One example is the **Marina View Cooperative**, a formerly market-rate complex in Southwest D.C. that went co-op in the 1990s; members there have kept share prices around $15,000 and monthly fees affordable, even while luxury developments rise nearby. However, limited-equity co-ops face challenges too: they must maintain aging buildings with limited reserves, and some have struggled with governance or financing for repairs (since they can't easily borrow against skyrocketing property values without risking affordability). Cities like D.C. have formed task forces to provide technical assistance, recognizing these co-ops as precious community assets worth sustaining [35] .

Both CLTs and LECs illustrate a key principle: **separating the value of housing as a home from its value as an investment**. By restricting equity or ownership, these models ensure that increases in land and housing value (often driven by public investments or community efforts) benefit a broad group – future residents or the community – rather than just enriching a single owner. The "downside" is that individual owners don't get to partake in speculative gains; but the upside is stability and continued affordability. The trade-off can be seen as each generation paying it forward to the next. In practice, many residents in CLTs/ LECs are grateful to simply have secure, affordable housing – something increasingly rare – and are willing to forgo a jackpot payout. As one CLT homeowner in Burlington quipped, "I'm building some equity, but more importantly I can sleep at night not worrying about rent doubling."

Sharing Public Wealth: Royalties, Dividends, and Sovereign Funds

In 1982, the young state of Alaska embarked on a bold experiment: instead of allowing oil companies and a few individuals to pocket all the wealth from Alaska's oil reserves, the state would collect a portion of revenues into a public fund and **share the earnings directly with every Alaskan** each year. Thus was born the **Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD)** program – perhaps the world's best-known example of a public royalty-sharing scheme. The idea was simple yet radical: Alaska's oil and gas are collectively owned resources, so a chunk of the proceeds should be saved and invested on behalf of the people, yielding an annual *universal dividend*. Four decades on, the Alaska model has proven its popularity and resilience, inspiring discussions of "basic income" and similar funds elsewhere.

The Alaska Permanent Fund: Oil Wealth for All

Every eligible Alaska resident – man, woman, and child – who has lived in the state for a full calendar year can receive the Permanent Fund Dividend. The money comes from the Alaska Permanent Fund, a sovereign wealth fund that by 2025 held roughly **$81 billion** in assets [36] . The fund was built by saving a portion of state oil revenues (at least 25% by constitutional mandate) since the late 1970s, investing those royalties in a diversified portfolio of stocks, bonds, real estate, and more. Each year, a formula determines a sustainable draw (originally based on a 5-year average of fund earnings, now a percent-of-fund value payout). That amount is then divided evenly among all residents who apply. The first dividend was paid in 1982 at $1,000. Dividends have fluctuated with market returns – from a low of $331 (in 1984) up to a high of $2,072 (in

2015), not counting a special one-time $1,200 bonus in 2008. In recent years, dividends have been around $1,000–$1,600; for example, **in 2021 the PFD was $1,114 per person** (so a family of four received about $4,456) [37], and in 2024 it was approximately $1,300 plus a $300 energy relief bonus [38]. Since inception, the **PFD has averaged roughly $1,000 per year** [39], and for most of the 2000s it stayed in the $1,000–$1,500 range. About 600,000 Alaskans receive it annually, meaning on the order of **$600 million to $1 billion is distributed directly to households each year**, typically in October [40]. At times, the payout has been even larger: in 2015, when oil and stock market gains swelled the fund, every Alaskan got $2,072 (and that was after the state had reduced the calculated amount to save money).

This universal payment functions almost like a small basic income. While $1,000 a year won't make anyone rich, studies have found it *has* measurably reduced poverty and improved health and educational outcomes, especially in rural communities where subsistence activities are common (the money often helps pay for fuel and equipment for hunting/fishing) and where jobs are scarce. The dividend has become an important part of many family budgets – indeed accounting for about **6% of total household income statewide on average** [40], and a higher share for low-income families. Beyond economics, the PFD altered Alaskans' relationship to government: people feel and act like stakeholders in the state's resource wealth, arguably bolstering support for the fund's continuation [41] [42]. Politically, the dividend is enormously popular across the spectrum; attempts to reduce or redirect it are met with public outcry. (In recent years, with state oil revenues declining, Alaska's legislature has debated using more of the fund earnings to cover budget shortfalls, effectively cutting dividends. This has led to heated battles and even voter-led initiatives to constitutionalize the dividend formula.)

From a governance perspective, Alaska set up safeguards to minimize political interference and elite capture. The Permanent Fund is managed by a semi-independent corporation with professional investment managers; only fund *earnings* (not principal) can be spent, and for the first 35+ years the state followed a formula that insulated the annual payout from direct legislative manipulation. This ensured the fund's real value grew over time (it began with just $900 million in 1977; by 2000 it was ~$26 billion, and by 2025, $80+ billion [36]). The "sharing" is done in an egalitarian way – every resident gets an equal amount, rather than, say, proportional to one's taxes paid or something that would favor the wealthy. This universal approach likely contributed to its durability; it's seen as a right of citizenship in Alaska. As one researcher noted, Alaskans came to view the dividend "as an entitlement that all Alaskans share rather than as a public expenditure" [43]. In other words, it's the people's money. This broad buy-in has protected the fund from what one might fear – namely, politicians raiding it entirely in lean times or powerful interests diverting it. Of course, nothing is perfect: Alaska's experience also shows some unintended effects, such as the dividend's volatility (it can swing by hundreds of dollars year to year with markets, making household budgeting tricky) and the fact that, by itself, ~$1k a year hasn't solved systemic inequities (especially since living costs in Alaska are high). Still, the Alaska Permanent Fund stands as a pioneering model of a **Universal Basic Dividend** – essentially a **community-owned sovereign wealth fund** paying out cash to all members of the community.

The Alaska model has influenced other resource-rich regions. Several Canadian provinces established non-renewable resource funds (e.g. Alberta's Heritage Fund for oil revenues in 1976), but these mostly funnelled earnings into general government spending or specific programs rather than citizen dividends. One partial exception was Alberta's experiment in the 2000s of giving irregular "resource rebate" checks (once a $400 payout to all residents, cheekily dubbed "Ralph Bucks" after the Premier). **Mongolia** in 2010 announced plans for a sovereign wealth fund with dividends from its booming mining sector and even paid an initial ~$70 to each citizen, but political changes led the program away from pure dividends to targeted social spending. **Bolivia** took a different route by using gas royalties to fund a universal old-age pension (the Renta Dignidad), effectively sharing resource wealth with all seniors rather than everyone. And **Norway**, often cited for its massive $1.3 trillion oil fund, pointedly does *not* pay direct dividends; instead Norway's fund returns are used to cover up to 3% of the national budget each year (indirectly benefiting citizens via public services, and saving the rest for future generations). In short, few places have implemented the direct-per-capita dividend as fully as Alaska, though the idea is frequently discussed in policy circles – for example, proposals for carbon tax dividends (where revenue from carbon pricing would be distributed equally to citizens to offset higher energy costs).

Public Resource Funds and Community Royalties

Another category of participatory ownership involves communities owning rights to natural resources or critical infrastructure and collecting royalties or revenues on behalf of the public. Often these take the shape of **trust funds** or **public enterprises** where the proceeds support local budgets or projects (sometimes called "community wealth funds"). One example is **state government permanent funds** in resource-rich U.S. states. Besides Alaska, **Texas**, for instance, has the Permanent School Fund and Permanent University Fund – fed by oil and land revenues – that support public education (while not paying individuals, they substitute for taxes). **Wyoming** and **New Mexico** have permanent mineral trusts that generate income for state needs. These are essentially forms of collective ownership of subsoil assets.

At a more local level, some municipalities have negotiated direct community benefits from resource extraction. In the Marcellus Shale regions of Pennsylvania, a few forward-thinking counties set aside portions of gas drilling impact fees into community trust funds to be used for long-term public purposes (like improving parks, infrastructure, etc.), aiming to extend the benefits beyond the life of the wells. In Colorado, certain counties receiving federal mineral royalties have established scholarship funds for local high school graduates. These are ways to ensure the "commons" get a slice when private firms exploit local natural resources.

A unique case of community-level dividends comes from the world of indigenous self-governance. Many Native American tribes, after winning rights to operate casinos or develop natural resources on their lands, have chosen to distribute a share of those revenues to their enrolled members. For instance, the **Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians** in North Carolina uses profits from its two tribal casinos to issue **per-capita payments to all tribal members, effectively making them shareholders in the enterprise** [44]. The tribe directs 50% of casino net revenues to these per-capita distributions (the other half funds tribal government and services) [45]. In recent years the **semi-annual payments have averaged about $6,000 each (around $12,000 per person per year)** [46]. In June 2018, for example, every eligible Cherokee member (including children, whose shares are held in trust) received roughly **$5,552** (before taxes) as their six-month dividend [47]. For a family of four, that could mean over $40,000 a year – a significant income supplement. These payouts have had profound impacts: poverty rates among the Cherokee have dropped, and one study in western North Carolina found that Cherokee children's educational and health outcomes improved after the casino dividend program began in the late 1990s. The steady cash stipends also allowed more families to start businesses or invest in homes. Of course, casino revenues can fluctuate – for example, the Cherokee per-capita distributions dipped during 2020 when COVID shuttered casinos, then hit record highs in 2021–2022, and were expected to drop about 8.6% in 2023 amid softening gaming receipts [48] [49]. This volatility requires careful budgeting by families and the tribal government. To promote savings, the Eastern Band recently launched a program to encourage or even mandate putting a portion of minors' payouts into trust for education or future needs [50]. Other tribes have similar systems: the Chickasaw Nation and Choctaw

Nation (Oklahoma) give smaller annual dividends; the Osage Nation historically distributed oil royalties to tribal members (famously leading to immense wealth – and exploitation – in the 1920s); and some Western tribes with lucrative casinos pay upwards of $20,000 annually to each member. While these are not without controversy (concerns over dependency or infighting over enrollment), they represent a form of communal asset ownership – the entire tribe, as a collective, owns the casino or the oil, and shares the profits accordingly.

Beyond resources and gambling, communities are even considering **public share ownership in infrastructure and spectrum**. In some countries, municipalities have stakes in utilities like telecom networks or ports and use the dividends for local needs. A novel idea floated by economists is that when governments auction public assets like electromagnetic spectrum (for mobile networks) or emissions permits, a portion of that revenue should go into a *citizens' trust* that pays out dividends. No country has yet set up a permanent citizen's dividend from spectrum, but the concept is akin to Alaska's oil fund – treating the airwaves as a public commons that could fund a universal benefit.

The theme in all these cases is aligning monetizable assets with public ownership. When done well, it can tame the "resource curse" and counter inequality. However, distributing cash to citizens is not the only approach. Some communities instead opt to use shared wealth for collective goods – for example, **Scotland's community land ownership** movement (where villages have bought out large estates) usually reinvests land profits into local development projects, subsidized housing, and community enterprises rather than paying individuals. Similarly, **Namibian conservancies** (community-run wildlife management areas) earn money from tourism and hunting concessions – in 2018, conservancies generated about **N$140 million (US$10 million) in cash and in-kind benefits to local communities** [51]. Much of that value is delivered via jobs (e.g. **N$60 million in wages** from lodge and hunting operators in 2018 [52]) and community funds for clinics or schools, though some conservancies also declare dividends to member households in years of surplus. The choice of whether to pay direct dividends or provide services is an ongoing debate – each community finds the right balance.

Community-Owned Investment Vehicles: Collective Capital for Local Gain

Even outside traditional co-op or public utility structures, new models are emerging for communities to jointly invest in development and build wealth. These include things like **municipal real estate investment trusts (REITs)**, **community investment trusts (CITs)**, and other shared-equity funds that allow ordinary residents to own a piece of local commercial or housing assets.

One pioneering example comes from Portland, Oregon. In the city's Jade District – a diverse, working-class neighborhood – a nonprofit in 2017 created the **East Portland Community Investment Trust (CIT)** to enable residents to collectively purchase a local strip mall. The property, known as Plaza 122, houses small businesses (many run by immigrant entrepreneurs) that serve the neighborhood. Through the CIT, **any resident of four ZIP codes can buy shares in the property for as little as $10 a month** (up to a max of $100/month) [53] [54]. Before investing, individuals must take a brief financial education course called "Moving from Owing to Owning" [55], ensuring people understand the risk and commitment. Once in, their investment is *loss-protected* – Mercy Corps (the nonprofit initiator) arranged a letter-of-credit guarantee so that if the property were to lose value, investors would at least get their principal back [56]. Investors receive **annual dividends from the rental income** (after expenses) and also benefit from **appreciation in the**

share price as the property value rises and the mortgage is paid down [57]. After a minimum holding period, they can sell their shares back to the CIT at the updated share value. The results so far have been impressive: between 2017 and 2024, the CIT's share price nearly doubled from $10 to **$19.65** [58], reflecting successful debt repayment and increased property value. Over 300 residents have participated, with an average investment of around $30–$50 a month. **Between 2017 and 2022, the annual dividends averaged a 7.6% return** on investment for shareholders [59] – far outpacing a savings account, and quite meaningful for families with otherwise limited assets. In total, the CIT has distributed tens of thousands of dollars in dividends (for example, in 2021 it paid a **4.57% dividend, totaling $16,886 across all investors** [60]). Perhaps more telling are the personal stories: one participant, Fabiola, was able to use her accrued CIT investment of $4,700 as part of a down payment on a home, fulfilling a dream [61]. Others speak of feeling more connected to their neighborhood because they *own a piece of it*. The CIT is governed by a board that initially included nonprofit and banking experts but is transitioning to more community investor representation. By blending private investment with public-minded safeguards, this model creates a **"starter asset"** for families who have never owned property, while keeping ownership local and preventing the displacement of beloved businesses.

In Chicago, a similar concept is being explored through the **Neighborhood Investment Company (NICO)**, which structured a hyper-local REIT in the city's neighborhoods. NICO's pilot in Los Angeles's Echo Park neighborhood (the concept's first implementation) bought a portfolio of apartment buildings and then offered shares to local residents for as little as $100 [62] [63]. The idea was to let renters and neighbors own equity in the neighborhood's rising real estate values – essentially **"build equity while renting"** [64]. NICO created two classes of shares: a Class L for local residents and a Class N for general investors. Local residents get some preferential terms (such as lower minimum investment and perhaps priority on certain returns) to encourage community participation [62]. The REIT, structured as a public-benefit corporation, must pay out 90% of taxable income as dividends (per REIT rules) [65]. While NICO is a for-profit model (targeting around 5–10% annual returns), its public-benefit mandate and local recruitment aim to ensure that at least a portion of the financial upside in gentrifying areas flows to longtime community members, not just outside developers. Early outcomes from Echo Park's NICO include dozens of residents investing and quarterly dividends being paid (in 2020–21 the dividend yield was around 3%, with expectations of ~10% long-term including appreciation [66]). NICO and the Portland CIT are part of a broader innovation of **Community Investment Vehicles (CIVs)** – essentially financial structures that let communities pool capital to acquire or co-own assets that are important to them (be it housing, retail space, solar farms, etc.). A recent report documented over 20 such CIVs launched in the U.S. since 2010 [67] [68], ranging from Market Creek Plaza in San Diego (where residents owned shares of a shopping center via a trust) to community-led real estate cooperatives in Minneapolis and Boston.

These investment vehicles often face steep challenges: legal complexities (securities regulations), the need for an "anchor" investor or guarantor to get started, and the task of building trust with community members who may be unfamiliar with investing. To mitigate risk and abuse, many are structured with caps (e.g. an individual can't invest above a certain amount, so no single party can take over) and with missions locking in community benefits (for example, requiring a certain percentage of profits to be reinvested locally or limiting resale of shares to prevent flipping). **Governance** varies – some are nonprofits, others are for-profits with community advisory boards, others like CIT are hybrids (a C-corporation owned by individual shareholders but originated by a nonprofit and governed by a mix of community and expert directors) [69]. A noteworthy design principle is that if the purpose is wealth-building for residents, the entity must actually allow for dividends to be paid. (Some well-intentioned community trusts are set up as nonprofits that reinvest everything, which is noble but doesn't directly improve households' finances.) For instance, the East

Portland CIT explicitly chose a C-corporation model so it could **provide direct dividends to resident investors** (nonprofits can't do that) [69] . Meanwhile, to maintain affordability or mission, some CIVs choose not to maximize profit – for example, by keeping rents affordable for local businesses or by placing caps on resale value of shares. These decisions must balance the **wealth-building goal vs. community benefit goal**, which sometimes conflict (a higher return for investors could mean higher rents from small business tenants, for instance, which might hurt the community). So far, best practices suggest involving the community deeply in these trade-offs from the start, and enshrining mission in legal structures (like benefit corp status or binding commitments).

Governing the Commons: Best Practices to Prevent Capture and Corruption

As promising as participatory ownership models are, they are not automatically equitable or immune to problems. In fact, the **design of governance** – the rules, oversight, and democratic mechanisms – often determines whether these models truly deliver broad-based benefits or whether they get derailed by rent-seeking and elite capture. Through trial and error, practitioners have identified several best practices that help maintain the integrity and effectiveness of community-owned ventures.

1. Build in Democratic Control and Broad Membership: Almost all successful models ensure that no single individual or small clique can dominate decision-making. Cooperatives accomplish this through one-member-one-vote bylaws and elected boards. Community land trusts use the **tripartite board** structure to balance interests [23] . Rural utility co-ops, by law, hold regular member elections (often by mail or at annual meetings) for their boards. Inclusive membership and voting rights help prevent "insider" capture – e.g. a developer or politician co-opting the entity for personal gain – because power is diffused among many stakeholders. That said, **active participation** is needed to realize this democratic potential. Some co-ops fell into trouble when members became apathetic and stopped attending meetings or running for the board, creating a vacuum in which entrenched managers or a small board could act unchecked. Thus, a cultural norm of engagement, plus perhaps stipends or other incentives for participation, can bolster democracy.

2. Transparency and Accountability: Openness in finances and operations is a powerful deterrent to corruption. Many co-ops and trusts publish annual reports to their members, disclosing budgets, major contracts, and any conflicts of interest. Some are even legally required to do so (credit unions, for instance, file financials with regulators, which members can review). For example, a scandal at **Pedernales Electric Cooperative** in Texas in the 2000s – where the board had awarded themselves luxurious perks and the manager had a $300,000 salary and nepotistic contracts – came to light and was rectified only after member-lawsuits forced disclosure [70] . In response, Pedernales implemented strong ethics rules, open board meetings, and term limits. A **member-driven push for transparency** transformed that co-op from one of the most corrupt to a more accountable utility [71] . The lesson is clear: **sunlight prevents fungus**. Community entities should operate like public bodies – posting meeting minutes, conducting independent audits, and allowing member inspection of records. If participants can see how funds are used, it's harder for someone to line their pockets or divert resources.

3. Checks and Balances in Governance: Some models formalize checks: For instance, **rotating board seats or term limits** can prevent a fiefdom from forming. Many housing co-ops limit board members to 2-3 consecutive terms. In CLTs, the split board (residents vs. others) ensures that neither the residents alone nor external stakeholders alone can push through decisions that betray either affordability or resident interests – they must compromise. Another balance mechanism is requiring **member approval for major actions** (like dissolving the co-op or selling a community asset). In Co-op City's case, any decision to privatize required two-thirds of residents' approval, a deliberately high bar that helped keep the coop from being sold off [33] . Similarly, Alaska's Permanent Fund principal is constitutionally protected – it would take a statewide voter referendum to spend the principal, an intentionally arduous step [72] . These structural hurdles protect longevity and guard against impulsive or self-interested moves.

4. Capping Returns to Discourage Speculation: Many participatory models explicitly cap the return any individual can get, to reinforce that the purpose is service, not profiteering. In co-ops, this appears as limited dividends on member capital (for example, a coop might pay at most 6–8% interest on member shares if at all, to prevent co-op membership from being just an investment vehicle rather than a patronage-based collective). Mondragon famously limits not just salaries but also the interest it pays on internal capital accounts. In housing co-ops and CLTs, the **limited equity formulas** and resale price restrictions exist precisely to stop a windfall that could incentivize speculation or quick resale flipping. These limits align everyone's incentives toward long-term collective benefit rather than short-term personal gain. Without them, an investor might join a co-op or CIV with the sole aim of eventually demutualizing and cashing out the assets at market value (there have been cases of this, such as some food co-ops in the UK being taken over by investors). Therefore, strong **anti-demutualization clauses** are important – requiring supermajority votes and large payouts to members or community charities if a co-op/trust ever converts, making demutualization less attractive. The UK's Building Societies had lacked such clauses, and many demutualized in the 1990s when members were enticed by instant stock windfalls; conversely, U.S. credit unions have resisted demutualization partly due to stricter member vote rules and less lucrative conversion terms.

5. Community Oversight and Shared Leadership: Participatory ventures should reflect the community in leadership. Whether it's a **community advisory council** for a municipal broadband network or training and elevating resident leaders in a housing co-op, empowering people from within keeps the organization rooted in its mission. When outside "experts" are involved (e.g. a nonprofit aiding a CIT or a government official on a CLT board), their role is to support, not dictate. In Caño Martín Peña's land trust, for example, extensive community assemblies and "stewardship committees" guide development decisions, ensuring the professional staff implement what residents want [73] . This bottoms-up governance builds trust and reduces the chance of corruption because more eyes are on every decision.

6. Legal Protections and Enforcement: Good governance is sometimes about having legal backstops. For instance, if co-op board members violate their fiduciary duty, there should be recourse – members can call a special meeting to remove them, or sue if necessary. Laws like an "inclusive stakeholders" requirement or cooperative corporation statutes give members standing to challenge misbehavior. Some U.S. states now require co-ops to adopt conflict-of-interest policies and conduct periodic member satisfaction surveys (especially for electric co-ops), spurred by exposés of mismanagement. Regulators can also play a role: credit union regulators ensure those institutions are not taking excessive risks or enriching insiders improperly (there have been a few credit union failures tied to fraud, but they remain rare given oversight). For public trusts or funds, independent trustees or ethics boards help. Alaska's fund, for instance, has a board of trustees appointed for expertise, not political loyalty, and must operate transparently; the dividend amount used to be formulaic, which prevented annual political meddling.

While these measures strengthen governance, **patterns of failure** can still emerge if they are ignored. One pattern is **“insider control”** – for example, some rural electric co-ops became dominated by long-serving board members who faced no election competition and became cozy with management, leading to wasteful spending (like lavish travel or nepotism) [74] . This often happens in the absence of active membership oversight. The antidote was grassroots member organizing – recently, co-op members in places like South Carolina and Nebraska have formed reform groups (with help from organizations like We Own It) to oust complacent boards and implement term limits and transparency [75] . Another failure pattern is **demutualization/privatization**: if a cooperative or trust becomes very valuable, members may be tempted by a buyout or conversion. The UK saw most of its mutual building societies (thrifts) demutualize for this reason – once members realized they could get windfall stock shares by voting yes, many did, and subsequently those institutions were bought by banks or collapsed. The best guard is cultivating a sense of pride and collective identity that outweighs short-term profit – as seen at Co-op City, where residents rejected offers to privatize because they felt it “would not be right for their neighborhood” [32] . Educating members on the long-term consequences of demutualization (higher costs, loss of control) also helps inoculate against it.

Finally, **corruption** remains a risk in any human enterprise, but participatory ones have moral authority to leverage. A community-owned project can tap into members’ sense of mutual responsibility – essentially a social contract that “we’re all in this together, so let’s not mess each other over.” In many cases, the **social pressure** and visibility of behavior in a tight-knit cooperative or neighborhood can deter would-be corrupt actors more effectively than any regulation. For example, at CHCA home care coop, the fact that workers knew each other and openly discussed pay and conditions meant any attempt by management to unfairly benefit a few would be quickly spotted and called out. In contrast, in a faceless large corporation, corruption can hide behind hierarchy and secrecy.

When Community Ownership Falters: Lessons from Setbacks

Not every participatory ownership venture succeeds. It’s important to examine failures and limitations to understand what can go wrong. One cautionary tale comes from within Mondragon itself: in 2013, its largest cooperative in the appliance manufacturing sector, **Fagor**, went bankrupt under competitive pressure from global rivals. Despite Mondragon’s mutual support system, Fagor’s losses were too great to bail out entirely. About 1,800 workers lost their jobs (though most received offers in other co-ops, about 25% could not be relocated). The collapse shook Mondragon’s federation and exposed tensions between cooperative ideals and market realities. Some critics pointed out that Mondragon’s globalization strategy – operating factories in low-wage countries that were not worker-owned – may have diluted its solidarity and contributed to Fagor’s missteps (e.g., they expanded production abroad rather than upgrade at home) [76] [77] . The lesson: **co-ops aren’t invincible** – they must still innovate and stay competitive. Moreover, if a cooperative grows very large, internal governance can become “sleepy” or bureaucratic, as economist Larry Summers quipped [78] . Mondragon has worked to reinvigorate participation and inter-coop solidarity post-Fagor, but the event underscores that even the strongest participatory enterprises face business risk.

In housing, limited-equity co-ops sometimes fail due to property mismanagement or external pressures. In the 1970s and 80s, New York City sold many dilapidated buildings to tenant co-ops for $1 under a program to stabilize neighborhoods. Some of those co-ops thrived, but others fell apart when major repair bills came due that the low-income members couldn’t afford, or when infighting and lack of professional know-how led to poor upkeep and default on taxes. Support organizations learned that **ongoing training and technical assistance** is vital – successful co-ops often have alliances with nonprofits or federations that provide management guidance, loan refinancing, and leadership development. Where that support was absent, a co-op could run aground. Similarly, some early CLTs struggled to scale up because they remained volunteer-run; without staff to handle transactions and stewardship, a CLT can stagnate or lose track of its ground leases. Funding for CLT operations (often through city housing funds or philanthropy) has proven key to durability.

Another pitfall is **"mission drift"**. A community enterprise might originally form with an inclusive, anti-speculative mission but later leaders could slowly shift priorities. For instance, a rural electric co-op might start engaging in side businesses (fiber internet, propane sales, etc.) that benefit a subset of the board's friends, while neglecting core service or raising fees without member understanding. This drift can be subtle and hard for disengaged members to notice until it's advanced. Frequent member communication and mission reaffirmation (e.g. via surveys, town halls) can counteract drift. Some co-ops embed their social mission into bylaws so that any major change requires a full member vote.

Elite capture is a constant threat, especially in community-driven government programs. Participatory budgeting, for example, has sometimes seen local elites influencing outcomes disproportionally. In ownership models, elite capture could look like a community trust's board being taken over by politically connected individuals who steer contracts to themselves or their allies. To guard against this, rules like conflict-of-interest disclosures and independent audits come in. The **South Carolina electric co-op scandal** in 2018 revealed that a small group of insiders at one co-op had literally stolen funds – the investigation only gained traction after a state audit was mandated [75]. Ensuring external oversight (be it by members, regulators, or partner organizations) provides an extra layer that purely internal governance might lack if everyone internally is in cahoots.

Finally, some participatory models fail not from internal issues but **external shocks or hostility**. A supportive policy environment matters. For example, many German energy co-ops thrived under feed-in tariffs, but when the policy shifted to competitive auctions favoring big players, co-ops found it hard to initiate new projects [79] [17]. A number of them have gone dormant as a result. In the UK, funding for CLTs has waxed and waned with political changes – without grants, it's hard to acquire pricey land for affordable housing, limiting CLT growth. And in some instances, incumbent for-profit interests actively oppose community ownership. Big telecom lobbyists in the U.S. have pushed laws in several states banning or restricting municipal broadband (they don't want cities to "compete" with private ISPs). These laws have stymied projects that could have benefited communities. So, part of making participatory ownership work is **organizing politically** to defend the right of communities to own assets. The successes of co-ops and trusts often owe something to enlightened public policy: from the Cooperative Bank acts of the 1930s to the urban homesteading programs of the 70s to today's social enterprise legislation.

Conclusion: The Future of Shared Ownership

The stories and data in this report reveal a diverse ecosystem of participatory ownership flourishing in cities, counties, and regions around the world. While they vary in form – a worker-owned factory in Spain, an oil fund dividend in Alaska, a community wind farm in Denmark, a land trust in Puerto Rico, a neighborhood investment fund in Portland – all share a common DNA: **the belief that the assets which shape a community's prosperity should be owned by or at least yield wealth to the members of that community**. This stands in contrast to the dominant model of the past few centuries, where capital (land, infrastructure, enterprises) is owned by private individuals or shareholders who often have no stake in the locale, extracting wealth in the form of rents, profits, and royalties that flow outward. Participatory ownership models redirect those flows inward or broadly, striving for a more inclusive economy.

The empirical evidence suggests these models can deliver substantial benefits. They **build assets for people** who have been excluded from traditional wealth-building (e.g. renters becoming co-op homeowners, workers becoming co-owners, citizens getting dividends). They tend to **stabilize communities**, as seen in lower turnover and higher civic engagement in cooperative housing or the improved economic resilience of areas with municipal broadband. They can also encourage more **sustainable management of resources** – when the community owns the forest or the broadband network or the apartment complex, there's incentive to think long term and balance profit with public good. Moreover, these models often spur **innovation in governance** that can spill over into healthier local democracy: members learn self-governance skills, transparency norms improve, and people see that they can have a direct hand in shaping their economic destiny.

That said, participatory ownership is not a panacea. These initiatives require **hard work, capacity building, and enabling conditions** to succeed. They don't eliminate conflict – members can disagree intensely on strategy, or communities can struggle with how to share gains equitably – but they provide a forum to hash those issues out with everyone at the table. And they are not immune to market forces or human folly. What they do offer is a framework for tackling 21st-century challenges (inequality, disinvestment, climate transition) with 21st-century principles: **equity, inclusion, and sustainability**.

Looking ahead, there are several trends to watch. One is the intersection of technology and shared ownership – for example, the rise of **platform cooperatives** (worker-owned gig platforms) aiming to give Uber drivers or Airbnb hosts collective ownership of digital marketplaces. Another is renewed public policy support: cities like New York, Oakland, and Austin have in recent years launched funds and technical assistance programs to seed worker co-ops and CLTs, recognizing them as tools for racial and economic justice. States are exploring laws to ease the creation of community investment trusts and to permit public banks or funds that resemble the Alaska model (there have been proposals for a California Climate Dividend, for instance, funded by carbon cap-and-trade revenue). Internationally, movements like the **Preston Model** in the UK (community wealth building through local procurement and co-ops) and experiments in **stakeholder capitalism** in the EU are aligned with participatory ownership goals.

Ultimately, the spread of these models will depend on demonstrating tangible success and maintaining trust. When people see a neighbor receive a dividend or buy groceries with their co-op member rebate, or when a local solar farm co-op cuts electricity bills, it builds credibility and interest. Education and outreach are vital to scaling up – many people still haven't heard of these options. Those that have sometimes carry outdated stigmas ("co-ops are inefficient" or "communal ownership means no one is accountable"). The track record documented here should help dispel that: cooperatives can be globally competitive and efficient (Mondragon, German co-ops), communal ownership can be well-managed and accountable (Alaska's fund, Cherokee's distribution system), and in fact these models often outperform conventional counterparts in their resilience and stakeholder satisfaction.

In a world grappling with inequality, climate change, and social fragmentation, participatory ownership offers a path to **shared prosperity** and **empowered communities**. It invites us to reimagine the economy not as a zero-sum battle over slices of a pie, but as a collective endeavor where the pie's ingredients – land, labor, capital, technology – are contributed by and for the many. From the Arctic Circle to the equator, from dense cities to rural villages, people are proving that when you give communities a stake, they take care of what's theirs – and *we all* reap the dividends.

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