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TO WIN IT

Participatory Action Research and Transportation Projects

RECENT EVENTS IN THE US — the call for greater inclusivity and the markedly harsher impact of COVID-19 on communities of color — bring into strong focus the structural inequities that reside in and beleaguer our society. Mass transportation by its very nature is a web of interconnection that weaves people and places together. For the larger macrocosm to function cohesively, communities need to decrease disparities between them, share common standards of public services and establish baselines of environmental justice for all. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines “environmental justice” as requiring that “no group of people should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, governmental and commercial operations or policies” and calls for “fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.” (EPA 2015) Yet, low socioeconomic status groups face consistently increased risk of premature death from fine particle pollution, among 13.2 million Medicare recipients studied in the largest examination of particle pollution-related mortality nationwide. (Zeger 2008)

To achieve this equity of resources, public agencies would do well to engage communities, particularly low-income communities of color, through earnest and high-quality meetings, workshops, and project development efforts. The typical templated public outreach programs fail and disenfranchise many communities. Participatory Action Research (PAR) offers both a set of best practice principles as well as methods that go above and beyond traditional public outreach. This paper examines PAR in concept, in practice and through the context of two case studies.

Participatory Action Research: The Head and the Hands

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH is a knowledge and community-driven civic activation process. Acknowledging the critical uniqueness of every community's identity, PAR embodies guiding principles that must be customized for each context. This research paper surveys 14 research works on PAR and identifies these characteristic five principles: (1) Community-Building, (2) Establishing Trust, (3) Meeting People Where They Are, (4) Developing Stakeholders and Alliances, and (5) Inclusivity. These principles describe the engagement processes and the lasting outcome of PAR processes. (See Chart 1: Best Practices Principles)

The essence of PAR is building the group's power, knowledge, and action. (Stoecker 2016, 2:20) Stoecker recommends an overarching methodology for PAR application, with the understanding that the research is in the service of the project and that meeting the regulatory public engagement requirements can also nourish a long-term PAR commitment, which in turn fortifies the communities ability to receive future projects' public engagements. PAR necessitates a rigorous consensus-building process whose intangible by-products, including mutual understanding, trust, harnessing shared resources, are as valuable to the community as the immediate tangible rewards. (See Chart 2)

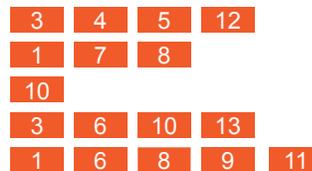


Best Practices Principles in PAR

Survey of Literature (Halley & Hsu)

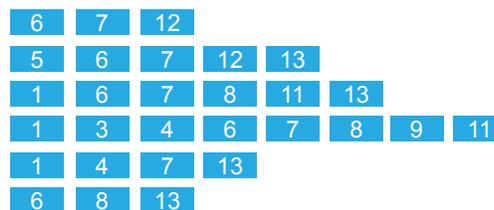
Community-Building

- Individual Empowerment
- Existence of active Community-Based Orgs
- Maintain a presence in the community - be available
- Synergy across community entities
- Bridging Social Ties



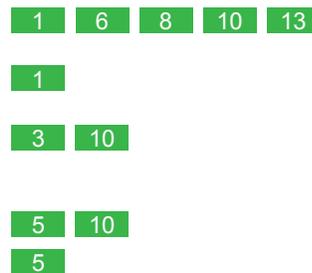
Establishing Trust

- Democratic management
- Collaborative leadership
- Learning and education on issues and citizens' roles
- Building trust within the community group
- Transparency and planning's actual use public feedback
- Early engagement



Meeting The Community Where They Are

- Customized creative communication tools (including interactive games)
- Starting with a Generic Equity Framework and using input to tailor it
- Create a welcoming environment that honors the community
- Convenience - language support, childcare, food, transportation, location, time of day
- Providing the tools to act



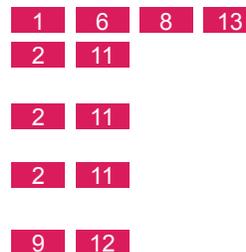
Stakeholder Development & Alliances

- Relationship between political capital/persons of influence and planning/outreach
- Identify natural community leaders and build relationships



Inclusivity

- Broad access and appeal (age, gender, race)
- Identifying the most impacted community members and ensuring they are engaged
- Demonstrating how the engagement process reveals who benefits and who sacrifices, and how
- Identifying and examining the factors that produce or perpetuate racial inequity related to this proposal
- Involving Communities in the Development Process



Denotes research works corresponding to the below authors; full reference available in the bibliography.

- 1 – Creger, Espino, Sanchez
- 2 – GARE (Racial Equity Alliance)
- 3 – Garkovich
- 4 – Jagosh
- 5 – Lachapelle
- 6 – Laskin & Weiss
- 7 – Mandarano
- 8 – NYCDOT
- 9 – O'Reilly-de Brún
- 10 – PBOT
- 11 – Schaffer
- 12 – Smith
- 13 – Triplett

Chart 2: Consequences of Consensus-Building (Innes 1999)

Interpersonal (First Order Effects)	Organizational (Second Order Effects)	Social (Third Order Effects)
Social Capital: Trust, Relationships	New Partnerships	New Collaborations
Intellectual Capital: Mutual Understanding, Shared Problem Frames, Agreed-Upon Data	Coordination and Joint Action	More Co-evolution, Less destructive conflict
Political Capital: Ability to work Together for Agreed Ends	Joint Learning Extends into the Community	Results on the Ground: Adaptation of Cities, Regions, Resources, Services
High-Quality Agreements	Implementation of Agreements	New Institutions
Innovative Strategies	Changes in Practices	New Norms and Heuristics
	Changes in Perceptions	New Discourses

Comparatively, PAR is much more demanding of resources than perfunctory, minimalist public outreach meetings. (see Chart 3: Standard Public Engagement vs. PAR Methods with Public Projects). First, in the Diagnosing Phase, the community must organize a core group of natural leaders and stakeholders who can take thorough stock of the political context while representing the needs of all segments of the impacted community. PAR requires constant research of data and information, analysis, meetings to discuss and strategize solutions and alternatives. The resource demand— particularly the energy and time of participants and experts— and actual costs — renting a space, equipment, and materials for documentation, etc., awareness-building — are formidable. Grants and university-driven research support are often tapped by PAR programs. The key is to grasp the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the community and keep participants involved in decision-making.

In the Prescribing Phase, the PAR effort focuses on examining inward and outward research relative to the group to come up with priorities and the rubric for evaluating proposed designs from the government. The core group and participants may also devise alternative project designs that account for the most urgent needs in the community. All the while, the PAR process continually researches and shares to ensure a transparent process.

In the Implementation Phase, the PAR effort is synthesizing all of the work up to this point, including its recommendations to the public agency on the project direction. The purpose of implementation is two-fold: to take stock of the community’s knowledge and

Chart 3: Baseline Public Engagement vs. PAR

	Standard Public Engagement	Participatory Action Research
Phase 1: Diagnosing	Holding public meeting to connect community needs to upcoming project	Timing of the PAR (weeks ahead of the project inception)
		Meeting with community leaders to identify the core group
		Figuring out what's wrong in the community and providing educational sessions to help impacted groups understand the project
		SWOT analysis, asset-mapping
		Designing the research methodology to ID needs (intensive vs extensive)
		Resourcefulness; Creative funding and identifying human resources (i.e. universities)
		Building the participants' power/knowledge/action.
Phase 2: Prescribing	Holding public meeting to examine proposed solution(s) from the initiating agency	Inward vs outward research
		Developing criteria
		Identifying possible solutions and alternatives
Phase 3: Implementing	Holding public meeting to devise alternatives for the initiating agency	Research and drawing insights as action, as a community fortifying itself
		Making sense of the research (example community artwork)
Phase 4: Evaluating	Utilization-focused concentration on outcomes	Process-focused evaluation
		Internal and external evaluation relative to the community

action and to recognize the group's cohesion. At this phase, the PAR effort may include a creative community art project to encapsulate its research achievement such as film, a book, or even a mural.

In the final Evaluative Phase, the project is complete and in use. Traditional public outreach would focus on user experience. The PAR effort includes not only those who are using it but the entire community and its evaluation of the project itself as well as the entire process that led to it. PAR also evaluates the external relationships and processes during this period. As PAR is an enduring and superseding process, it re-evaluates and replenishes its own capital (natural, cultural, human, social, political, financial and built) amidst the inexorable change of internal and external conditions. (Stoeker 2016) (Mandarano 2015)

The Greatest in Need Gets the Worst Treatment

LOW INCOME AND MINORITY COMMUNITIES have historically fared the worst from transportation projects that caused environmental hazards and air pollutants. Public agencies, through policy and regulatory requirements, conduct community outreach for projects, but it's neither sufficient nor holistic. Public agencies need to conduct ongoing community engagement, especially within these communities of concern where trust may be at its lowest levels. It cannot be the "business as usual" community outreach, but should be guided by best practices of Participatory Action Research.

Case Study 1: The environmental impacts on West Oakland from the transportation and storage of coal at the former Oakland Army Base

IN JULY 2012, the City of Oakland ("the City") adopted a Master Development Plan for the former Oakland Army Base property ("Gateway Development Area") that had been deeded to The City when the State's Redevelopment Agencies were dissolved earlier in the year (see Figure 2: Former Oakland Army Base Gateway Development Area). By October 2012, The City had entered into a Lease and Land Development Agreement ("LLDA") with California Capital Investment Group ("CCIG" or "the Developer"), the lead Development and Construction Manager for the remainder of the redevelopment areas of the former Oakland Army Base. CCIG and an affiliate, Oakland Bulk Oversized Terminal ("OBOT"), would jointly develop the Gateway Development Area which is adjacent to The City's West Oakland Neighborhood ("West Oakland") (see Figure 1: West Oakland, California).



Figure 1: West Oakland, California



Figure 2: Former Oakland Army Base Gateway Development Area

In 2014, after learning that OBOT had planned to transport and store coal at the Gateway Development Area facility, the City adopted a resolution banning such activities within the city limits. The City's rationale is that the West Coast, as a region, had begun efforts to stop the transport of crude oil, coal, and petcoke along rail lines that endanger estuaries and waterways. In addition, the City stated that allowing such activities in Oakland would mean "passing through the most vulnerable communities of East and West Oakland, which throughout Oakland's history, have been exposed to significant environmental harm from industrial and commercial uses" (Oakland City Council S-7.19-CC, 06/17/2014).

West Oakland is a neighborhood of much historical significance to the region. It was the western terminus of the Central Pacific Line of the 1st Transcontinental Railroad in the late 1880s. From 1940 to 1960s, the former Oakland Army Base was the epicenter of the neighborhood, as it served as the busiest U.S. shipping and distribution hub during World War II. The onset and eventual end of World War II turned West Oakland into a thriving cultural and economic neighborhood that boasts coffeehouses, restaurants, banks, and music clubs that served the military and their families. West Oakland was the Harlem of the West Coast and Seventh Street was the hub of it all.

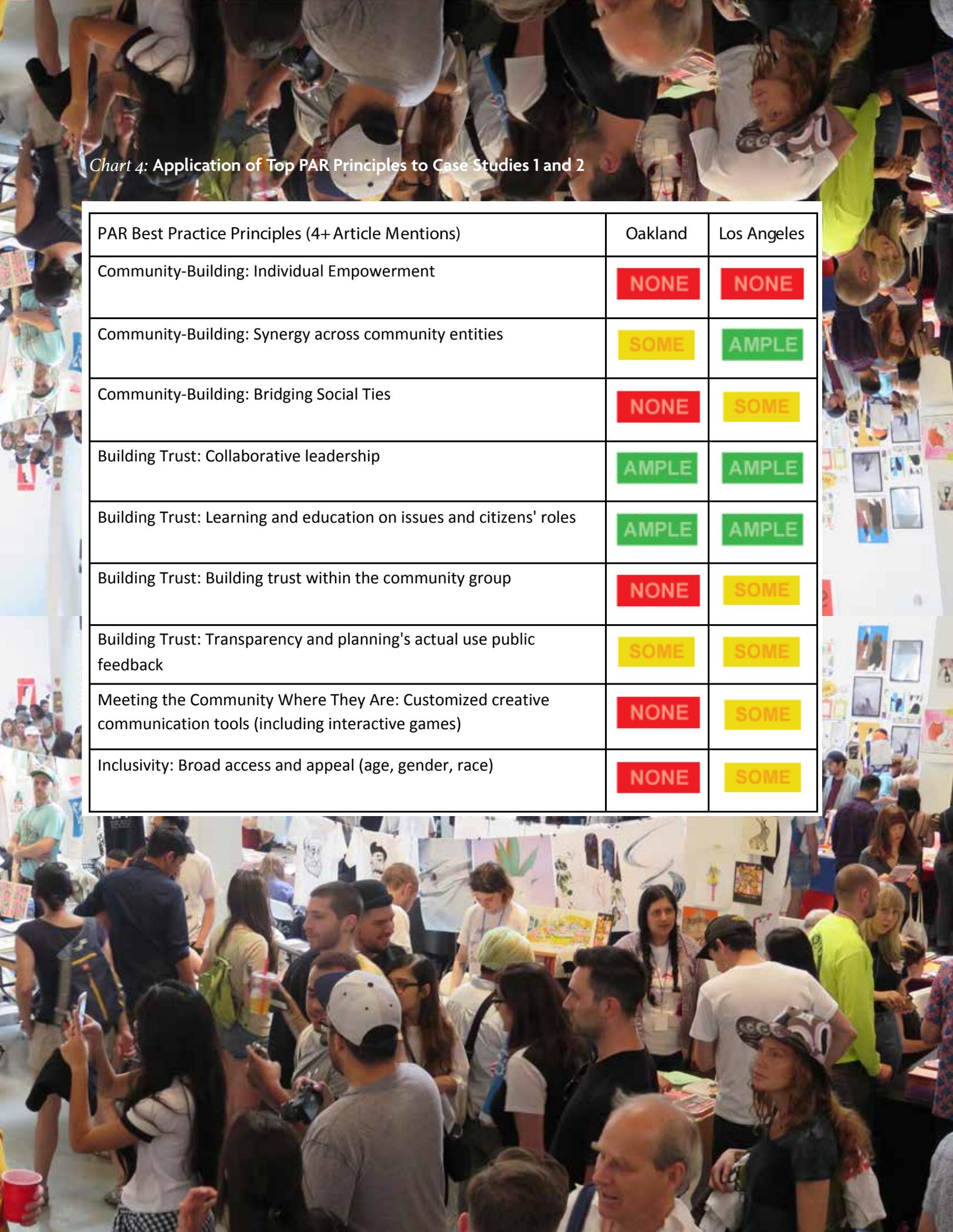
On the surface, it appears as if the City had not conducted any significant community engagement because if they had, it's likely that this concern would have been discovered much earlier and prior to the LLDA contract signing in October 2012. When viewing the City of Oakland Coal Transportation and Storage Case Study ("City of Oakland Case Study") through the lens of Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Community Engagement, it is believed that the stakeholders involved did not adhere to the framework of the best practice principles of PAR. However, it takes a greater detailed analysis of the case to determine which principles, if any, were employed and which were not. The five best practice principle categories as identified from previously researched case studies are Establishing Trust, Community Building, Meeting the Community Where They Are, Stakeholder Development and Alliance, and Inclusivity (see Chart 1: Best Practice Principles in PAR).

Lastly, while practicing each of these principles is the best-case scenario, it may be that the stakeholders employed a semblance of the best practice principles or even one of the prescribed alternative principles. The City of Oakland Case Study presented multiple challenges in evaluating the community engagement employed because of the transfer of obligations from the Oakland Redevelopment Agency to the City of Oakland Successor Agency within the Public/Private Development Division. In this analysis, we looked at individual principle coupled under the five categories and came to the following conclusions:

First, when bringing together the Master Development Plan, there is strong evidence that the City, the Developer, and the Community came together on many opportunities to craft out benefits for Oakland and the West Oakland Neighborhood. These meetings

Chart 4: Application of Top PAR Principles to Case Studies 1 and 2

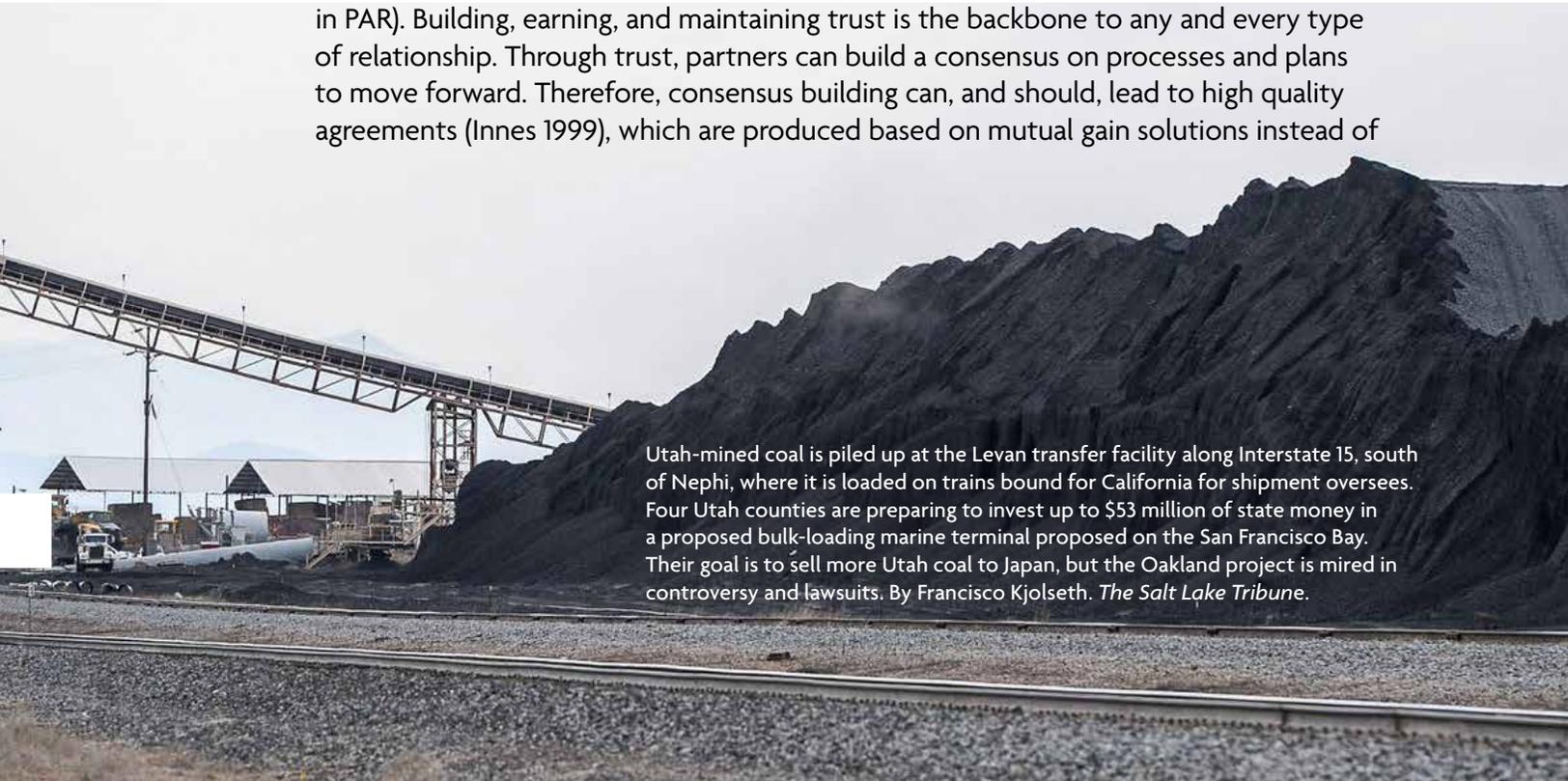
PAR Best Practice Principles (4+ Article Mentions)	Oakland	Los Angeles
Community-Building: Individual Empowerment	NONE	NONE
Community-Building: Synergy across community entities	SOME	AMPLE
Community-Building: Bridging Social Ties	NONE	SOME
Building Trust: Collaborative leadership	AMPLE	AMPLE
Building Trust: Learning and education on issues and citizens' roles	AMPLE	AMPLE
Building Trust: Building trust within the community group	NONE	SOME
Building Trust: Transparency and planning's actual use public feedback	SOME	SOME
Meeting the Community Where They Are: Customized creative communication tools (including interactive games)	NONE	SOME
Inclusivity: Broad access and appeal (age, gender, race)	NONE	SOME



helped West Oakland forge alliances with both the developer and the City and resulted in ongoing air quality monitoring and job workforce agreements that included local hire goals, unionized labor requirements, small local business participation, and a West Oakland Community Fund (WOCF). At minimum, this evidence illustrates that some principles of Inclusivity and Stakeholder Development and Alliances were employed.

Additionally, with the agreement to establish a West Oakland Community Fund and the local hire workforce goals, there appears to be a level of collaboration and agreement to plan for long term Community Building. Unfortunately, while the intent of the WOCF was to assist the community residents in benefiting from the redevelopment of the OAB (West Oakland Community Development Fund Framework, Final Rule 2004), it also appears that the WOCF wasn't funded until fifteen years later (City of Oakland Rules and Legislation Committee, Item 4.10 10/3/2019), severely diminishing West Oakland's ability to participate in and benefit from the redevelopment activity within their community. Lastly, nearly all of the research indicates that there was and continues to be a very strong lack of trust between West Oakland, the City, and the Developer. Early documents from the West Oakland Community Advisory Group (WOCAG), The Official Forum for Public Input on the Oakland Army Base Reuse Plan, illustrate a concern that the funding is not coming and a lack of cohesive participation in the development and planning processes (see WOCAG subcommittee report Community Recommendations for reuse of the City of Oakland "Gateway" Development Area, June 2008) . Additional documents, including meeting minutes and agreement language, show that while collaboration existed, many of the benefits guaranteed to West Oakland were the result of unwavering demands from the community. All-in-all, it appears that Trust was never established nor maintained in this case.

While the hypothesis was proven wrong and there was ample outreach and inclusion in the development and planning process, it was also evident that the entire process lacked trust (see Chart 4: Application of Top PAR Principles to Case Studies 1 and 2). According to the PAR research findings, Building Trust was the single most significant indicator of success in PAR Community Engagement (see Chart 1: Best Practice Principles in PAR). Building, earning, and maintaining trust is the backbone to any and every type of relationship. Through trust, partners can build a consensus on processes and plans to move forward. Therefore, consensus building can, and should, lead to high quality agreements (Innes 1999), which are produced based on mutual gain solutions instead of



Utah-mined coal is piled up at the Levan transfer facility along Interstate 15, south of Nephi, where it is loaded on trains bound for California for shipment overseas. Four Utah counties are preparing to invest up to \$53 million of state money in a proposed bulk-loading marine terminal proposed on the San Francisco Bay. Their goal is to sell more Utah coal to Japan, but the Oakland project is mired in controversy and lawsuits. By Francisco Kjolseth. *The Salt Lake Tribune*.

through litigation or legislative mandate. Broken trust is what has landed this project in court purgatory. There remains disagreement on whether CCIG or OBOT promised to not transport or store coal, or whether the City knew and kept it under wraps. However, in April 2013, a Utah newspaper (<https://richfieldreaper.com/>) released a story about the Utah government funding up to \$53M for four coal counties to fund a terminal project in Oakland, California.

Regardless of who wins in court, West Oakland will continue to lose. If the coal terminal is built, the community will suffer yet another environmental and air quality hazard. If the coal terminal is not built, the community will lose out on what should have been an economic windfall and revitalization. The City must start rebuilding trust with the West Oakland community. The first step in doing that is to ensure that the Community Fund is fully-funded and available to assist the residents and businesses of the West Oakland community.

Case Study 2: South LA's PAR practices and the resulting environmental urban planning and transportation projects

The second case study is similar to the West Oakland case in which several government agencies are engaged to manage the development of a newly available parcel of land in an industrially blighted, low-income community of minority residence. However, the success of this South LA ecological parks and pedestrian pathway owes several stellar PAR traits: local leadership that aligns values with the residents, early engagement, creative funding and staffing methods through partnerships across government agencies and universities, meaningful community workshops that explore innovative solutions, and long-term community-building features which continue to pay off with community improvement, such as the expansion of the initial park to its connection with the upcoming ecological bike and pedestrian path, between the Metro A line and the LA River bike path.

As the West Oakland case also demonstrated, the PAR assets of trust and inclusivity require regularly meeting with constituents where they are, stakeholder development and alliances, and community-building. In the series of related three projects in South LA, we see that in the third portion, the LA Metro Rail to River bike and pedestrian pathway development, the community did not feel welcome at all meetings and began to fear that this infrastructure improvement may invite gentrification and dislocate current resident-tenants.

South LA, home to a polarized age-range of neighborhood-bound African-American and Latino residents, has historically been marked by lack of green open space, and limited safe transportation options outside of driving. The 1992 LA Riots was a proclamation of this inequity, a conflagration of social frustration against pervasive racism, chronic poverty, LAPD's excessive force and tensions between groups in that geographic area. In the recovery years that followed, the cultural groups engaged in greater dialogue and community-building. One resident of South LA observed that "heartfelt dialogue and debunking myths across different ethnic, racial, and religious groups are key to bridging the divides among communities...We definitely see it as a long-term effort." (Fuchs 2017) The dialogue not only identifies the needs and threats to the community; the act itself



Figure 3: The Rail to River bike and pedestrian path is broken into two phases, with overlapping public

is a generator of trust, as also exemplified when the City of Oakland converged with the development company and the local community to create a master plan which prioritizes clean air, employment, and local businesses.

Stakeholder alliances and community trust benefit when the biggest proponent of the project is a long-time resident and active local leader connected with schools and neighborhood support groups. In 1997, LA Councilwoman of South LA District 9, first African-American woman elected to the city council, and longstanding advocate of integration and several years of service in the LA Unified School District, Rita Walters (1930-2020) finally requested the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC), a state agency which has acquired and preserved over 27,000 acres, allocate funding and design for a park in her district. She visited and noted SMMC's wilderness park projects and believed that her lower-income community would benefit from one too. Community workshops revealed a widespread desire to create isolated habitat to attract birds and wildlife, instead of a traditional turf grass community park. The schools and your also welcomed the native ecosystem environment serving as an hands-on, outdoor space for science classes. The community dialogue gave way for one of the most innovative urban parks in the USA. (Santa Monica Mountain Conservancy, 1997)

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) leased land (pipe storage yard) for a mere \$1 per year. (Pool 2000) UC Berkeley's Landscape Architecture program was enlisted to design a park that balanced the tradeoff between naturalness and perceived safety. An additional community center and nature center were built which now serve the most popular site for neighborhood meetings and events. (Hester 2020)

Initially named the Parque Natural, it was renamed after a local historical figure. The Augustus Hawkins Nature Park revered the first African-American US Congressman

who also hailed from this community. Jan Perry, successor of Rita Walters, had grand visions of continuing the transformation of the South LA 9th District which Walters had begun. “It’s transformative,” said the councilwoman. “I realize, as I look at these little kids who were here today -- they’re going to have a chance at a different kind of a life, and maybe a life that they had never envisioned for themselves before. Maybe as they grew up, they always thought it was normal to have trash and abandoned buildings in their neighborhood, and I hope today gives them the hope to imagine something else now.” (Martinez 2012)

Community-building generates hope and produces new visions for improving and adapting the physical environment according to the changing needs of its constituents; it forges resilience and adaptability. In terms of the PAR principle “Meeting People Where They Are,” helping residents envision themselves benefiting from the shared hope and goal is key to their ongoing participation.

Creative funding helped realize the ecological watershed component to the Augustus Hawkins Watershed Park. Adopted by LA taxpayers in 2004, Proposition O authorized \$500 million of general obligation bonds for projects to protect public health by cleaning up pollution, including bacteria and trash, in the City’s watercourses, beaches and the ocean, to meet Federal Clean Water Act requirements. Proposition O also funded improvements to protect water quality, provide flood protection, and increased water conservation, habitat protection, and open space. Using Proposition O funding for stormwater cleaning, typically for water plants, in 2005 Perry was able to install the first of its kind in the nation a natural ecological watershed in the park that serves both to clean stormwater and enrich the habitat in the park. Furthermore, the project enlisted research and expertise from academic institutions. The project was so successful, she worked with LA Metro to convert another former trolley yard into a second watershed in 2012, the 10-acre South Los Angeles Wetland Park. (Pool 2012) According to the October 2020 Google Reviews, South LA Wetlands Park earned a 4.3 stars and Augustus Hawkins Park earned 4.5 stars out of five, each with over 800 reviews.

An additional, nearby project with LA Metro is similar but is not embracing the Best Practice Principles of PAR. Like the WOCAG distrust of the City of West Oakland, the community of South LA distrusts LA Metro and fears the potential for gentrification. At similar timing in 2012, LA Metro began conducting the feasibility study for the agency’s Rail to River project connecting the Metro A line to the LA River Bike Path over 10 miles via a Metro right-of-way track on Slauson Boulevard. The design is to feature native plants along a broad lane, protected from motorized vehicles, and embody the natural environment experience of the two watershed parks. Though in the same ecological restorative spirit, this project involves a public engagement process of lessened depth, causing some residents to worry that it will invite developers and drive out current residents. They also had concerns about safety and overall opportunities for citizen involvement in the planning. For example, one critique of the informational materials is that the people depicted in the marketing materials did not reflect the community and furthered worries that the developers would change the makeup of the neighborhood. Another example was that street vendors, though unpermitted, are a mainstay of the community presence. However, they felt unwelcome and unsafe to attend the public

meetings and voice their perspective. This project has the opportunity to better meet residents where they were, gain trust and practice inclusivity.

In both the case studies, the project managers could better utilize stakeholder alliances: they can identify and consult the community's core group and empower them to help broker the communication and planning of the project. At this point, both cities' have yet to demonstrate their ability to allay completely the local community's fears (air pollution for West Oakland and gentrification for South LA) through defining measures and commitments in the projects.

The Alternative Analysis of the Rail to River was completed and the Locally Preferred Alternative adopted in 2017. The preliminary design and environmental clearance process began in 2019 with the project scheduled to break ground in 2021. (Sulaiman 2017)



Augustus Hawkins Nature Park features a watershed that filters stormwater before it flows into the LA River. Photo from nature p.L.A.y. Nature Places for Los Angeles Youth. <https://wheredothechildrenplayla.wordpress.com/category/parks-featured/>

PAR fortifies Communities with Knowledge, Power, and Action

PAR STRENGTHENS THE FABRIC OF COMMUNITIES to contend with governmental agencies that shape the services and infrastructure of neighborhoods. Through PAR-driven engagement, government agencies can build high-quality consensus with communities, and design more useful and socially uplifting projects for constituents. But first, in order for PAR to exist, the resolve and the means must be sufficient on both the community's and the government agency's sides: (1) To chart the Diagnosing, Prescribing, Implementing, and Evaluating Phases. (2) To ensure ongoing collaboration with the communities and intra-community convening must occur before and after projects. If the resolve is lacking, then communities and agencies should establish mutual mandates: thorough publicly available documentations (videos or reports) of public engagement at each milestone of the project cycle, current research data to show all impacted members of the community or their representatives and their participation, monetary compensation for the participants' time, partnership plans with dates and deliverables across agencies and stakeholder groups, qualitative studies on the effectiveness of the PAR efforts, surveys to the community eliciting their estimation of the process, and a detailed analysis on how community input was integrated into the final project — why or why not. At present, outside of news and citizen watch group reports, the agency documentation of public engagement merely shows that meetings were held. Such public engagement improvements can better ensure equity in transportation, environmental impacts and quality of service for all users.

With the multi-billion-dollar costs of infrastructure projects, moreover the costs of litigation that may follow, PAR is a high-return investment: It advances fiscal responsibility, equitable and appropriate development of urban design and transport for all communities, and community empowerment and trust —that public agencies are indeed working for all of the public. Unfortunately, animosity thrives prevalently between communities and large government agencies. Mandates for PAR can significantly transform these relationships from alienation to trust and cooperation.

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