

What is Social Movement Ecology?

Social Movement Ecology identifies the different organizational cultures, tactics, strategies for social change that currently exist among diverse organizations, and create the ability to appreciate the strength and weakness of each approach, and find new methods of constructive collaboration. While ecology is “the scientific study of cooperation and competition among organisms and their environment”—Social movement ecology is study of how diverse organizations within a country cooperate or compete with each other, and with the entire political and economic environment to create or hinder social change. Social Movement Ecology will identify some ways in which there can be more complex collaboration between different organizing cultures, by first understanding and empathizing with ways different organizations hurt each other, and how they can support each other. This collaboration happens in many types of relationships and through many organizational forms, whether informal reciprocal relationships and networks, formal coalitions, or even just some mutually beneficial informal exchanges between organizations.

Most organizational cultures have a philosophy of social change (theory of change), and its own tactics, and strategy to achieve change, whether it is political parties, non-profit organizations, Labor unions, Community advocacy groups, popular movements, service organizations, counter cultures, churches, and monasteries. These organizational cultures are often in conflict with each other, without understanding and appreciating their own, or others organizational culture, and theory of change. Successful Social movements of the past have often through, trial and error, hardship, and great leadership of a few individuals whom become cultural bridges between organizational cultures, are able to develop some level of collaboration of these diverse cultures, which we call--- effective social movement ecology.

An example would be the ways Gandhi designed a complex collaboration between political parties (Indian national congress), the religious cultural institutions (ashrams), the social service organizations (the constructive program), and the popular movement (Satyagraha), which create an amazingly powerful and resilient independence movement over 60 years and lead to the overthrowing the British colonial government.

An other example, would be experimentations in early civil rights movement to build an new organizing tradition that Civil Rights Historian Charles Payne calls a combination of the Community organizing tradition, and community mobilization tradition—that made SNCC, and SCLC powerful and innovative in the early years of the civil rights movement. As well as the rare and temporary collaboration between unions, politicians, mainstream advocacy groups, the Johnson Administration, with the civil rights movement to pass legislation, and support or hinder the rise of dramatic campaigns of protest in Birmingham and Selma. In addition, to the way the Black churches in the South in the 1960's worked with the civil rights movement.

Recently, Podemos in Spain, a popular political party, is attempting a new type of collaboration that incorporates a political party that has won elections in city and provincial states, while working with popular movements that have come out of anti austerity movements and are putting pressure on government from outside.

To see more examples read chapter on Ecology of Change, from Mark and Paul Engler's Book, This is an Uprising, attached. In addition the article, Should We Be the Change, or Fight the System. <http://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/fight-system-change/>

Our training on Social Movement ecology will identify some models for thinking about more complex ways of thinking about strategy that can transcend any one individual organizing culture, to make new effective social movement ecology. This will include different models of thinking about how we could think about a longer-term process of change, and the barriers to doing this. Already doing introduction to social movement ecology at Momentum has allowed people from many different organizations and perspective to collaborate, and form informal network of supports in ways we did not expect. Like forming a network to show up to each other's actions, and support cultural and song exchanges among participate, and funders to think about how funding in new ways to support popular movements.

Some possible ideas for modules for advance social movement ecology:

1. **Review of structure. Momentum.** Focusing on theory of change, and strategy within different organizing cultures. Strengths and weakness
2. **Review of personal transformation, and alternative institutions.** Strengths and weakness
3. **The inside game:** strengths and weakness.
4. **Advance movement ecology.** How do we hurt each other? Emergent ideas.
5. **How do we help each other? From our experience.** Emergent ideas.
6. **Some theory on movement ecology.**
7. **Models of movement ecology--** collaboration, and ecology. Spectrum loose networks, coalitions, and large decentralized movement structures (aka popular fronts.) Gandhi, Podemos, Early civil rights movement, Sovadia movement, Right wing Evangelicals in US, and counter culture and the peace movement of the 60's.
8. Common problems of complex social movement ecology, and long-term strategy.
9. How do we integrate this for individuals, individual organizations, or possibilities for loose to tight new movement ecology for future?