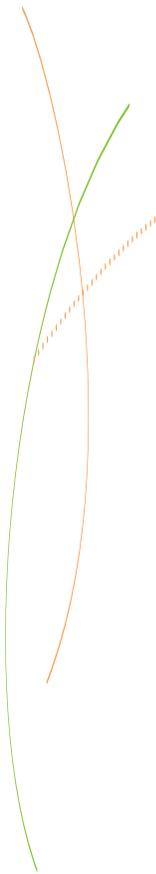


WILDFLOWERS INSTITUTE

# A THEORY TOWARD BUILDING SOCIALLY SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

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*May 2005*



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*Hanmin Liu*  
*May 2005*

This paper draws upon our experiences in nine communities in the United States and China and describes the basic framework of Wildflowers Institute regarding community self-transformation in response to shifting economic policies and practices over time.<sup>1</sup> Communities are constantly changing, but most of the changes result from economic forces rather than from the actions of people in the community. Thirty-five years ago, for example, Guangwai was a rural community of more than fifty-five thousand people located outside Beijing. Community members earned their income from collective farming and manufacturing railroad-related equipment and supplies. There were community schools, a community hospital, a lake near the farming area, houses for farmers and their extended families, and shelter for livestock. Over half of the households were organized around farming and care of livestock, and all family members cooperated to help one another in their daily chores. Ten different nationalities lived together.

Since the introduction of the market economy in China in 1979, Guangwai has grown to more than ninety thousand people, with a migrant population of twenty-one thousand and seventeen nationalities. The community, now located within Beijing proper, has a thriving commercial, scientific, and technological marketplace. Commercial enterprises and residential living facilities have replaced farmland. Schools and hospitals have increased in size and number. And most residents live in high-rise apartment buildings, though some still live in traditional-style single-story housing. The center of attention in households in Guangwai is now the single child or the television. In most families, both parents work in different organizations or corporations.<sup>2</sup>

Although the market economy and globalization stimulate entrepreneurialism, innovation, and growth, they also cause significant social and cultural changes in the community, including increased diversity, dislocation, health disparities, social isolation, and a host of other social dysfunctions. Community leadership must respond by re-forming a culture and building a shared vision to strengthen community identity; bring together people with different assets, resources, and strengths; and provide direction, support, and opportunities for all members of the community.

To address these issues, Wildflowers examines the social implications of the market economy and develops new approaches to building socially sustainable communities. We look for self-organizing patterns that organically emerge from within the community and that form the community's healthy practices and social gravity for engagement, replenishment, entertainment, and inspiration. We work to help communities grow from the bottom up and the inside out. We bring leaders together and help them form a culture that gives young people direction and capacity, that protects the most vulnerable members of the community, and that incubates innovation and wealth creation.

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1 The ideas expressed in this paper emerged from a series of lengthy and oftentimes passionate discussions about these changes that was conducted by Wildflowers fellows, our external evaluator Professor Yunxiang Yan, Ms. Analiese Richard, and Wildflowers staff during Wildflowers meetings and social labs. These discussions led us to think about the impact of the global marketplace and its influence on ethnic, racial, and indigenous communities in the United States and China.

2 Xiaobo Cui, Chunyu Li, and Jing Liu, *Anthropological Importance of Beijing Family Diet Culture* (Beijing: Capital University of Medical Sciences, 2005), p. 1.

## Demographic Changes and Cultural Diversity

In the past, many communities of color were better able to achieve these goals because strong kinship, a common worldview, and greater cultural and social cohesiveness prevailed in these communities. Generations of people living and working together formed the culture of their community. Living in the same location from one generation to the next created a common worldview and a predictable process for social formation. Notable exceptions are African Americans and indigenous Indians in America. When their ancestors were forced to adopt Western beliefs, virtues, and leadership formations, they were stripped of most of their traditional culture and left without a “compass” to give them direction in their lives. But despite all the social injustices that have afflicted African Americans and Indians, they have developed their own ways of building community and nourishing and replenishing themselves. However, although they have made amazing strides toward correcting these injustices, such as during the civil rights era and with effective legal challenges to treaty violations, both communities are experiencing greater social problems today than ever before. They are also suffering from the ever-increasing gap between rich and poor that is prevalent in the United States and abroad.

Because of demographic changes in the United States at large since the 1960s, and the strength of the marketplace, there is significantly greater diversity in the community today than yesterday. For example, in 1983, when East Palo Alto, California, was incorporated as a city, the majority of the population was African American. Today, over 60 percent of the people in East Palo Alto are from Mexico and Central America. Hispanics now outnumber African Americans by a ratio of 3:1.<sup>3</sup> A new demographic such as this requires communities to re-form their cultures. African American and Hispanic leaders in East Palo Alto have been actively involved in dialogue, and they have come together to form One East Palo Alto, a community-based nonprofit organization dedicated to helping residents “reinvent” the community.

The challenge that all communities are facing is how to form around a shared culture that at once honors and respects each race and ethnicity, recognizes the contribution of past and present leadership, and builds a cultural interface that brings different cultures together in powerful ways. Such a relevant and sustainable community culture nourishes and protects the vulnerable, fosters learning and development, and cultivates innovation, creativity, and growth.

It took nature millions of years to create its biodiversity; but globalization is challenging us to successfully bring together different indigenous, ethnic, and cultural groups in such a way that they will have to coexist with their differences in just a few decades. This challenge—creating strong social trust and cohesion within a culturally diverse community—needs innovative processes and tools. It requires new kinds of social and open spaces as well as processes and tools for community members to see their own invisible patterns so that they can assess and leverage their culture for community building. It also requires new technologies and spaces that serve as lenses for those on the outside to see the power and spirit of the community from the inside. (In a separate paper, we describe VisionBuilding, Wildflowers’ processes and tools for uncovering the culture of the community and building social sustainability.)<sup>4</sup>

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3 Carilee Pang Chen, *African American and Hispanic Communities in East Palo Alto* (San Francisco: Wildflowers Institute, 2003), p. 4. Available at [www.wildflowers.org](http://www.wildflowers.org).

4 Hanmin Liu, *VisionBuilding* (San Francisco: Wildflowers Institute, 2002). Available at [www.wildflowers.org](http://www.wildflowers.org).

# Modernization, Globalization, and Challenges to Community Sustainability

At Wildflowers, we define socially sustainable community as having social trust and cohesion, virtues, social spaces, and other social resources that are self-generative, replenishing, and self-transformative. The problem confronting all communities is that the market economy creates a tension between competitive relationships and cooperative relationships. There is also a tension between the motivations for pursuing personal interests and the motivations for pursuing community interests. These tensions erode social trust and cohesion in the community.

To understand these tensions, we must look back several hundred years. In agrarian societies, the community culture cultivated a cooperative spirit and the involvement of people who were interested in and dependent on the whole community. In a very fundamental way, individual survival before modernization depended on families and kinship supporting one another and on the whole community coming together to build and defend itself. Community leaders, elders, and members supported a common system of beliefs and premises that formed social trust, family cohesion, and spiritual replenishment. Spiritual leaders and artists created and honored symbols and music, literature, paintings, dance, and other forms of cultural representation that reflected the values and spirit of the community. There was little room in traditional culture for valuing self-interest and competitive behavior. Chart 1 illustrates the community culture before modernization.

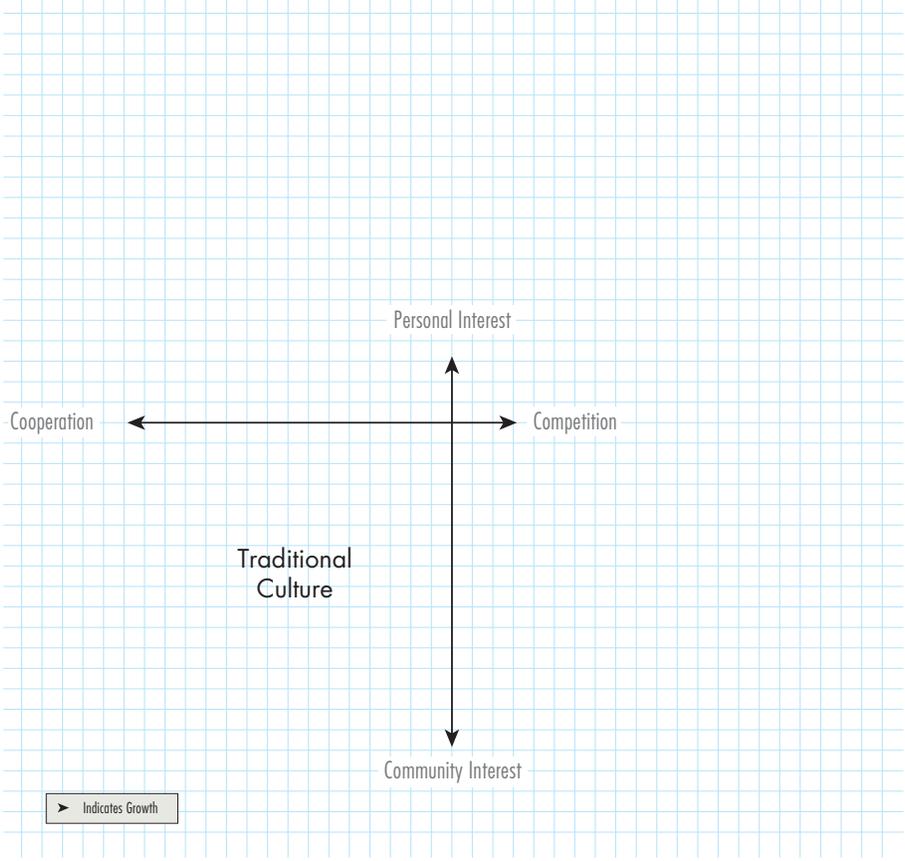


Chart 1: Community Culture before Modernization

The Industrial Revolution transformed the agrarian community culture. From the eighteenth century to the twentieth century, the market economy grew as a result of competition and self-interest. Individuals and institutions in the community organized themselves to compete with one another for their own survival and betterment. When individuals, families, and community institutions embraced competition and self-interest, the community’s ability to be self-generative or sustainable was reduced. Market forces shaped the definitions of human dignity and success in individual financial and material terms rather than in familial and spiritual terms. As Chart 2 shows, the traditional culture with its spirit of cooperation and community interest has been diminishing since the Industrial Revolution, while modernization has accelerated the importance of the individual. Now, family and community members are more valued for their individual productivity, ability to realize self-interest, and competitiveness; leadership is viewed hierarchically as well as interdependently.

Globalization has accelerated this trajectory. In the community today, those who build social trust and the spirit of the community—informal leaders, spiritual leaders, healers, elders, community artists, and other social players—are all struggling to survive in a global market economy. Their strength is not in individual competition but in collective efforts to build social capital and solidarity for the whole com-

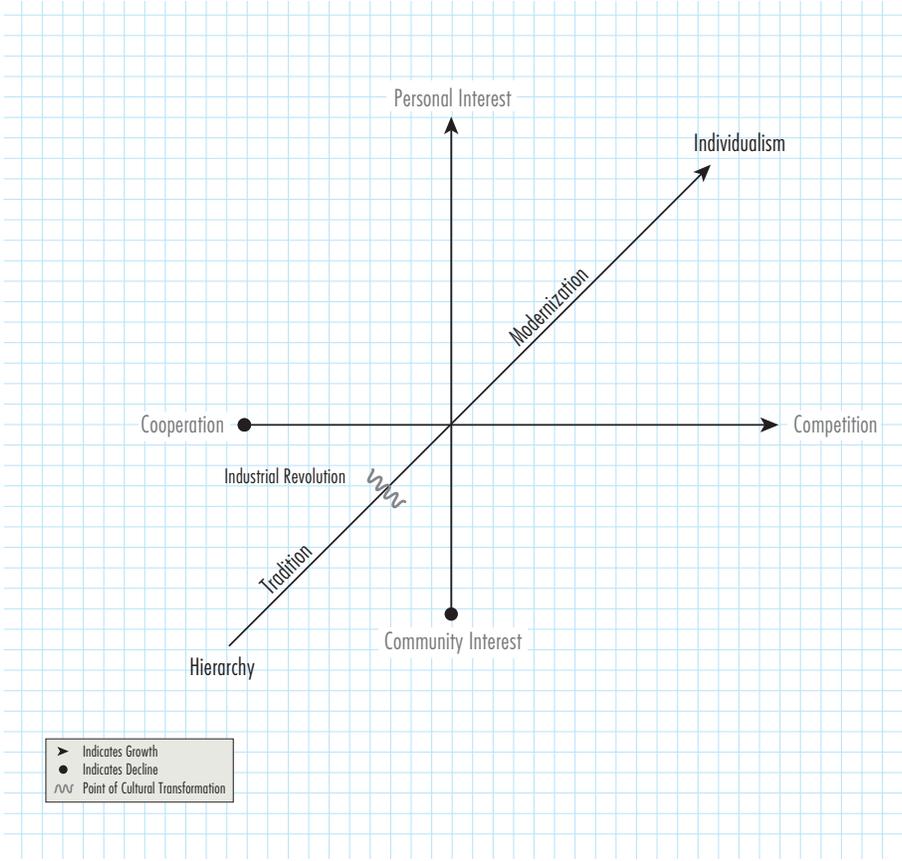


Chart 2: Community Culture before and after the Industrial Revolution

community. On the other hand, individuals in the community who are talented, innovative, and entrepreneurial are flourishing and prospering in the global marketplace. In many communities, there are significant tensions between wealth builders and social builders. Since the values of these two groups are very different, there is no shared culture that brings them together. Thus, communities are diminished in their ability to be socially sustainable, and many are building gates, walls, and barriers to separate themselves from those whose values are different from their own. Chart 3 reflects the diminishment of informal leaders, healers, spiritual leaders, community artists, and elders, and the growth of individualistic artists, innovators, intellectuals, athletes, and business leaders in the process of globalization.

To address the growing social inequalities and health disparities as by-products of a market economy, local governments, wealth creators, and philanthropic institutions build the capacity of the service providers in the community so that they can respond positively and proactively to these inequalities and disparities. These social players provide funding and support to community-based organizations such as schools, health clinics, and senior citizens centers and to after-school programs, affordable-housing projects, and community art programs. While significant improvements in communities have resulted from these efforts, the survival of these community-based organizations depends on their competitiveness in the marketplace. When engagement is defined as though it were a competition, it becomes increasingly difficult for nonprofit organizations to strengthen social trust and to cooperate with others

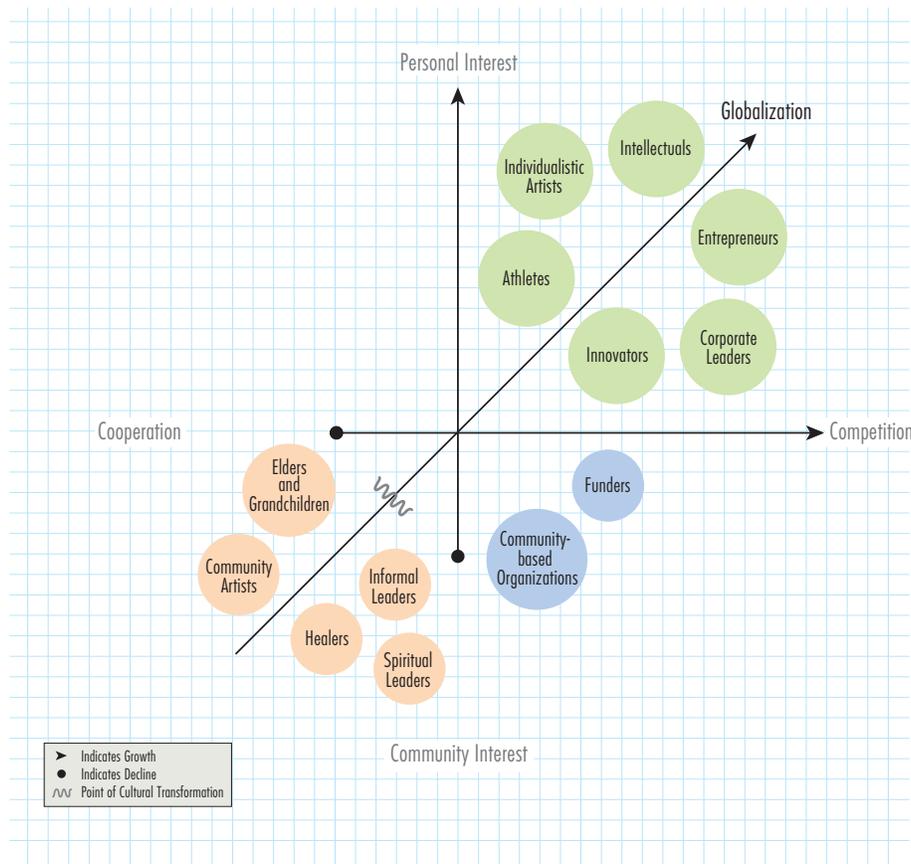


Chart 3: Community Culture and Social Players in the Global Marketplace

in the community. We have observed that funding institutions and government agencies often endorse competitive approaches to grant and contract awards that have resulted in the loss of core values, virtues, and time-honored traditional ways.

But it is not in the mission and purpose of community service providers to cultivate and promote the cooperative core of the community culture, which in our view is essential for building socially sustainable communities. All communities want to participate in the marketplace but on their own terms. The Hispanic and Filipino communities have their plazas and social spaces for intergenerational family members to gather and reinforce social trust and identity. The elders in the African American community in East Palo Alto provide social guidance and spiritual direction to young people. A good deal of this work is ongoing and situational. It happens all the time—in the barbershop, at athletic games, on street corners, at two o'clock in the morning, and in homes and organizations.

One of the most important challenges in cultural formation work is to identify the power of the culture, which is generally invisible to people inside and outside the community. Many aspects of the community culture are conscious and explicit, but some aspects are unconscious and implicit, such as cultural premises. For example, in *Applied Anthropology*, George Foster makes the following observation about cultural premises:

*All members of a group share a common cognitive orientation, a comprehension and interpretation of the world around them which, in effect, set the terms and conditions on which they feel life is lived. Some aspects of this common cognitive cognition are fairly explicit, in that they are found at an overt, conscious level and can be verbalized by most members of a society. . . . Other aspects of cognitive orientations are more covert and subconscious; they represent assumptions and premises so deeply imbedded in the individual's mind that normally he is not aware of them.*<sup>5</sup>

Wildflowers' work is to develop new approaches to building socially sustainable communities. We help the community see the invisible and do the "impossible." The cultural premises of the community that are unconscious and implicit are most often the most powerful influence on the attitudes and behaviors of community members. But when community leaders are conscious of the assumptions, postulates, and premises that govern thinking and behavioral patterns, they have more control over their destiny.

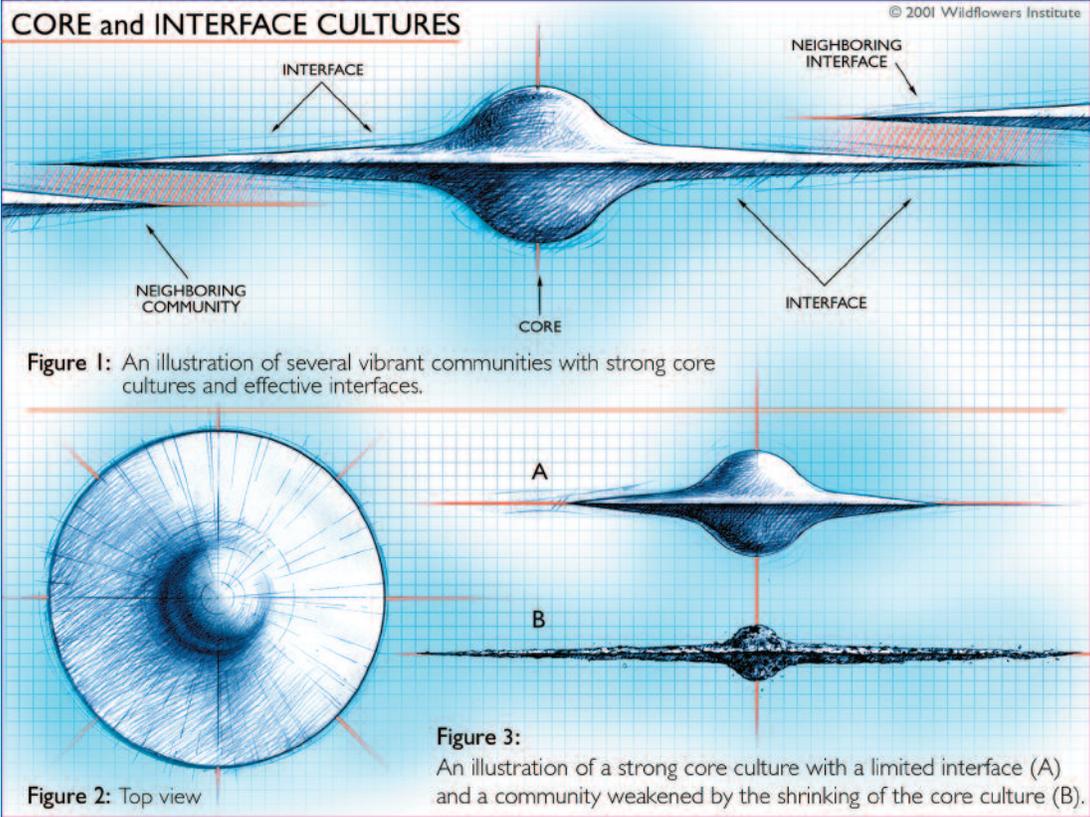
The leadership of the Lao Iu Mien community in the San Francisco Bay Area, for example, became decisively more effective after uncovering the underlying expectations that informed its responsibilities to community members and leadership formation. The leadership came to this understanding at a Wildflowers VisionBuilding session in the fall of 1999. Staff members at the Filipino Education Center (FEC) in San Francisco discovered the importance of *kanlungan*, a spiritual space for replenishment and ancestral reflection, to the Filipino community. After their discovery, staff members understood why so many Filipino grandparents, parents, and grandchildren travel from afar on a daily basis to FEC. Organized by parents and teachers, FEC provides bilingual after-school programs for children and has unintentionally become a kind of *kanlungan* for the Filipinos who go there.

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5 George M. Foster, *Applied Anthropology* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969), pp. 67–68. For additional information on cultural premises, see George M. Foster, *Statement on the Concept of Premises Underlying Our Efforts to Develop Personal Networks* (San Francisco: Wildflowers Institute, 1992). Available at [www.wildflowers.org](http://www.wildflowers.org).

# A New Understanding of Community Culture

At Wildflowers, we think that the key to building a socially sustainable community is naming and claiming the premises that inform the culture. We view the community culture as having specific leadership formations, virtues, structures and spaces, and centers of social gravity. Although there are many different ways to define “culture,” Wildflowers looks at existing dynamic social formations in communities and searches for the authentic leadership, virtues, and the premises that inform social relationships. Our work has demonstrated that a contemporary community always has two kinds of culture: the core and the interface (see Figures 1, 2, and 3).



### **The Core Culture**

The core culture is a system of beliefs, premises, and behavior patterns that builds identity and social trust and replenishes community members. The core holds up the community's moral and ethical behavior and is deeply rooted in time and history. Its leadership formation is vertical and horizontal according to age, experience, and wisdom. Its virtues define the individual in the context of community identity. In some communities, formal leaders have lost their moral direction and many of their virtues, and we would not view such individuals as holding up the core culture of the community. But in the same community, there are informal leaders to whom others go for advice and help, and it is these individuals, many of them women, who are providing leadership for their community. The core is also upheld by elders, spiritual leaders, and grandparents who have gained certain insights into the formation of social trust, cohesion, and replenishment.

We make a distinction between traditional culture and core culture. People in traditional culture follow the customs of past generations, and certain aspects of this culture may not be relevant to contemporary times. By contrast, people in the core culture follow both time-honored practices and beliefs and contemporary approaches to building social trust and spiritual nourishment.

We came to recognize this distinction when we were involved in a community research project on child obesity in Guangwai community, Beijing, China. In 2003 a research team at Capital University of Medical Sciences conducted a survey of dietary culture and its changes among local residents in Guangwai community. One major finding of this survey was that local residents continue to believe in the traditional child-rearing notion that to be fat is to be strong. This notion directly contributed to the widespread obesity among children as parents and grandparents force-fed their children, even when they didn't want any more food.

We found an emerging core culture in Albuquerque, New Mexico, that incorporates traditional customs with contemporary practices. The Red Wolf Clan is composed of men and women, young and old, from different tribes in the Southwest. It holds sacred ceremonies and traditional healing practices for all Indians who are far from their own tribe, nation, and reservation. The clan is building a core culture among "urban" Indians as an essential way of nurturing and helping them grow and develop.

### **The Interface Culture**

The interface culture is a system of beliefs, premises, and behavior patterns that helps individuals and institutions go beyond their own boundaries to build understanding and relationships with other groups, institutions, and communities. The interface is open and flexible and grapples with choices. The leadership, when building interfaces between neighboring communities, works best when it operates horizontally—bringing different ideas together and forging new approaches to relationships and to working together.

As mentioned earlier in this statement, because of demographic changes, the racial and ethnic character of a community changes dramatically over time as does the income levels of its members. Therefore, all communities must nurture a culture that helps children, youth, adults, and elders learn about and build meaningful and productive relationships with people whose backgrounds are different from their own. Moreover, we think that both the core culture and the interface culture are essential in the market economy—the former nurtures and replenishes those individuals whose strengths come from the whole community, while the latter fosters individual growth, innovation, and development. It is a "both/and" community culture.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Hanmin Liu, *The Wildflowers Approach* (San Francisco: Wildflowers Institute, 2003). Available at [www.wildflowers.org](http://www.wildflowers.org).

## The Essential Spaces for Socially Sustainable Communities

Wildflowers views a community that is socially sustainable as having four important but significantly different social and relational spaces. First, there are Replenishment Spaces that hold up moral and ethical values, beliefs, and social trust; some of the spaces are sacred (see Chart 4). These spaces encourage people to cooperate and motivate them to act in the interests of the whole community. The elders, spiritual leaders, grandparents, and informal leaders claim and embrace these spaces. And as such, Replenishment Spaces are safe, spiritually replenishing, and trusting.

The Lao Iu Mien community in the San Francisco Bay Area is composed of more than five thousand individuals who immigrated from the highlands of Laos in the early 1980s. In an effort to re-form the Iu Mien community, the former chiefs and spiritual leaders of the villages in Laos came together and developed a leadership and social formation that led to the establishment of eight districts. They elected council members, a district council, and a central council. In addition, the informal leaders of the community established the Lao Iu Mien Culture Association (LIMCA), which serves as an interface for other racial and ethnic communities as well as for the Iu Mien community at large. These Replenishment Spaces provide the social safety net and support for the Iu Mien in the Bay Area. The informal and voluntary leadership in the district and central councils and in LIMCA upholds and promotes a core culture that is rooted in Chinese Taoism.

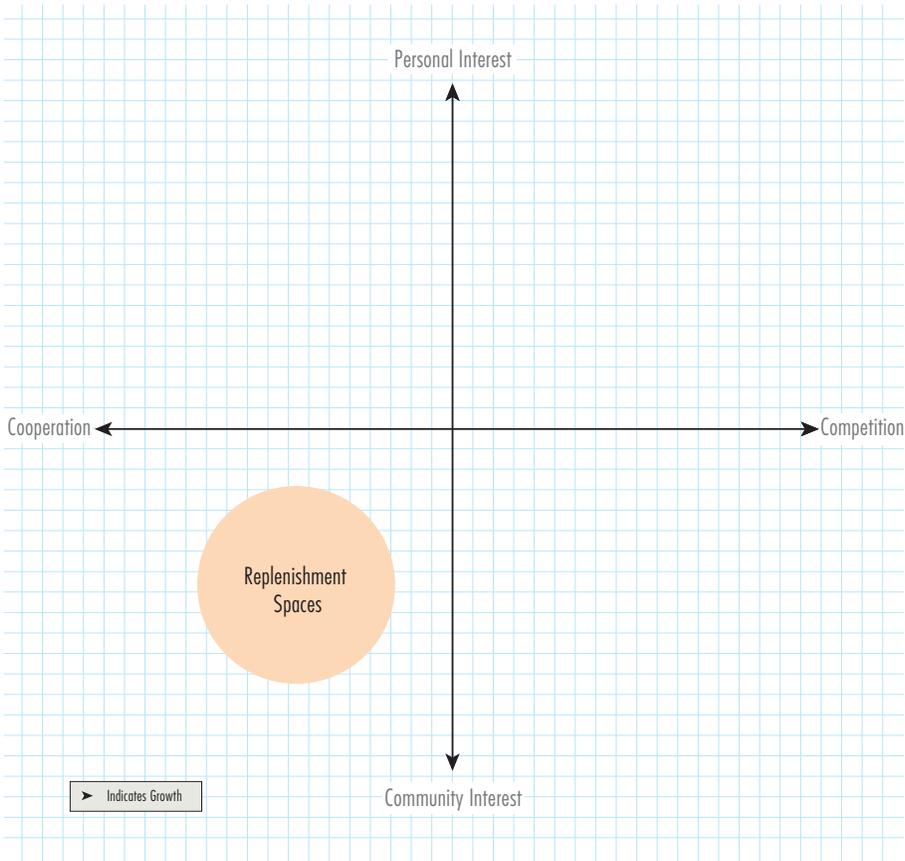


Chart 4: Replenishment Spaces

Second, there are Public Service Spaces where public goods such as health care, education, youth development, and commercial services are provided. These services are much more effective when their practices and policies are rooted in the culture of the community (see Chart 5). For example, at Frank’s Landing in Washington State, the Indian leadership has established the Wa He Lut School for Indian children to learn about their traditions and cultures and to develop themselves fully. The school leadership and culture are deeply rooted in their clarity of purpose and the values of endurance and longevity. And the Hispanic leadership in East Palo Alto, after recognizing the importance of strengthening families in a market economy, established the town’s first ethnic-based nonprofit organization, Nuestra Casa (Our House), whose mission is to promote education in families and the community. In Xujiacao community, Ningbo, China, the local leadership has a person reading an entire newspaper every day to some fifty to sixty elders who are either illiterate or visually impaired. And in the same city of Ningbo, a government referral service connects people of all ages who call in to seek technical help, such as plumbing or electrical services, at their residence or workplace. The referral service also follows up with a call to see if people received good service. Were they pampered? Did they feel emotionally satisfied? Was the problem solved?

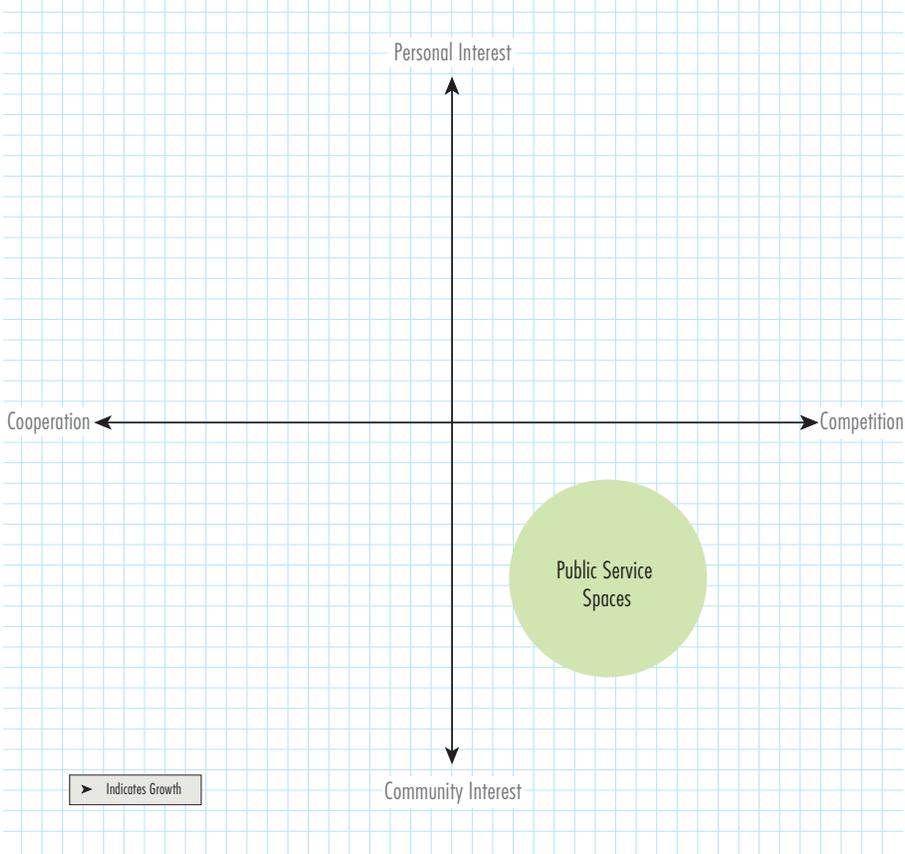


Chart 5: Public Service Spaces

Third, the community must have Personal Growth Spaces for young and old, women and men, individuals and groups—spaces that foster growth on a noncommercial basis (see Chart 6). These spaces are critical to helping both individuals and the community develop fully. At Wildflowers, we look in the community for the cultivation of younger intellectuals and younger artists by elders and others more experienced than they. In South Central Los Angeles, the leadership has identified a cadre of youth and adults and given them significant responsibilities to help heal racism and the spirit of the community. The cadre is composed of extremely bright and talented individuals of different races and ethnicities: an East Indian woman in high school, a young Latino man, a Cuban Japanese woman, and African American men. This core group is focused on social healing as a primary strategy for gang prevention. What is particularly important about this group is the space that members create for personal sharing—a space that transcends age, race, and ethnicity.

Under Wildflowers’ theoretical guidance and support, researchers at Fudan University, medical professionals from Sitang Hospital, and government officials have worked together to address the new social problem of social alienation and isolation among elders in Sitang community, Baoshan district, Shanghai. During the course of this project, the subdistrict and district governments accepted our recommendation that they build a public space as a center of social gravity to help elders with their alienation and isolation. The district government is financing and developing a park of considerable size instead of an apartment complex. The intention is to create a teaching and learning space for elders, children, and families to come together to share, engage, and exercise. The health leader of Sitang

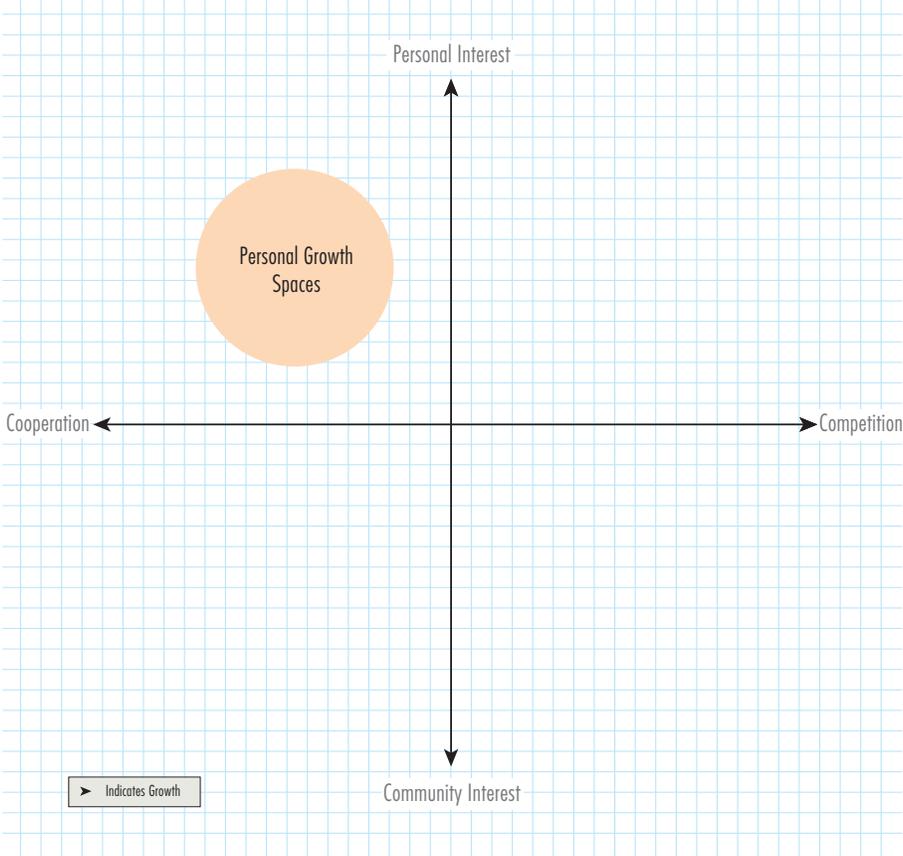


Chart 6: Personal Growth Spaces

Hospital had this to say about the project: “Although the local government suffered financially by building a park instead of an apartment complex in the short term, it gained a lot in terms of community harmony and public health, something that is more important in the long run.”<sup>7</sup>

Fourth, there must be Wealth Creation Spaces in the community so that entrepreneurs can flourish (see Chart 7). In some of the most marginalized and underserved communities, much of the talent leaves the community, creating a vacuum in which drug dealers, for example, take over the community. Since most of the informal leaders struggle to help their community survive by volunteering and supporting one another, the notion of helping individuals create their own wealth seems counterintuitive. But without Wealth Creation Spaces, the best and brightest leave the community, never to return. The individuals who do build successful businesses in the community move to other locations when the business environment is not optimal. Those people who are rooted in the core culture of the community need this space for innovation and wealth creation. Leaders in Shanghai and Ningbo have capitalized on global markets and have wisely developed their local economy as well as their technology and knowledge base. They send their most talented young people abroad to study and have focused on creating job opportunities and good business environments for wealth creation at home. To varying degrees, all nine communities that Wildflowers is working with are involved in different approaches to enterprise development, and they see the building of these spaces as critical to their sustainability.

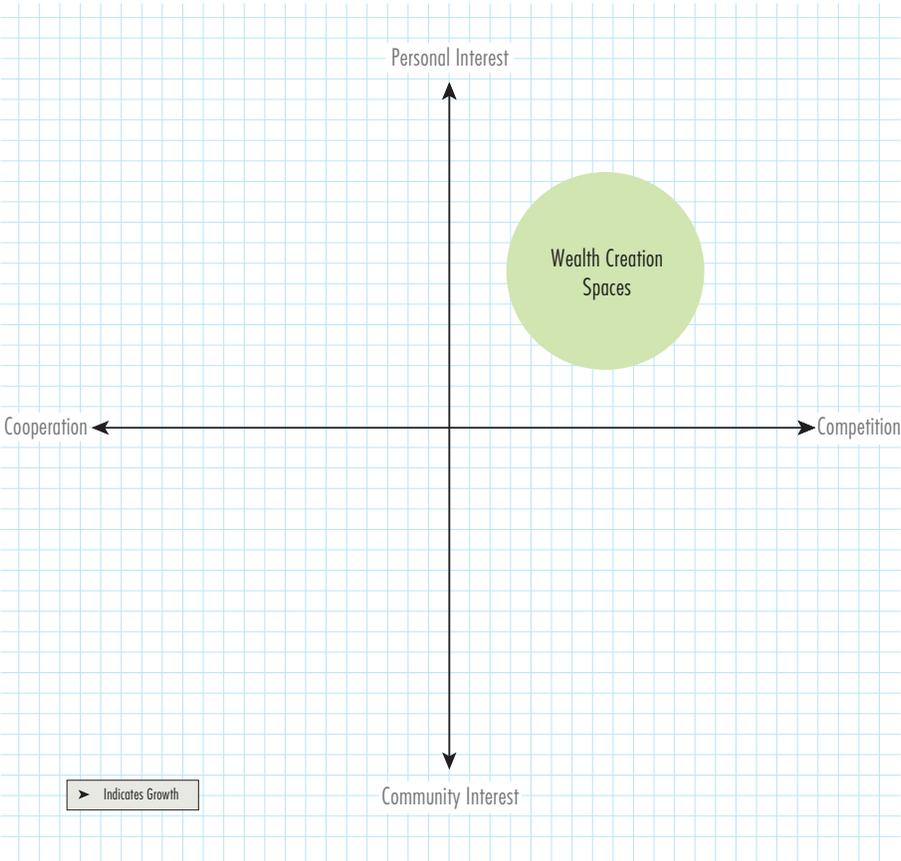


Chart 7: Wealth Creation Spaces

<sup>7</sup> Yunxiang Yan, “An Evaluation of Wildflowers Institute’s Programs in China in 2004” (San Francisco: Wildflowers Institute, 2005), p. 7. Available at [www.wildflowers.org](http://www.wildflowers.org).

Finally, once the different relational spaces that foster replenishment, public services, personal growth, and wealth creation are in place, there must be an overarching vision community members share that honors and respects their differences and that leads to the development of the commons (see Chart 8).

The current trend in market-oriented communities all over the world is the one-sided development of wealth creation and innovation and the diminishment of social trust and replenishment. Community-based organizations can only partially address the social inequalities, but they cannot rebuild social trust or provide spiritual replenishment. This work must be the responsibility of the community leaders. At Wildflowers, we have seen formal and informal leaders conscientiously build a community culture that nurtures both the whole community and the individual. In the relational spaces of the community, elders, grandparents, informal leaders, service providers, mentors, and wealth creators see and respect one another and work together toward a shared vision of a diverse community. We also have experienced the power of women in leadership roles as they build this shared understanding and forge relationships between those who honor the core culture and the innovators and wealth creators. We have seen women take more leadership in community building—crossing gender, age, and experience—and they are constantly working toward growth and change from the inside out.

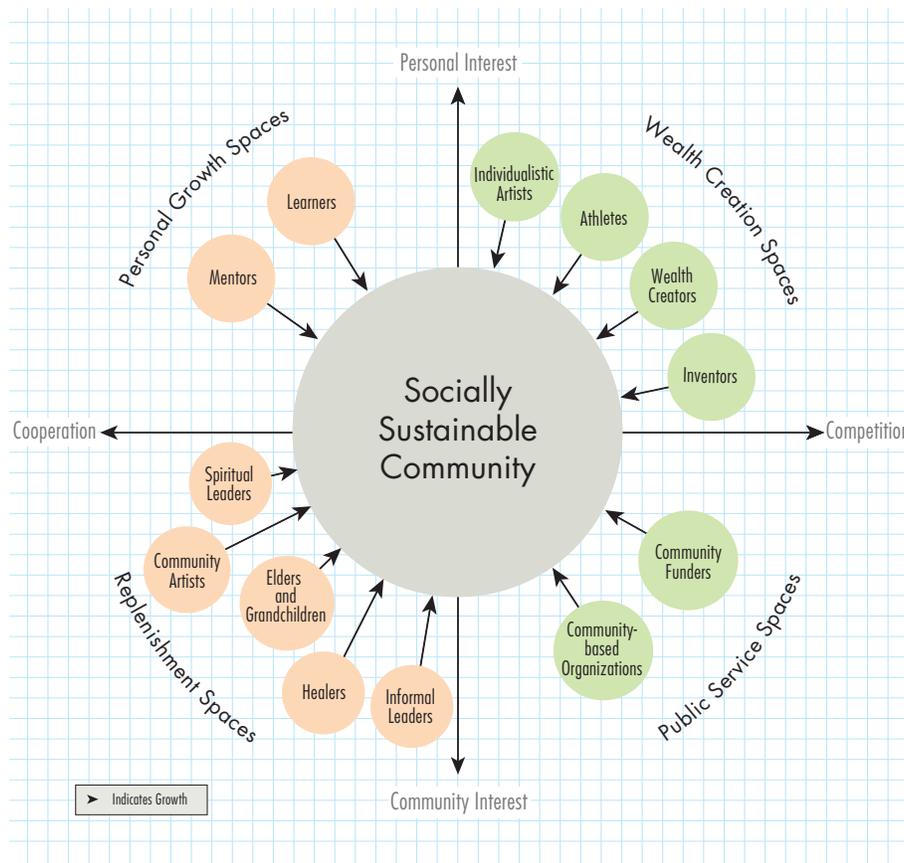


Chart 8: Wildflowers Spaces for Building Socially Sustainable Community

## Curriculum for Building Socially Sustainable Communities

The design of the curriculum was inspired by the power of a mirror from the Western Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). Skillful artisans made this precious Chinese mirror for the imperial court. When the sun shines on the face of the mirror, it reveals a pattern that, when reflected on the ground, was previously invisible. The mirror was used in ancient times to reflect not only one's face, but also one's heart and soul. Wildflowers staff experienced the power of this mirror during a visit to the Shanghai Museum in 1980.



Wildflowers's goal is to construct a curriculum that holds up different mirrors and lenses to individuals and the whole community to evoke a much deeper understanding of change and social formations over time. We help groups of leaders transform their community by enabling them to construct a temporal mirror for seeing their collective past and present; and we help the community build its own lenses for those on the outside to see what is vital and sacred to the life of the community and what are its shared visions for the future.

The curriculum gently confronts individuals with who they are and expects them to learn and grow. The motivation for change must come from within the person and within the community. Wildflowers offers opportunities for individuals to develop their capabilities following five different parts of a training program to build socially sustainable communities.

First, we start with *clarifying the mental model(s)* that individuals use to view the community and their assumptions underlying the strategies for social change. While it might be instinctual to look for needs, deficits, and barriers, we think it is important instead to look for and identify the informal systems that are fair and socially generative and that bring out the collective spirit of the community. So much of community formation depends on having a lens that sees the positive, the emerging ideas and leaders, and the potential in the community.

Second, we help individuals *see the "invisible" patterns* that bring them together in the community. We help them identify the people and places that serve as centripetal forces—where community members naturally gravitate, on their own, to others for advice and nourishment and to social and sacred places for spiritual replenishment (the core culture). We also help individuals identify other people and other places that act as centrifugal forces—going outward, beyond boundaries to explore, understand, and create something new (the interface culture). We have the community map its core patterns for building social trust and its interface patterns for innovation and creation work. In this mapping process, the community names and claims people and spaces that form the identity of the community.

Third, we help leaders cultivate enabling spaces or environments that ***unleash the centripetal power*** of the core culture. All human systems—families, groups, associations, organizations, and the whole community—must have a “cultural compass” to guide them as they grow and change; there must be a set of deeply rooted core values and practices that ground all people in their decisions and directions in life. By naming and claiming these cultural strengths, the community explores ways to foster, support, and protect the individuals who personify the core, such as the elders, informal spiritual leaders, and community artists. Wildflowers helps leaders develop approaches to further protect sacred spaces and to design and build new open spaces where the holders of the core culture and spirit can further develop social trust, safety, and replenishment among all members of the community.

Fourth, Wildflowers helps leaders ***build spaces that enable community members to interface*** with other people and institutions outside the community. The key to positive intercultural and interracial relationships is having a highly effective interface culture that fosters intellectual curiosity, appreciation of differences, and synergy. Two environments are fundamental to the growth of a powerful interface: spaces for personal growth and for innovation and wealth creation. Spaces for personal growth are always safe. Such spaces help individuals reflect on their experiences in life to deepen their understanding of and to develop their capacities to lead, cooperate, and follow. Having spaces where individuals can take risks, be creative, make mistakes, and accept failures is integral to their being successful. Spaces for innovation and wealth creation help individuals invent, create, and develop something new. Making something new happen involves having a process that works. Knowing this process and developing the business capacities in finance, marketing, and sales to carry out this process in a predictable manner is the key to success.

Fifth, we help community leaders ***understand the impact of globalization*** on their community and develop strategies to engage positively and constructively in the marketplace. By and large, the market economy drives social and cultural change, and community leaders must figure out strategies to take control of the changes that are happening in and around them. They must cultivate different sectors of their community so as to be economically sustainable. They must form a culture of the community that respects both the individual and the collective and builds social trust among all community members. They must also be clear about their own terms of engagement and negotiate effectively with those from the outside. Wildflowers helps community leaders make explicit their leadership formation and helps them explore different mechanisms that promote fairness and balance to those in the core and interface cultures.

## Emerging Work Going Forward

Wildflowers plans to assist the community in wealth creation by developing small enterprises that recognize and build on the culture of the community. As the community becomes more socially sustainable, there is greater readiness for community members from the different social and relational spaces to come together and work productively on developing businesses. We have several goals in mind. Small enterprise development builds business capacity and provides jobs and income for community members. It also incubates new approaches to social living. For example, there are local community theaters that serve meals during showtime and noodle shops that offer healthy meals at reasonable cost. In every community, people use creative talent, innovation, and self-organizing patterns to get things done. Wildflowers seeks to help the community cultivate this talent and turn these assets into wealth creation. We will help individuals or small groups construct a vision and develop a business plan for their endeavor. We will link them with technical assistance and financing mechanisms. We will challenge them

to be strongly competitive in the marketplace but to be accountable and yielding to those who hold up the core culture of the community. Wildflowers will look for opportunities to help them replicate their successes in other communities and to actively search for ways that we can strengthen and perhaps even participate in their business model.

One of the most fundamental challenges for the community is to strike some balance among the asymmetrical situations caused by the market economy. In order for the economy to grow to new levels not yet achieved, not only must policy makers and funders look beyond making profits and lobbying for policies that benefit the private sector, but they must help communities build their leadership capacities to function effectively as a socially sustainable human system—a system that draws on the strengths of each racial and ethnic group as well as brings people together with different perspectives, directions, and cultures. Also needed are an explicit culture of the community and the formation of new spaces and enterprises that honor the history and culture of different indigenous, ethnic, and racial groups. Only then will the spirit and soul of the community be unleashed. To build this capacity in communities, Wildflowers humbly offers its framework, processes, tools, and “spaces” for learning about and reflecting on building socially sustainable communities.

## **WILDFLOWERS INSTITUTE MISSION STATEMENT**

For more than a quarter of a century, Wildflowers Institute has focused on leadership development and community building in the United States and abroad. We help communities uncover and utilize the strengths of the various cultures within the community. Wildflowers helps them plan, grow economically, and be more socially sustainable by:

**Discovering** the virtues, self-organizing principles, and formations of family and community and applying that understanding to the planning and development of programs, services, and policies

**Developing** leaders among youth and adults rooted in the cultures of the communities

**Designing** social spaces for civic engagement

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