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Surviving a Broken System: Synergies between Solidarity Economies and Sustainable Development Goals

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Surviving a Broken System: Synergies between Solidarity Economies
and Sustainable Development Goals

by

Julie Beach

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
with a concentration in Florida Studies
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DEDICATION

Life is difficult but it gets a little easier when we have a few folks that love us. With gratitude I dedicate this work to myself and my support network. To my partner, thank you for carrying most domestic labor tasks for years while I spent 14+ hour days tethered to my laptop. Thank you for the dinners, laundry, cleaning, dog walking, the late-night hours you sat beside me, and for always listening regardless of how many times you heard the speech. To my wild family and dearest friends that always understood why I ghosted them these last few years and were never mad at me for it. To myself, and anyone else like me that forgot what they were capable of because someone made you think otherwise. You are absolutely worth pursuing your dreams or even just trying something new. It may be terrifying and difficult, but you can do whatever you put your mind to, and in the end, you'll be proud of yourself. To my sister Amanda, losing you lit a fire in me because I had so much to prove. I had to be stronger and do better, so this what happened. "As you wish."

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ABSTRACT

Capitalism has created problems including wealth polarization, rapid depletion of natural resources, and pervasive systemic societal issues. Hard work is not enough to solve the unequal distribution and barriers preventing access to necessities. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were created to remedy the harsh reality of global inequities and negative environmental impacts by working towards a more just and equitable future for all. Solidarity Economies (SE) offer an alternative framework to achieve these goals.

This research used multiple qualitative methods to investigate the synergies between SE and SDGs in a growing urban environment. St. Petersburg, FL struggles with affordable housing, food insecurity, inadequate employment, and insufficient financial resources. Environmental concerns are high as climate change and sea level rise have begun to impact the densely populated coastal city.

Evaluation of two community groups, Buy Nothing Project and St. Pete Timebank, shows both do utilize SE framework and work towards SDG achievement daily. Considering that both organizations are found globally highlights the value of small-scale collective actions to achieve widespread initiatives; however, little research has been conducted on their capacity to create positive change. Additional research will offer evidence of the usefulness and necessity of Solidarity Economy framework in addressing many of the concerns local and regional governments face today as they look towards the future. As St. Petersburg officials seek ways to implement sustainable practices, research such as this, may offer valuable insight.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Unsustainable Economic Development

For traditional economic systems, such as capitalism, the constant flow of money is vital to advance continued economic growth. Monetary exchanges happen all around us as we consume goods or services, but many of these interactions rely heavily on the detrimental extraction of natural resources. Additionally, obsession with profits and wealth has resulted in a polarization of two classes – the ‘haves’ with substantial financial backing or power, and ‘have nots’ that comprise the majority population. According to Cahn (2018, p. 33), capitalism negatively impacts social well-being because “... a fixation on the pursuit of money drains personal relationships, depletes informal support systems, commercializes professional callings, and contaminates democratic processes.” Instead of organic community connections, people are often stuck relying on expensive professional services, which weakens the social fabric and prevents struggling masses from obtaining necessary services. Economies that value profits over people often create a disconnection that results in environmental degradation, food insecurity, socioeconomic inequalities, and competition instead of cooperation, mutualism, and sustainability. The United Nations (UN) has outlined 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that address problems perpetuated by capitalism, including poverty (SDG 1), food scarcity (SDG 2), environmental damage (SDGs 13 – 15), inequalities (SDGs 5, 10, 16), and waste generated through consumerism (SDG 12) (United Nations, n.d.). The significant human and

environmental problems included under the SDG framework are so pervasive that they exist across multiple geospatial scales impacting individuals, local communities, and nation-states.

Actions towards lessening today's global problems often include reducing environmental footprints, donating time, money, or goods, and even sharing information about resources and organizations that work towards SDG achievement. Each SDG has many charitable organizations and aid-based groups, each with their own methods and reach. The digital age of the internet has made it easier to connect with initiatives to support; however, it can also result in a sense of overwhelming paralysis that comes from information overload (Horrigan, 2016). A conscious effort to find the best way to contribute may create a laundry list of questions to determine where to direct one's resources therefore, multiple guides have been created to help navigate the complexities of selecting an appropriate charity to contribute to (Wang, 2019; Wasik, 2013). For some, reports from watchdogs such as the Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance, GuideStar, and Charity Navigator reduce the mental load of researching aid groups, but for others this increases the conceptual difficulties and barriers between active engagement and the strong desire to participate. Alternatively, some prefer to improve their own community and address large problems on a local level through personal connections.

Solidarity found in local collective action is a simple concept, but the effects should not be understated. For those who are overloaded by information or want to feel connected in a grassroots manner, organized community efforts offer a solution. Involvement in a group that supports SDGs can increase individual participation and motivation, while providing clarity through organizational tactics that cut out the noise of information overload. By engaging in local group activities, initial barriers such as deciding which organization to support or what specific actions to participate in, can be reduced. Solidarity Economies are one approach to

addressing the human and environmental problems associated with capitalism and the systemic issues imbedded within society. A Solidarity Economy (SE) is a global movement with a framework designed to create alternative economic systems and ecosystems based upon principles of equity, justice, sustainability, mutualism, and cooperation to benefit people and the planet (Kawano, 2018). Organizations or groups using Solidarity Economy principles reduce the gap between the overwhelmed individual and positive strides that impact a broader spectrum. The pluralist principle in Solidarity Economies allows flexibility in implementation and scope for local organizations, while the founding principles and framework foster vital changes outlined by the Sustainable Development Goals.

Development and Sustainable Goals

Solidarity Economies and Sustainable Development Goals contain similar principles that provide a framework for alternative practices that unravel the opposing dynamic inherent in capitalist economies by acknowledging individual power and assets as well as strength in numbers. (See Table 1.) Principles found within the framework of Solidarity Economies are vital components to Sustainable Development Goal achievement. Democracy and pluralism allow for flexibility in creation of organizations and implementation of initiatives, increasing the capacity of application. Mutualism and cooperation help individual stakeholders connect to each other for impactful collective action to address goals. Rooting initiatives in equity and justice provides a strong foundation of equality and sustainability. The benefits of working together create ripple effects, on both small and large scales, by improving the quality of life for all living organisms through using a holistic ecosystem approach, protecting the environment from undue harm, increasing financial stability, and reducing food insecurity.

Table 1. Synergies in the Frameworks of SE and SDGs compared to Capitalism

| Solidarity Economy Principle | Sustainable Development Goal | Capitalist Economy |
|---|---|---|
| Pluralism | Nations/Regions have different methods to achieve goals, Goals 9, 10 | Hegemonic. Production & Consumption |
| Mutualism | Meeting goals creates better future for all, Goals 1, 3, 17 | Relies on polarized classes, promotes individual gain |
| Cooperation | Working together achieves goals, Goals 13, 16, 17 | Private property & Competition |
| Sustainability | Woven into the fabric of every goal, for the people and the planet, Goals 2, 14, 15 | Methods of production are unsustainable, Often addresses short term and not longevity |
| Equity, Equality, Justice, & Solidarity | Multiple goals centered on these principles, Goals 4, 5, 16 | Inequality is fundamental & perpetual |
| Democracy | Actions to achieve goals can use participatory democracy, Goals 6, 17 | Monopolistic, Inequal distribution of power |

Solidarity Economies and Sustainable Development Goals often overlap in the areas of health, agriculture, income, and the environment. For example, SE organizations may promote community-based agriculture to increase access to nutrition while enabling workers to earn a fair income while harvesting crops. Practitioners and scholars alike believe collaboration and solidarity provide an avenue toward addressing the many negative human and environmental impacts of capitalism such as poverty, resource degradation, and inequality. Using solidarity principles as a basis for the economy can lead to equality in job opportunities, food resources, housing, and shifting power dynamics within marginalized communities (Bell et al., 2018). A Solidarity Economy puts an emphasis on what is best for people and the planet, such as reusable

products, sustainable harvesting/agriculture, and reducing the amount of waste generated, while developing resilient connections between community members (Hudson, 2018). There are clear synergies between sustainability movements and Solidarity Economies, as sustainability focuses on making decisions to protect the planet, while also taking care of the peoples' needs.

Solidarity Economies should be included in governmental meetings and planning sessions that discuss community development or sustainability; however, they are sometimes ignored or neglected due to barriers that prevent their involvement. A global network of Solidarity Economies, Réseau intercontinental de promotion de l'économie sociale solidaire (RIPESS), acts as a unifying agency to increase their representation, visibility, advocacy, and goal achievement. RIPESS creates a space where even small grassroot movements can become connected to the broader network enabling collaborations across a broad geospatial scale. RIPESS recognizes the beneficial correlation between Solidarity Economies in achievement of all Sustainable Development Goals and has argued for the inclusion of SE framework within the SDGs since 2012 (RIPESS, 2021). Furthermore, this intercontinental SE network emphasizes the unique opportunity local grassroots movements have to support Solidarity Economies and create positive change (RIPESS, 2021). Both the International Labour Organization (ILO) and United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force promote SE principles as a framework to support the Sustainable Development 2030 Agenda (ILO, n.d.). Through participation in a Solidarity Economy, strides toward SDGs are more manageable. Individuals become part of a group where small actions are amplified and contribute towards multiple Sustainable Development Goals.

Research Purpose and Questions

This research examines popular local social movements to determine their strengths and limitations in addressing Sustainable Development Goals through the Solidarity Economy framework. Data collected enabled analysis of additional questions such as which SE principles are more heavily emphasized and achieved within the organization, as well as what specific types of interactions support SDGs. This research featured a multicase study approach based in qualitative methods including document analysis, surveys, interviews, participant observation, and data collected from the websites of two specific St. Petersburg, Florida groups: the Buy Nothing Project and the St. Pete Timebank. Scholars have already begun studying Solidarity Economies; however, most of the places studied are in foreign nations or large thriving cities. These Solidarity Economies have been successful in Europe, Africa, Central America, and the U.S. Solidarity movements in New York City have been effective for workers (Hudson, 2018). Little research has been conducted on Solidarity Economies in smaller cities or on the synergy between Solidarity Economies and Sustainable Development Goals.

This research suggests that principles of the Solidarity Economy are being used within the Buy Nothing Project and Timebank communities, and that these organizations offer effective methods to make progress toward achieving some of the UN's SDGs. Evaluating two Solidarity Economies within the same city will increase our understanding of how SE guiding principles may work to ensure equitable and sustainable practices, while fulfilling a sense of community and togetherness, in the context of a small but vibrant urban center in the U.S. Research using mixed qualitative methods will yield data for a robust analysis of various beliefs, practices, and actions used to promote the principles of a Solidarity Economy, and for a comparative analysis of the efficacy of specific organizational principles and strategies. Data gathered through this

mixed methodology research project, including participant observation, virtual personal interviews, an online survey, and document analysis, helped with understanding and analyzing the values local Solidarity Economy initiatives provide to the individuals that participate within them; identify which actions are most effective in meeting both SE principles and specific SDGs; and highlight the overlap between the SE approach and the UN Sustainable Development platform.

Primary Question: What are the strengths and limitations of the St. Pete Timebank and the Buy Nothing Project in fulfilling both the principles of Solidarity Economies (SE) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

Additional Questions:

- What SE principles are emphasized the most and how is this represented throughout the group?
- What SDGs are supported by group interactions or principles and how are those goals addressed?
- What are the specific actions promoted by the group(s)?
- What attributes make these groups effective and viable alternatives to the complex issues created by capitalism?

Acknowledgment of Terms

Discourse on this alternative economic system uses different labels including “Social Economy” or “Solidarity Economy” depending on a variety of factors including location, goals, and the preference of organizational leaders. For clarity and mutual understanding between nations when discussing the development of policy and legal framework, several international

organizations recognize the overlap and bridge the terms together to form the ‘Social and Solidarity Economy’ (International Labour Conference, 2022). Solidarity Economies may refer to the traditional definition of a financial economy and could be found where workers’ unions and cooperatives are favored over capitalist structures (Borowiak, et al., 2018; Hudson, 2018). Social economies can focus more directly on the welfare of the people. Those are general differences and are not concrete definitions. Researchers or specific groups choose the language that suits them due to the many circumstances involved. Further conversation of the differences between social and solidarity economies should involve in-depth knowledge about the geopolitics of the area and the goals of that collective.

This author respectfully recognizes the differences between Social Economy and Solidarity Economy, and the purpose in using the combined terms; however, discussion in this research uses “Solidarity Economy.” It is one of the most important tenants of these alternative economies, found in the collective movements discussed throughout this paper, and a principal value within both of the case study organizations, Buy Nothing Project and Timebank. Due to the virtual space and platform used by these organizations, the modern understanding of ‘social’ is also part of these groups; however, it is left to the individual to determine what their interactions and communications will be. There are several fundamental principles shared throughout Solidarity Economy groups.

CHAPTER TWO: CAPITALISM

Fallacies of Capitalism and Wealth

In an ideal free market under a capitalist economy, goods are produced by paid workers, sold without much government interference, and profits benefit business owners. Adam Smith, whose 1776 treatise *The Wealth of Nations* eventually led him to become widely known as the father of modern economics, believed that individual workers with specialized skills would collaborate with other specialized workers to produce larger quantities of goods (Sharma, 2020). The economy would increase as production and sales increased. These exchanges, unlimited by the government, ensure freedom of both producers and consumers to determine the quality and value of commodities. Producers of better products would prosper over those with inferior products, but consumers retain the power to keep prices low and would not be pigeonholed into purchasing items at costs they felt were too high. Ideally, capitalism's tendencies toward monopolies and inequalities would be controlled through supply and demand, and competition with other producers. Proponents of capitalism use Smith's 'invisible hand' theory and claim that growth in capitalist economies is the 'rising tide that lifts many boats' (Kennedy, 2015).

The ideal free market is not what we see in the United States. Although laws are enacted to prevent corporate monopolies, consolidated power and limited competition has enabled megaproducers to dominate their markets and charge higher prices for goods and services (Mitchell & Holmberg, 2020). These monopolistic companies can be found in every sector including waste management, telecommunications, health, finance, entertainment, and food

(Feroldi, 2017; Mauldin, 2019; Mitchell & Holmberg, 2020; Stewart, 2020). Mega corporations including Alphabet/Google, Meta/Facebook, Amazon, and Apple have all had anti-trust lawsuits filed against them, including a recent appeal by 46 states to revisit a recent anti-trust case against Facebook, that was originally decided in favor of the company (Bartz & Culliford, 2022).

While capitalism as an organizing theory for the economy is not alone in producing detrimental impacts to human and natural communities, it is the prevailing economic model around the world today. Hence, this research focuses specifically on how Solidarity Economies might address the failures of capitalism specifically. Capitalism has created financial inequality where only a select few stand on islands of wealth and prosperity. Evidence indicates that our economy has not supported the general welfare of the people, but instead has allowed the free market to polarize populations between a small group of wealthy individuals and millions of struggling working-class poor (Schaeffer, 2020). The owners of production earn profits but too often, they do not redistribute the profit back to consumers or workers, instead they are frequently distributed among the top tier within corporations between executives, shareholders, and investors (Bell et al., 2018). Polarized income distribution and wealth hoarding allows for extreme disparities between the working class and the leaders of large corporations (Davis and Cobb, 2010). The U.S. is a leader in global wealth, holding roughly 30% which is almost double the wealth of the second-place nation, China (Desjardins, 2020). This competition to become the wealthiest country, ignores the systemic injustices and oppressive tactics residents struggle with daily. In America, the richest 1% of the population owns far more than the lowest 50% of residents (Beer, 2020). The wealthiest people in the U.S. continue to earn high incomes, even during times of economic despair experienced by the rest of the population. In the last 30 years the U.S. experienced major busts and crises in housing, financial sectors, and the automotive

industry, which involved changes and regulations that impact mortgages, credit lending, stock exchanges, and banking or investments practices (Council on Foreign Relations, n.d.).

Throughout this, the upper-class retained much of their wealth and assets, even increasing the median net worth to 75 times more than lower-income families that do not have the same level of financial resiliency (Horowitz et. al, 2020).

The lack of competition between large businesses has impacted workers by allowing corporations to create predatory practices that force workers to compete for low wage jobs, pay relatively high prices for many necessities, and accrue hefty financial debts, which keeps power and wealth in the hands of the elite. Workers are seldom able to leverage their skills for higher compensation due to a decrease in the value of skilled labor resulting from the ability of many business owners to mechanize production lines. Many workers face limited job opportunities or termination, when they fight back against an anti-union political atmosphere and organizing by elitist powerholders (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2011; Lafer & Loustaunau, 2020; National Labor Relations Board, 2005; Pryluka, 2021). Current labor laws allow corporations to spend millions of dollars annually to prevent unionization by requiring anti-union staff meetings, prohibiting discussions on opposing views, and subjecting pro-union workers to denigration, firing, operation shutdowns, and even arrest. (Applebaum, B., 2022; Lafer & Loustaunau, 2020; Lozano, I. 2022). For too long, the workforce has been powerless as the rules of law protected the owners of capital production. Attempts to thwart the ability of unions to advocate for wage increases, benefits, and safer working conditions may be coming to an end. Hard fought battles are taking place as abused workers fight against megacorporations, including Amazon and Starbucks, to protect rights and equality for the working class, often creating the first unions within these giant organizations (Applebaum, B, 2022; Lozano, I, 2022)

Bootstrap economics, the false promise that financial security comes just from hard work and that everyone is capable of earning incredible wealth, is destructively engrained through hegemonic capitalist ideology. Society often sends the message that all financial troubles can be solved if one works more hours, gains a second job, or finishes their education. This perpetuates an exhausting cycle and places the burden of responsibility solely on the individual worker, instead of contemplating that the entire system may be suffering widespread failure. We latch on to bootstrap stories and try to breakdown moguls into relatable tales that say “See! This person did it, you can too!” Meanwhile, accumulated wealth and assets can be passed from generation to generation, resulting in incredibly wealthy individuals being born, instead of rising through hours of work (Pryluka, 2021). When millions of North Americans work for minimum wage operations such as retail stores and fast-food restaurants, this large-scale systemic inequality is difficult to bear for the struggling majority of residents (Zornick, 2012).

Historical economic trends show that unemployment rates decreased between 1970 and 2018, and the median household income was rising; however, changes vary drastically between economic classes. Shifts between the upper-, middle-, and lower-income classes also include differences in their percent of total population and how much each group’s median income level increased. Between 1970 – 2018, the median income for lower-class households increased by 43% but this equates to earnings of less than \$29,000 per year, versus the upper-class incomes of over \$207,000 (a 64% rise) (Horowitz et al., 2020). The percent of the U.S. population in the middle-class bracket has decreased, shifting more heavily towards the lower-income bracket, further illustrating the large divide between the haves and have-nots.

The U.S. economic system is clearly not working for millions of people. By 2010, half of the kids enrolled in public schools throughout the U.S. were in poverty (Cahn, 2018). The

number of people living in poverty increased to more than 37 million by 2020, but these figures do not account for the “uncounted majority,” people above the poverty threshold but frequently struggling to afford monthly bills and daily necessities (Pascale, 2021). By May 2020, over 20 million U.S. workers had lost their jobs due to the pandemic, furthering inequality (Tappe, 2020).

Income inequalities and uneven distribution of wealth are not new concepts. Women are anticipated to earn less than male counterparts throughout their working careers, which leads to far less retirement income (Gregory, 2003). Women and people of color are traditionally paid less and are less likely to be promoted, once they are hired within a company (Bell et al., 2018). Glass walls and ceilings are found in multiple sectors, preventing women from attaining higher positions and salaries within their current fields, as well as preventing them from obtaining certain types of jobs (Hunt et al., 2020). Due to the inequality and disparities common in the U.S., research on alternative economic frameworks, such as Solidarity Economies, has become relevant. Economic expansion that concentrates wealth and power into the hands of a few negates human value and respect for all living beings. It destroys the connection between people and the planet. Capitalist economies create systems of economic instability for millions because they “develop institutions and ideologies that justify surplus extraction and capital accumulation” while exploiting natural resources and human populations in the name of economic growth (Singh & Tiwana, 2019).

Environment and Food

Overharvesting of many natural resources has greatly reduced the planet’s ability to regenerate and remediate. The Earth has lost over 46% of trees globally due to farming and

ranching practices, logging for paper and wood, extraction of resources such as palm oil, and increased urbanization (Nunez, 2019). The reduced health, diversity, and quantity of trees impacts biodiversity and increases the numerous issues associated with climate change. Our current rate of natural resource consumption will require two Earths by 2050, to generate the renewable resources we use within one year (World Wildlife Fund, n.d.). The Global Footprint Network calculates national carbon emissions with rates of deforestation and renewable resource consumption to analyze how quickly ecological resources are being used before the Earth can reproduce them. In some years, the U.S. has used our allotted resources within the first few months of the calendar. The U.S. has roughly 5% of the world's population but it consumes nearly 33% of paper supplies and 25% of coal, oil, aluminum, and copper (Scheer & Moss, 2012).

Capitalist economies flourish through the rapid creation and sale of goods supported by product planned obsolescence, unnecessary innovation, and manipulated distribution (Crosby, 2020). These tendencies cause environmental damage through the cycle of unsustainable natural resource extraction, production, consumption, and waste (Lovins et al., 2007). Well known examples of that cycle include the purchase of plastic bottles, the trillions of discarded "single-use" plastic bags, fast fashion trends, and the planned obsolescence of electronic products (United Nations, n.d.). The buildup of material waste pollutes landscapes, leaches toxins into soils, and harms aquatic life. Pollution impacts biodiversity, water quality, contaminates the ground, and reduces air quality (Richardson, 2018). Soil acidification and degradation are unwanted byproducts of capitalism through industrial and mining activities, increased carbon and acid rain, and the addition of fertilizers for higher yield agriculture (Bolan et al., 2005). Acid rain, a byproduct of the burning of fossil fuels, has negative impacts on the environment, limiting

the healthy biological function of both aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems (Lükewille & Alewell, 2008). Strong ecosystems reduce climate impacts while also providing valuable natural resources that allow for nutrient rich food sources for people and nonhuman animals (Tan, 2021).

Biodiversity helps ensure seed dispersal, pollination, and healthy soils to grow nutritious foods.

The U.S. food system is dominated by industrialized agricultural practices, designed to maximize profits and production through high yield harvesting of monocrops that require soil amendments and pest remediation, resulting in further damage to the environment, increased global warming, reduced biodiversity and harm to human well-being (Fakhri, 2021).

Consequences of Unsustainable Development

Climate and environmental problems, exacerbated by capitalist economic pursuits, perpetuate the cycle of food insecurity and poverty by increasing barriers to healthy food supplies (Webster, 2019). Food insecurity not only impacts people in developing nations, but it also leaves its mark on college students and middle-class families within the U.S. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service found that roughly 14 million U.S. families experienced food scarcity in 2019. In 2021, more than 38 million people were struggling with food security, 12 million of them children, with many of them directly impacted by the Coronavirus (Feeding America, n.d. b). The percentage of food insecure people has doubled with the economic crisis brought on by the pandemic (Silva, 2020). A food system bounded in capitalist economics, where profits are more valuable than basic human needs, is unsustainable and largely detrimental.

Financial insecurity, food scarcity, and environmental health are woven together, where addressing one can reduce the burdens of the other, because food scarcity is complicated by

wealth inequalities, environmental impacts of agriculture, and the distance between healthy foods and hungry people (Feeding America, n.d. a). Food based organizations around the world estimate that over 820 million people (1:9) struggle with food insecurity every day (World Food Programme, 2019). Once food is grown, it must be transported to markets which may not be in easily accessible locations for some people, resulting in community food deserts. Food apartheid exists in areas of high inequalities, usually based on socioeconomic factors of income and ethnicity, and can be found in both rural and urban environments. Over 19 million Americans live in areas where healthy food is hard to find (Silva, 2020). In the U.S., food scarcity is connected to socioeconomic injustice, often impacting ethnic communities more than white neighborhoods (Bread for the World, n.d.). Since the days of expeditions and colonization in the U.S., centuries of harmful practices and legal restrictions have limited access to healthy food by stealing the right to grow food from Indigenous and Black communities and locking many workers in low-income jobs that further restrict nutritional health (Fakhri, 2021). Land was forcefully, or legally taken through the construction of unjust laws, from these communities, disrupting their ties to the earth while also restricting access to nutrition. In modern times, restrictions on small-scale or public food production can be found in cities across the U.S. Food apartheid due to unjust barriers of access and financial insecurity create daily struggles for many people to obtain basic necessities.

Sustainability is a method of taking care of the needs of the current generation without reducing the ability of the future generation to do the same. A healthy and resilient planet provides a wealth of ecosystem services; therefore, we should reduce our ecological footprint, limit consumption, and reduce waste to ensure the vitality of the environment (Mair, 2019). Many cities are attempting to ban single use plastics such as disposable grocery bags and

drinking straws. Universities are teaching classes and offering degrees in Sustainability. Toluna, a global technology company focused on market research, produced a 2019 Sustainability Report, in which more than half of the respondents indicated their concerns about environmental health should lead to better business practices and more sustainable production methods. Concerned consumers around the world are becoming aware of their environmental impacts; therefore, they are searching for ways to make healthier decisions by shifting their everyday actions and buying practices to new sustainable methods (Crosby, 2020). Roughly 70% of North American consumers are purchasing more ecofriendly products and attempting to limit their waste (Bekmagambetova, 2020).

Increasing awareness of the world around us and our impacts on the planet has led to growing numbers of people that find it unacceptable to continue our economic practices, and the demand that other alternatives must be explored at all geospatial scales. (Hawken, 1997). As we consume digital images and videos of plastics in the ocean, raging forest fires, and protests over social injustices public outcry supports the growing urgency to become more environmentally sustainable and reduce disparities that impact the quality of human life (CBS News, 2021; Sea Turtle Love, 2018; Taylor, 2021). The rapid information abilities of social media have exposed many systemic problems both locally and globally; however, millions of Americans are still being denied internet access in personal residences and schools due to being in rural areas (Janse et al., 2021). In the age of technology, not only is it embarrassing to have these geographic resource limitations it is also detrimental to health and well-being. When schools switched to virtual classrooms during the Coronavirus pandemic, education became inaccessible for millions of students without reliable high-speed internet because of their family's rural residence or low-income status (Campbell et al., 2021). Several giant telecommunication companies have been

under investigation for outages, in both rural and urban areas, which prevented customers from contacting emergency call centers for life saving assistance (Knapp, 2021; Magaña, 2021). The government deems communication services essential; yet this persistent problem continues to impact health and well-being, and at disproportionate rates for marginalized communities of low-income or ethnic minority residents (Campbell, et al., 2021). In addition to these direct impacts to individuals, communities as a whole suffer from lack of communication. For example, Facebook, the world's most popular social media platform, has a built-in alert feature as part of their crisis response initiative which enables users to notify friends and family about their safety. This check-in option can be greatly beneficial for communicating in times of natural or social disasters; however, it only works for those that have access to it. For Facebook users, restricted access found in dead zones, insufficient data plans/caps, or financial limitations that led to service outages, could cause extra stress, lead to clogged phone lines as frantic calls are placed to contact loved ones, or result in untrained people conducting risky and unnecessary rescue attempts.

People are searching for ways to stretch their income, feel connected to their community in times of isolation or disaster, and care for their family while navigating uncertainty about their job prospects compounded by the impacts of the pandemic (Walsh, 2021; Gray & Gifford, 2020). Participation in a Solidarity Economy may be the alternative needed to reduce these concerns.

CHAPTER THREE: ECONOMICS OF SOLIDARITY

Solidarity Economy Solution

The foundation for the Solidarity Economy (SE) movement focuses on solidarity, mutualism, cooperation, equity, sustainability, social and economic democracy, and pluralism (Bell et al., 2018; Borowiak et al., 2018). The principle of pluralism means that there is no single and inviolable definition or way of working together to make the world a better place, allowing different communities to develop unique approaches. These principles foster community and well-being for all members, instead of economic growth that benefits a smaller portion of people. Solidarity Economies are found on multiple continents, discussed in many languages, and given a variety of different names – trade unions, gift economy, social economy, and so forth (RIPESS, 2021). The representation is flexible, allowing operations to be tailored to a community’s specific needs, but the principles of solidarity remain the same. The SE framework can be used for business management practices, community development, and grassroots movements.

SE movements can often take the form of a modernized gift economy, where items are transferred between participants without consideration of retail value (Brady, 2018; Distefano, 2016; Bryant, 2020). In gift economies found across social media sites, like the Buy Nothing Project, gifts range from small inexpensive tangible things to more expensive larger items or intangible help and services. All gifts, whether they are a box of broken crayons or a reclining sofa, help reduce monetary expenses for the receiver. Some gifts have a deeper meaning than the price the item could be sold for. Traditional gift economies can be found in many different

varieties including indigenous community exchanges, pre-market economies, and women's domestic labor (Vaughan, 2002). If the principles of equality, sustainability, opposition to systems that support oppression, and community participation towards more just living situations, are represented in a group or movement, it can be a part of the wider umbrella of the Solidarity Economy.

Solidarity Economies exist under a variety of conditions and political bodies. It is vital to recognize and discuss the unique methods and goals of these communities throughout the world, not only to increase their representation in both academic and conventional conversations, but also to explore the multiple scenarios addressed by the framework. Few problems are alleviated by a one size fits all solution; however, as principles of Solidarity Economies remain consistent, there is flexibility in their implementation. This allows each community initiative to take shape based upon the needs of local people, and the supports and processes present in the area. In Marica, Brazil, financial support in the form of a localized digital currency, no-interest loans, and basic income payments from the government paved the way for a modern Solidarity Economy response to problems exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic (Katz & Ferreira, 2020). Marica is a small city, but their existing framework created stability by enabling local leaders to increase financial stipends, keep workers employed, and distribute food to needy citizens, well before the country had an official response plan.

Recent research on squatting as a technique to create spaces for economic development and building networks of Solidarity Economies examines RiMaflow in Milan, Italy (Calafati, 2020). Traditionally we think of squatting as occupying a space that is not legally one's to occupy, but many regions have Squatter's Rights protections that enable people to utilize these available spaces, within some limitations. Squatting has been used since the early 1900s to stand

up against social injustices that limit access to physical spaces that include housing, agricultural lands, meeting places, and working spaces. For RiMaflow and the associated enterprises, their occupation of an abandoned facility was not contested by the legal owners. RiMaflow was created when an automobile part manufacturer filed for bankruptcy and sold the facility to a company from outside the country. The new owners severely cut jobs and ultimately relocated the production line to their country. The workers were left devastated but quickly moved to establish squatter's rights and earn income to support their families. Since occupying the space, RiMaflow created a cooperative, shared the excess space with local marginalized entrepreneurs, and hosted multiple social gatherings to generate profits. The workspace is governed by an assembly where all workers that use the space have equal share in how it is maintained. Additionally, workers reduce ecological footprints by recycling materials, increase financial stability for workers, moderate consumer costs for all created goods, and create fair trade networks that support sustainable development (Calafati, 2020).

Research has focused on Solidarity Economies used in countries throughout South America and Europe, but alternative economies can be found on other continents too. Recently large cities within the United States have begun experiments with Solidarity Economies. One trend is in community food movements found throughout the U.S. in large metropolitan cities such as Philadelphia (Borowiak et al., 2018), Boston (Loh & Agyeman, 2019), Seattle (Menconi et al., 2020), New York City, Baltimore, and Chicago (Anderson et al., 2019). These Solidarity Economies are excellent examples of local initiatives that impact multiple SDGs while transcending ethnic and economic boundaries through the cultural significance and intrinsic value of growing and sharing food resources.

Beyond Subsistence

SE groups cover much more than food and agriculture, however. A network of cooperative businesses and organizations strive to reduce racial injustice and numerous inequalities in Jackson, MS by putting the power for change back into the hands of those most effected. Collective action allows for locals to access new markets, technology, and services by reducing the initial cost of these ventures because their credit and negotiation abilities are enhanced when seen as a group and not an individual (Cooperation Jackson, n.d.). For years, Mississippi has been the poorest state in the U.S., where drastic imbalances in food security, employment opportunities, and race-based inequalities cause significant tension that impacts the health and well-being of both adults and children (Cooperation Jackson, n.d.; Franklin, 2016; World Pop, n.d.). To combat these systemic disparities, Cooperation Jackson uses Solidarity Economy framework to collaborate and engage residents, agencies, and local and regional government officials to create Community Land Trusts, increase affordable housing, create sustainable urban agriculture, and reduce waste through their new recycling program (Cooperation Jackson, n.d.).

Alternative economies under the SE umbrella offer an array of benefits for diverse circumstances and are not designed to be limited by immutable demographics. Over the last few decades in Montréal, Canada, non-profit activist groups led by women have been working to address the city's housing crisis from a feminist, inclusive, and culturally aware position (Table des groupes de femmes de Montréal, 2021). While the government often drags their feet with funding or construction of affordable housing, collectives have conducted research on community needs, secured finances, and enabled hundreds of residences to be built. New housing is affordable, safe, diverse, and inclusive, with many units reserved for specific

marginalized populations including Indigenous people, single parents, and older adults. The planned co-operative housing project La Maison des RebElles will offer a safe space against discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, and age, while reducing financial burdens and the struggle many residents experience when looking for affordable housing (Gladu, 2020).

There is no limit to the number of SE groups that may exist in one area, creating the ability of organizations to compound benefits within a community; however, little academic attention has been given to multicase studies, which could result in an in-depth analysis of how the creation and implementation of SE groups, their placement, and the socioeconomic demographics of a community can contribute to perpetuating systemic problems. (Borowiak et al., 2018). Understanding the spatial boundaries of residential demographics and the physical places where specific types of Solidarity Economies exist can lead to more effective initiatives that truly support SE principles such as equality and justice. Bridging the gaps can break up the social stratification, unequal distribution of resources, and other discriminatory tactics found in the workforce and society.

Justice and Equity in Solidarity

What makes a SE initiative effective for the community? Throughout the years many researchers have tried to determine the most important factors that foster participation in sustainable, environmentally friendly actions (Shove, 2010; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Altruism, cultural consideration, and collective societies are important mindsets (deMorais et al., 2021). Some factors that have been found to increase effectiveness of SE organizations while enhancing sustainable initiatives are incubation and networking spaces, the inclusion of women

as leaders and board members, and access to outside financial support (Marconatto et al., 2019; Cooperation Jackson, n.d.). Physical spaces where collaboration and creative ideas can flourish within a centralized location offer many benefits to Solidarity Economy members. Unlike capitalism, Solidarity Economies may not generate profits or revenue; therefore, they often lose out on potential land space for innovative community-based ideas when property transactions favor higher profit use. In some situations, virtual meeting places can be utilized when physical space is limited, distance traveled is a consideration, or in times of a global health crisis such as the on-going Covid-19 pandemic. In-person or virtual meeting areas may require a fee which creates a barrier for Solidarity Economies that are small or just beginning; therefore, open urban spaces where grassroots movements can grow and transform should be protected. These places may include the use of large facilities such as church halls or empty school cafeterias, companies sharing the use of video conference apps, or creating Community Land Trusts that help ensure that land stays in the hands of the neighbors instead of being redeveloped for other purposes. A land trust that allows for a vacant lot to become a community garden is a great example of transformative practices that promote health for people and the planet.

Another important factor for the development of an effective Solidarity Economy or community organization is the people involved in creation, implementation, and their continuous involvement within the group. Resident stakeholders are more likely to have “long standing rapport” within the community and create well-established initiatives that withstand the test of time (Anderson et al., 2019). People engrained in a community are generally more knowledgeable about the struggles within that area; therefore, existing neighborhood residents are better prepared for solidarity-based collaborations. Well-intentioned outsiders may have helpful ideas and motivation to reduce inequalities, but they are better suited as supportive

contributors rather than movement leaders. Trust is vital to alleviate concerns about future displacement or marginalization, especially when community members have had previous experiences that led to false promises and being let down (Borowiak et al., 2018). Trust is easier to gain when marginalized community members see their own demographic diversity represented within the initiative.

Solidarity Economies strive to reduce inequalities, but misguided initiatives can replicate the same differences found in society. Maps drafted by Borowiak and colleagues (2017) show SE based operations are clustered on both sides of the Schuylkill River close to downtown Philadelphia. There are many SE initiatives doing great things across that city, but there are few such initiatives in predominantly Black, Latinx, or low-income areas. Additionally, many SE initiatives have their own barriers to entry, such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) which is designed for white communities with more financial stability as they often have the resources and funding needed to participate (Borowiak et al., 2017). Community organizations that want to make a real difference need more than good intentions. They must work hard to create trust between historically marginalized populations that are subject to systemic inequality, especially in communities where gentrification is experienced as more affluent white residents and business owners enter previously low-income neighborhoods home to ethnic minorities (Borowiak, et al., 2017; Loh and Agyeman, 2019). If Solidarity Economy efforts ignore redlining, discriminative practices, and lack diverse representation these initiatives will fail to help the vulnerable populations fundamental principles were designed to care for.

When SE initiatives have taken root and begun to flourish, they often gain attention from the local business and political sectors. The way SE is framed by those sectors and discussed in forums is important to members involved (Hudson, 2018). The way SE is described, and the

benefits highlighted by local press and public officials, can sometimes support business and political interests, instead of focusing on the core principles SE is founded upon: solidarity, sustainability, cooperation, mutualism, and so forth. By viewing Solidarity Economy movements through a capitalist perspective, which prioritizes seeking profits and economic growth, SE is stripped of its power to reframe, reconstruct, and transform the world as it is experienced by members. This focus harms the individuals invested in SE organizations and can impact their emotional perspectives. Bell et al. (2019) calls for social scientists to educate society about the alternative governance, employment, and goals found within Solidarity Economy organizations because of the ability to battle inequalities while promoting positive health socially, financially, and physically; however, careful attention is needed to not replicate existing discrimination or alienation.

Sustainable Development Goals

In the United States, Rachel Carson is often recognized as igniting modern environmental consciousness which led to the first Earth Day celebration in 1970, and recognition of the polarity between economics and planetary health (Ghorbani, 2021). Globally, activism and environmental awareness grew throughout the 20th century resulting in increased protests and political summits. Collaborative efforts at the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro led to the creation of new global objectives to reduce economic, political, and environmental pressures to further work started by the Millennium Development Goals established in 2000 (United National Development Programme, n.d.). Although amazing accomplishments were made on those the eight original goals, there remains much work to be done to protect vulnerable populations and planetary health.

Sustainable Development Goals expanded upon the previous goals to include additional issues such as equality, justice, resource allocation, financial burdens, and hardships experienced due to disasters or crises (United Nations, n.d. a). There are now 17 defined goals with a total of 169 targets that address disparities in well-being, food scarcity, poverty, ecosystem health, and responsible consumption (United Nations, n.d. b) Sustainable Development Goals and Solidarity Economies address many of the same issues. SDGs can be seen as identification of the problem and hopeful outcome, where SEs offer implementable solutions to achieve those goals. The pilot study of the Buy Nothing Project and St. Pete Timebank led to the hypothesis that the most pronounced goals within the organizations are those that address well-being (Goal 3) through reducing poverty (Goal 1) and hunger (Goal 2) and increasing the sustainability of the planet (Goals 12 – 16); however, the groups may also make progress on other SDGs. This research investigates the way Solidarity Economy and Sustainable Development Goal frameworks are implemented in local organizations in St. Petersburg.

Development through Solidarity

Solidarity Economy principles focus on collective experiences through community interaction, while reducing socioeconomic disparities, fostering human equality, justice, and environmental stewardship (Ripess, 2021; USSSEN, 2017). The principles of the Solidarity Economy can be found in a variety of organizations and grassroots movements that work towards Sustainable Development Goals including community agriculture, support networks, gift economies, collectives, and credit unions that strive to alleviate poverty and financial stress, increase equality, and offer multiple perspectives and various solutions to social and environmental maladies (Borowiak et. al, 2018). To reduce some of the daily struggles with

securing necessities, many people join their local Solidarity Economy, where helping neighbors is a key component. By sharing excess resources members can minimize the waste generated by a household or gain the material goods needed to help them thrive. Food and clothing are important large costs that can be reduced by sharing items. Spending time helping another creates the strong bonds needed for sustainable communities while also supplying affordable labor for home projects and transportation concerns.

Collaborative problem solving, often experienced through these alternative economies, is needed to achieve Sustainable Development. Collaboration can also have a positive influence on mental and emotional health which allows space to focus on other tasks and responsibilities. SE organizations can work towards goals that increase equality between different socioeconomic groups while slowly addressing some of the larger global problems found in modern society. Solidarity Economies can be formed by a few people or host a large number of members. They can be small and localized on the neighborhood scale, large enough to serve a broad region, or be part of an international effort. Impact on systemic issues depends on the outreach initiatives, group size, and ultimate goals of the people involved; however, the capacity for important changes is always present. Large scale regional economies may have more ability to address affordable housing or healthcare, but small neighborhood groups might be best suited to help with personal life changes or develop stronger community relationships.

CHAPTER FOUR: THESIS RESEARCH

Methodology

This research adds to the body of knowledge in support of locally based Solidarity Economies as alternative solutions to the unsustainable inequities created by capitalism. These economies have a variety of designs and implementations; however, they share the same guiding principles of sustainability, equity, justice, cooperation, and mutualism. Sustainable initiatives grounded in this framework can reduce the disparities between socioeconomic classes through grassroots efforts that sprout in communities in both large and small cities. Effective Solidarity Economy organizations put basic needs and human rights at the forefront of consideration, but successful initiatives depend on participation. Initiatives need community support, diverse representation, democratic participation, and reduced barriers such as startup or material costs and resource limitations (Diaz et al., 2018). Leaders should use Solidarity Economy principles to implement ideas that support SDGs. Participation in Solidarity Economies can increase the health and well-being of individuals while building strong resilient communities of support networks. Initiatives founded in principles of justice are effective at addressing insufficient community resources because they foster equity and well-being, while actively working to reduce disparities experienced by neglected populations (Jermé & Wakefield, 2013).

A small pilot study was conducted in Spring 2021 to ensure the viability of the research design, methods, and selection of case study organizations. After data collection and analysis, a few changes were made including the addition of SDGs and adjusting a few survey prompts for

clarity. Several key principles of the Solidarity Economy were supported by the survey responses and also found in the interviews. Interviewees discussed topics of sustainability and environmental concern, reducing financial burdens, and building support systems with members in the community. Participants also noted qualities of respect, equality, and valuing humanity. This demonstrates that the organizations share similar purposes and goals, although their methods of achieving the goals may be different. The pilot study confirmed that these methods are appropriate for investigating local Solidarity Economies.

This research used a community-based qualitative research methodology to investigate the motivations, behaviors, and attitudes of members of two specific St. Petersburg, Florida groups within the context of the principles of Solidarity Economies. The two case studies were the Buy Nothing Project and the St. Pete Timebank. Community-based qualitative research methodology included in-depth interviews, surveys, and participant observation within each of the groups, and website and document analysis, as explained below. Data were collected through online platforms; however, no personal identification was retained during the research. All collected materials are stored on the researcher's personal laptop and in the University approved storage program Box under password protection to ensure security. The project was submitted to USF's Institutional Review Board prior to data collection. After careful consideration, the protocol was determined to be exempt from Institutional Review Board review on March 21, 2022.

Florida Microcosm

Florida offers a wide variety of ecosystems and lifestyles that appeal to tourists and new residents; however, as development increases physically and economically, these attracting

factors may be at risk. Natural resources include coastlines that stretch for nearly 2,000 miles, more than 1,200 artesian springs, and roughly 25,000 mi² of forests (University of Florida, n.d.). Florida's unique ecosystems allow for robust biodiversity in flora and fauna; however, over 100 plants and animal species are listed as endangered or threatened species (Landscape, n.d.).

In addition to natural features, Florida also offers variety in its built environment, from densely populated urban areas to quiet rural properties. It is easy to understand why Florida is a leader in population growth (Saunders, 2021). The Sunshine State has its share of severe problems that include equity in education, affordable housing, insurance costs, and labor shortages (Klas & Ceballos, 2022). Housing problems across the state are complicated by wealthy investors that outbid locals and often pay in cash making their transaction more desirable (Mahoney, 2021b). Poverty and food scarcity is a reality for Floridians of all ages. The impossible dream that working hard will equate to financial security is at odds with Florida's minimum wage of \$10/hr, which will slowly increase to only \$15 by September 2026 (Department of Labor, 2022). Although no one truly needs to hoard their extravagant wealth, this wage would require nearly 50 years of 40-hour work weeks to earn a pre-tax \$1 million. This incomprehensible financial status still would not add someone to the top 1% of rich U.S. residents. In reality, roughly half of Florida's children live at or below the poverty level, one out of five children struggle with food security, and the number of overall residents experiencing this is expected to increase to 3.5 million throughout the pandemic (American Children's Campaign, n.d.; Florida Association of Counties, n.d.).

St. Petersburg Squeeze

Issues related to all Sustainable Development Goals are experienced across the state of Florida, especially in its most densely populated county, Pinellas. The city of St. Petersburg's population of more than a quarter million people is roughly equally divided by gender and age, but predominately white. Black, Asian, and Latinx people make up less than 30% of the population (City of St. Petersburg, 2021). In the Tampa Bay area, wages in many employment sectors are nearly 10% lower than the national average, which compounds the financial struggles and inability to get ahead experienced by local residents (Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2021). In St. Petersburg, clusters of wealthy neighborhoods line the coast, but a closer look at the demographics of the city show residential areas where income is less than the U.S. poverty threshold (City Data, 2019) Per capita annual income for residents is just over \$38,000, and median household income is barely \$60, 000 (United States Census Bureau, 2021). The City of St. Pete's website highlights the area's many benefits including being "one of the nation's fastest-growing cities" because of atmosphere that includes support for the LGBTQ+ community, perfect beach weather, and cultural activities found in museums, parks, and events across the city. St. Pete also offers a robust selection of sports and recreational activities as well as several institutes for higher learning. The city's vast coastline and abundant sunshine mean that aquatic health and outdoor recreation are also important to residents. Aquatic ecosystems provide the area with food, storm and climate mitigation, sequester carbon, and offer many recreational or spiritual opportunities. As the region continues to grow, the built environment encroaches upon natural spaces reducing their ecosystem benefits (McManus, 2021). Even top recreation destinations are being considered for redevelopment as projected sea level rise and coastal flooding weigh heavily on the minds of officials (McManus, 2022). Development can

revitalize a post-pandemic county by generating an economic boost; however, middle to low-income residents are still struggling with the basics of housing, employment, and food security. While debates over increased rents and the affordable housing crisis take place between community-based agencies, city councils, and state offices, St. Petersburg swore in new local officials in January 2022; representatives that are tasked with reducing socioeconomic burdens while striving to meet Sustainable Development Goals that recognize both social and environmental concerns (Wright, 2021). Due to how wicked and pervasive the problems associated with SDG are, efforts to reduce them may be thought of as higher-level government tasks; however sustainable initiatives and attainable goals are often seen at the community or city level. St. Petersburg has its own Office of Sustainability, and a sustainability degree is offered at a major university in the heart of downtown, yet these two giant stakeholders do not seem aware of the synergies between SDG achievement and Solidarity Economy framework. They may also be unaware of the community groups explored in this research and how hundreds of local residents participate in collective action towards SDGs on daily basis.

As sea level rise and coastal flooding increase, marginalized residents feel squeezed by both the human and natural environments. Sustainable development relies on using an equity lens to reduce poverty by increasing quality education, job prospects, and housing affordability (Brezina, 2022). In response to the growing needs of the city, development projects are underway across multiple sectors including employment, housing, and recreation (Brezina, 2021). Many of the current or planned projects include upgrades to roads and transportation opportunities, new restaurant and retail spaces, expansions for businesses, and a variety of mixed-use buildings that will create hubs of housing, service industry experiences, and workspaces. Historic Jordan Park will undergo a \$93 million redevelopment that should address

housing seniors and previously displaced residents (O'Donnell & Wright, 2021). Within the next decade, the former Gas Plant District may see development that brings affordable housing, job opportunities, and parks while attracting visitors to other amenities (Trujillo & Hollenbeck, 2021) Development has benefits; however, equity and sustainability may be used as catchphrases instead of progressive benchmarks when plans include the rapid building and sale of million-dollar townhomes or condominiums (Brezina, 2022; Mahoney, 2021a). With so much activity it can be difficult to create a sense of community, but grassroots organizations rooted in Solidarity Economy principles can help strangers bond with each other, foster equality across various demographics, and even work towards Sustainable Development Goal achievement.

Case Studies

Buy Nothing St. Petersburg

In 2013, Clark and Rockefeller and (2021a) created the Buy Nothing Project (BN), a hyper-local gift economy that reduces financial burdens, improves the health of the planet, and strengthens community ties between neighbors. The initial goal of Clark and Rockefeller was to reduce the microplastics found on their local beaches. They believed that recycling material goods throughout the community would ultimately reduce waste and by keeping the groups hyper-local, neighbors would be more likely to participate. The Buy Nothing Project uses a “give where you live” method which means members join the designated BN for their location. The mission of BN is to “offer people a way to give and receive, share, lend, and express gratitude through a worldwide network of hyper-local gift economies in which the true wealth is the web of connections formed between people who are real-life neighbors” (Clark & Rockefeller, 2020). The BN has a few simple rules that help maintain their mission, creates a safe and friendly online

atmosphere, and keeps members' posts within guidelines. Members are not allowed to buy, sell, trade, or barter for items (Clark & Rockefeller, 2021b). They should only give what is rightfully theirs to provide, which includes their time, a service or talent, or a tangible item from their home. Interactions begin on a free online platform, most commonly Facebook, when members create a give, ask, or gratitude post (Clark & Rockefeller, 2021b).

The Buy Nothing Project now spans the globe with more than 3 million members across 44 nations. Organizational documents, support services including mentor and group leader guides, and rules are available in multiple different languages as a template to help anyone create a thriving Buy Nothing Project group in their local community. The project has created nearly 6,000 local groups, each with its own limited geographic boundaries. To help new members find their correct group, a global map is available and periodically updated to reflect new groups. Each local group is run by community member volunteers that have completed free administrator training (Clark & Rockefeller, 2021b). There are no associated costs or fees for each local Buy Nothing community and access to each group is freely available on Facebook and a recently developed app.

The Buy Nothing Project sample population for this case study is St. Petersburg (North) and St. Petersburg (North East Park). These two groups were created in February 2021, after the previous St. Pete "NE" group had grown too large. The sample frame includes all members regardless of activity level or membership position; however, group members are required to be adults over the age of 21 and live within specific geographical boundaries. The total geographic area is comprised of a large section of Northeast St. Pete, spanning east of 34th St/ U.S. 19 between Ulmerton Road and 22nd Ave N (Buy Nothing St. Petersburg North, 2021; Buy Nothing St. Petersburg North East Park, 2021). Participants were recruited through posts

within their BN Facebook group. The post text was created by the researcher, approved by the university's Institutional Review Board, and then added to the Facebook group by one of their volunteer administrators. For participant observation and interviews, only the North group was considered. The North East Park group was added during the survey phase to obtain more responses.

In January 2022, there were roughly 415 members of the North group, and membership for the North East Park group is over 1,000; however, roughly only 70% of either group's members are active on a regular basis. Group membership can fluctuate daily, and it is typical for more members to be added as opposed to the rare occurrence that a member leaves the group. To join a group, new members must answer simple questions, used by most Buy Nothing Project communities, that seek to verify age, location, and that they are a member of only one group. Some of the members within the neighborhoods were not considered for participation in this research because they are 'silent observers', a term used to describe other group administrators that observe another group but do not like, post, or comment inside that group. This is a fairly common practice among administrators within the Buy Nothing Project and can be helpful to these volunteers for a variety of reasons. Data for this research includes 84 completed surveys and six in-depth, semi-structured interviews; however, it should be noted that some initial interviewees were also St. Pete Timebank members. These interviewees were counted once and placed into either category depending on the depth of organizational information they shared.

St. Pete Timebank

Alternative economies can offer opportunities for marginalized society members to make a contribution. Many people have limited abilities to participate in traditional capitalism through employment or buying and selling goods. Goodwin and Cahn (2018) discuss how the elderly,

former prisoners, and young people often have unrecognized skills that do not boost typical economic functions; however, they are still valuable members of society with many assets to offer. These forgotten people may be restricted from work due to age or legal limitations, but they possess a wealth of talents that are needed to build strong and resilient communities. For example, youth can read to younger children or help carry groceries for the sick, elderly residents may have craftsman skills from former careers, and those with troubled pasts might be best suited for helping others stay on track or being a member of a peer court/reformative justice system (Goodwin and Cahn, 2018). Although the time spent providing these types of services may not earn U.S. dollars, it could earn alternative currency to be reused within the local community.

Alternative currencies may sound strange, but they exist throughout the world in a variety of ways including frequent flier miles, rewards points, time credits, local currencies, and digital currencies (Goodwin & Cahn, 2018; Mauldin, 2015; Ozanne & Ozanne, 2016; Válek & Jašíková, 2013;). Timebanks operate with a social currency, where members earn credits to be used for other exchanges in the community. For example, a member may request help with lawn care and accept an offer from a second member to help bag leaves. The member bagging leaves works for one hour and receives a time credit. This member may later request help rearranging furniture. A third member spends 30 minutes of their time assisting with the furniture; therefore, earning a half time credit. The third member needs help promoting their business through social media likes and shares; therefore, they create a request for this service to receive the help they need. There are many examples of the type of exchanges that can take place through Timebanks. The cyclical method of earning and spending time credits always works towards building networks of social support, and it often allows for time and space to develop friendships. Some

research on Timebanks outside the U.S. is available and has found that this system offers valuable contributions to society, economies, and development; however, they are often overshadowed because they do not generate revenue (Válek & Jašíková, 2013). The Timebank system values people for helping neighbors, strangers, and local businesses, while removing some of the barriers to participating in the economy or altruistic actions by incentivizing the activity. Dr. Edgar Cahn, a former law professor and legal scholar, was a founder of the U.S. Timebank system but there are many similar Timebanks found in the U.K., Australia, Chile, and New Zealand (Donnelly, 2006; Seyfang, 2004; Ozanne & Ozanne, 2016).

Timebanking is a parallel economy created to improve community development and well-being by promoting human equality and the reevaluation of time (St. Pete Timebank, n.d.). This global initiative builds strong community relationships and shifts preconceived notions of work to ideals that value all skills and talents, recognizes the importance of both sides in an exchange, and utilize respect as a foundation of democracy (Florida Timebanks, n.d.). The Timebank system was created by Edgar Cahn roughly 50 years ago to foster inclusion and community while reducing some of the pressures of everyday life. This economic system is not based on a monetary currency; instead, it uses time credits where all work is equally valued, and there are no penalties for insufficient funds. New members are guided through an orientation process to learn how to use the online Community Weaver 3 platform to create offers and requests for goods or services (Timebanks USA, 2021 a). All exchanges for time credits are electronically recorded. Members seeking a service post an ad, similar to the Classified section found in newspapers, and wait for another member to “offer” their assistance. Members exchange time credits for services, instead of money, where one hour of time is equal to one time

credit (Timebanks USA, 2021b). This method of cooperation and working together leads to collaboration and feelings of solidarity between the participants within the group.

The St. Pete Timebank (SPTB) is currently in the process of becoming a recognized 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and has been sponsored by the Pinellas County Urban League. Unlike the Buy Nothing community groups, there are associated costs with operating the SPTB, but there are no required fees for membership. Within the annual budget for 2022, line items include education, Youth Timebank expenses, software and technology costs, legal fees, insurance, and office supplies (St. Pete Timebank, 2022). The local organization is maintained by a small group of board members. Inquiries about how those members are selected, their specific roles and duties, and any incentives to board membership have not been answered.

Membership count for the SPTB is more difficult to understand than with the Buy Nothing Project membership. The SPTB has two Facebook pages, an official software website, a YouTube channel, and an Instagram account. There were 323 registered members on the official St. Pete Timebank website at the beginning of the year (St. Pete Timebank, 2022). Several of those users are registered as “organizational partners” meaning they are businesses or organizations, not individual users. Some of these partners are 15th Street Farm, Central Oak Park Neighborhood Association, Refuge and Migrant Women’s Initiative, and the Youth Time Bank. Further analysis of the members shows that at least 25% were not active on the official software site during the research period. Primary activity should take place on this website; however, many members frequently use the webspace available on Facebook. At the time there were 253 members for the Facebook page. A few dozen of these are businesses, other Facebook pages (17), local officials, and organizations that do not represent specific individuals. The researcher estimated a population size of 220-240; however, one board member stated that

monthly activity was closer to 150-200 members. Data collection for this case study included 48 completed surveys and nine interviews.

Methods

Participant Observation

Participant observation is a widely accepted method for social scientists conducting ethnographic research because it allows the researcher a detailed view of the rituals and interactions of the culture being studied (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010). This method of fieldwork can help connect the researcher to their study sample and pave the way for more formal data methods such as personal interviews. Participant observation gives the researcher the opportunity to collect a wide variety of data as they watch, listen, and take field notes. Data collection for this virtual project would not have been possible without participant observation, which was conducted in both organizations throughout the spring and summer of 2022. Over a one month timeframe, including at least 20 hours of observation, each group's online posts were recorded in Excel spreadsheets with notes, memos, and other data. Data included dates and a brief description of the initial post made in either group. This was complimented by the addition of categorical classifications including the type of post made, specific information mentioned, and analytic notes to aid in recollection later. For the Buy Nothing community categories reflected whether the post was an offer or a request and if the content mentioned goods or services. This was slightly modified for the St. Pete Timebank to allow collection of posts created by the admins or by organizational partners. After the observation period in April Sustainable Development Goals were associated with each new line of data. A cross analysis was performed by comparing the SDGs represented across the two community groups.

Data collected from the participant observation phase was subjected to multiple rounds of coding. First, In Vivo coding was attempted; however, this technique was determined unacceptable and quickly abandoned due to many post contents including more images instead of text. These images included photos of offered items, pop culture visualizations such as animated graphics and avatars, or stock images found online. In the St. Pete Timebank, members shared Facebook created events or videos which contained most of the information, instead of using their own words in that specific post; therefore, the original coding technique was not an acceptable method of analysis. Another round of coding attempted to identify the Solidarity Economy principles represented in the community groups. The expression of these principles are results of interaction between people but investigating this on a Facebook page was nearly impossible. Some online post did not receive text-based comments but did collect an assortment of stock emoji reactions. Out of the seven supplied reactions, which would symbolism justice, equality, community, or environmental care?

Finally, it was decided that only the representation of Sustainable Development Goals would be analyzed during the participant observation phase. This allowed both member's text and images to be considered as evidence and did not require post engagement. Unaware of any previous research that has explored SDGs through Facebook posts in the Buy Nothing or Timebank communities, original coding schemes had to be created. (See Table 2.) This process went through multiple rounds of evaluation and analysis before codes were finalized. Thesis analysis is performed by one researcher; therefore, it cannot utilize known methods to compare inter-coder reliability. To replicate this process, data was duplicated on different Excel spreadsheets, coded line-by-line per sheet, and then identified goals were compared across all

spreadsheets. This allowed any discrepancies in coding to be addressed and adjusted to maintain a uniform application.

Table 2. Coding SDGs in Participant Observation Analysis

| Goal | Thematic Representation | Examples |
|--|--|--|
| Goal 1 No Poverty | Reduced financial burdens, funds spent at shops, financial literacy, service to vulnerable community | Requesting necessities (clothing, required limited use item), mention asking the group “before I buy/order”, generally paid for services |
| Goal 2 Zero Hunger | Sharing or requesting any food or food preparation items, food apartheid | Pots or pans (not silverware or towels), canned goods, homegrown edibles, pantries |
| Goal 3 Good Health and Well-being | Outdoor activities/items, mentions of well-being, stress, medical problem | Outdoor play equipment, bicycles, postpartum supplies, allergy, intolerance, sensory |
| Goal 4 Quality Education | Supplies, equipment, books, sharing knowledge | Desks and chairs, textbooks, learn to read books, teaching a skill or topic |
| Goal 6 Clean Water and Sanitation | All posts about water, cleaning, or environmentally related to FL waterways | Trash pickup, reusable bottles, cleaning supplies, gallon jugs, shower chairs |
| Goal 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth | Work related items, employment opportunities | Exchanged time credits, desks, work boots, local small business |
| Goal 12 Responsible Consumption and Production | Giving items new life, reduced waste | Half-used products, outgrown clothing, creative offers (decorations, plant pots) |
| Goal 13 – 15 Environmental Group | Earth positive actions, information, and material items | Plants and gardening, trash pickup, waste (clothing, electronics, metals, plastics, chemicals) |
| Goals 5, 10, 11, 16 Community Group | Community building and outreach, systemic inequalities, support for Ukraine | General poverty (not individual), “Sustainable”, group rules/events, moving, age/physical ability, Ukraine, Gratitude |
| Goal 17 Partnership for the Goals | Requires active participation between members | Requests that need a body to fulfill (subscribe to YouTube) or physical presence in a space (attend event, provide service) |

Interviews

Semi-structured in-depth interviews allowed for participant responses that cannot be easily conveyed through surveys. The conversation between the participant and researcher often

lent itself to spontaneous data such as anecdotes and memories, but more importantly it allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions to maintain clarity and comprehension. Virtual interviews, frequently through Microsoft Teams, were conducted during the spring of 2022. Tracy (2019) suggests that a small number of interviews may be sufficient for saturation when researchers use the same interview guide, analyze data after each interview, and seek participant responses to the same general experience, in this instance their group membership. Interviews were comprised of scripted open-ended prompts and most took about one hour to complete. Before beginning the formal semi-structured interviews, Informed Consent forms and participant permission for recording both video and audio were obtained. Pseudonyms were created for all interview participants to protect identities.

Surveys

Online links to each group's survey were posted within their Facebook pages. Each survey took less than 10 minutes of the sample participant's time. Snowball sampling methods were occasionally used when group members tagged their friends in the comments or created their own post to remind other members about the opportunity. This sampling technique is useful when there are barriers to accessing participants or populations (Tracy, 2019). The St. Pete Timebank emphasizes the value of time for all members and activities; therefore, the researcher offered time credits to participating members. The Timebank does not require that a member earn or have a surplus of credits in order to pay another member; however, since the first inkling of this potential study more than a year ago, the researcher worked to gain time credits by completing small anonymous tasks. Unlike traditional economy banks and creditors, there is never a punishment for insufficient credits. Time credits are equivalent to the amount of time spent performing an action. Members were offered a .25-time credit for completing their survey,

which is roughly equivalent to the amount of time it would take them to respond to all survey prompts. Support from Timebank members included reminders and an extra time credit incentive voluntarily offered by a board member.

Surveys were qualitative in nature and contained some demographic questions (but no personal identifiers), as well as open-ended and closed-ended questions to provide both a broad overview of participants and additional rich, textual data. The online survey helps illuminate values felt by participants in the organizations. Survey prompts included a section that explored member demographics and a section for participation and engagement interactions. Solidarity Economy principles and Sustainable Development Goals were investigated through five-part Likert scale prompts ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents were also asked to select values best represented by their group. An open-ended prompt gave space for conveying what group participation personally meant to that respondent. A series of prompts reflected the specific group's capacity to positively influence the individual lives of members. Built into the survey design were overlapping questions to help ensure members were considering the questions instead of rapidly selecting a random level of agreement.

Eighty-four online surveys were collected from the Buy Nothing St. Pete North and North East Park members. Forty-eight surveys were collected from members of the St. Pete Timebank. Eight of those respondents do not live in St. Petersburg, which does not violate any Timebank guidelines as this group is not neighborhood specific. Participants were allowed to complete the survey twice if they were members of both populations but were reminded to only respond for one group at a time. Six percent of the Buy Nothing sample reported that they were also members of the St. Pete Timebank. About a quarter of Timebank responses indicated that

members were in both organizations, which may show that Timebank members are more likely to provide services to help their neighbors.

**CHAPTER FIVE:
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

Survey Respondent’s Socioeconomic Demographics

Member Profiles

Analysis of personal demographics indicated through survey responses show Buy Nothing members are typically educated white women between the ages of 30-59, who joined within the last few years during the pandemic. (See Table 3.) Outside of ethnicity and gender, there were many fluctuations in responses that yield a deeper analysis of member backgrounds. A comparison of socioeconomic demographics between the groups was conducted.

Table 3. Buy Nothing Project Member Demographics

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Joined Buy Nothing | Before 2020 39% | 2020 or Later 56% | Unsure 5% | | |
| Gender Identity | Female 95% | Male 4% | Non-binary 1% | | |
| Age Range | Twenties 5% | Thirties 25% | Forties 29% | Fifties 21% | Sixties + 20% |
| Ethnicity | Asian 4% | Caucasian 86% | Hispanic 8% | P.I. or Native Hawaiian 1% | Multiracial Undefined 5% |
| Education | High School 23% | Two Years 13% | Four Years 38% | Six Years 26% | Education |

Analysis of the St. Pete Timebank member sample found several differences between the groups. (See Table 4.) In contrast, most members in this sample were single, older women, that lived alone, and had been a member for a longer time frame. For example, 71% did not live with

a domestic partner and were aged 50 or above (81%). There are more members in their sixties (35%) and seventies (21%) and only 8% were in their thirties. There is little ethnic diversity as 88% of respondents were white. There was a slightly higher percentage of respondents that identified themselves as male (8%) or nondisclosed (4%) than in the Buy Nothing sample. Timebankers reported longer membership records, 73% of them joined prior to the pandemic in 2020.

Table 4. St. Pete Timebank Member Demographics

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Joined St. Pete Timebank | Before 2020 73% | 2020 or Later 25% | Unsure 2% | | |
| Gender Identity | Female 87% | Male 8% | Other 4% | | |
| Age Range | Thirties 8% | Forties 10% | Fifties 25% | Sixties 35% | Seventies + 21% |
| Ethnicity | Asian 0% | Caucasian 88% | Hispanic 2% | P.I. or Native Hawaiian 0% | Multiracial Undefined 6% |
| Education | High School 15% | Two Years 21% | Four Years 31% | Six Years 33% | |

Housing and Income

Participants were asked whether they have owned or a rented a dwelling for the last six months. Residency that was less than six months was considered “temporary” and included a variety of conditions such as couch surfing, shelters, motels, or campus housing. Responses should not be interpreted as a reflection on financial stability nor housing security as anyone can struggle with either of these regardless of their circumstances.

Seventy percent of Buy Nothing respondents own their home, 27% rent, 2% have temporary housing. (See Table 5.) More than 60% have higher education including trainings and certifications equivalent to an undergraduate degree. Over half of the people surveyed reported

household incomes over \$75k per year and 8% reported less than \$25k. In general, members of these St. Petersburg Buy Nothing groups are middle-class, white, homeowners; however, there is a significant portion of members in the lower socioeconomic bracket. Additionally, the wide range of differences in most demographic categories is evidence that the Buy Nothing Project is beneficial and alluring to a variety of people and is not marketed to one social class.

Table 5. Homeownership and Income Levels

| Buy Nothing | | | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Homeownership | Own 70% | Rent 27% | Temporary 2% | | |
| Income | < \$25 k 8% | \$25-\$50 k 11% | \$50-\$75 k 27% | \$75-\$125 25% | \$125 k + 29% |
| St. Pete Timebank | | | | | |
| Homeownership | Own 75% | Rent 25% | Temporary 0% | | |
| Income | < \$25 k 19% | \$25-\$50 k 31% | \$50-\$75 k 10% | \$75-\$125 29% | \$125 k + 10% |

The Timebank sample has a slightly higher percentage of members that own their homes (75%) and no members reported temporary housing. Education rates are also higher; 64% have four or more years post high school, 8% more respondents finished an associate degree level education, and 8% fewer members stopped at the high school level. Timebankers have higher educational backgrounds, but their income levels are lower, which may be due in part to the diversity of age ranges. Typically, adults over the age of 60 are considering or have already retired, or some may be retired but working part time. Half of the respondents earn less than \$50k annually, but 40% earn more than \$75k per year. This is a slight contrast to the majority of Buy Nothing members that reported household incomes of \$75k or more. Timebank

membership may appeal to older women with lower incomes where Buy Nothing appeals to a wider variety of demographics. Understanding who lives in the home may explain the difference.

Households

The majority (88%) of Buy Nothing members surveyed live in households of 3 or less but 12% live in households of five or more. (See Table 6.) In total, 38% lived with one other person and 23% lived in groups of three, which may reflect small family units that include children or an elderly relative living in the home. The majority of Timebank members also lived in small households of three or less; however, 52% lived alone and 29% lived with only one other person.

Table 6. Domestic Relationships

| Buy Nothing | | | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------------|---------------|
| Cohabiting With Partner | Yes 82% | | No 18% | | |
| Household Count | One 13% | Two 38% | Three 23% | Four 14% | Five + 12% |
| Caretaking Role | No 24% | Elderly 4% | Kid(s) 39% | Medical Condition 6% | Pet(s) 54% |
| St. Pete Timebank | | | | | |
| Cohabiting With Partner | Yes 71% | | No 29% | | |
| Household Count | One 52% | Two 29% | Three 13% | Four 4% | Five + 2% |
| Caretaking Role | None 44% | Elderly 4% | Kid(s) 8% | Medical Condition 10% | Pet(s) 40% |

Older generations of adults may have raised children or have lost their domestic partner. To prevent over generalization, further investigation into the specifics of each household would be needed; however, it is helpful to continue analyzing the basic demographic makeup of each community to present an overall view of their community. Eighty-two percent of members in the Buy Nothing sample were married or currently cohabitating with their domestic partner, in contrast to Timebankers where 71% are not cohabitating. A limitation in this section was not

expanding on the possible living situations members may be experiencing. There are some relationship styles and living situations that were not explicitly offered in this prompt such as being separated and not living with someone you may be legally married to.

The majority (76%) of Buy Nothing respondents were caregivers for either an animal or human family member with roughly half of the population fulfilling this role in a combination of categories. Due to the higher percentage of Timebank members that live alone, much fewer reported caregiving responsibilities, except that 40% have a pet. A much smaller percentage had children (8%); however, more of them cared for someone with a medical condition (10%) and 4% cared for an elderly relative. People that are differently abled or have medical conditions may require special items that are often pricey; therefore, being able to find some of these things for free within the community would be a large benefit. Items gifted on the Buy Nothing site have included walkers, knee scooters, blood pressure cuffs, and shower chairs. Books, puzzles, blankets, reading glasses, and cozy socks are great comfort items especially for the elderly, bedridden, or those in a care facility. Some members in both groups responded that they cared for either an elderly relative or an adult with different abilities/medical conditions; however, there was no overlap between caring for both categories of people at the same time. Less than 25% of Buy Nothing members were free from the responsibilities of providing for another living being, which supports the claim that the Buy Nothing Project is for everyone.

These different roles offer an insight into some of the complexities of a family unit while suggesting some of the types of items these members may be looking for or sharing with the group. For example, many Buy Nothing participants indicated that they had at least one minor child and one pet in the home. Recent inflation has increased the price of many necessary items and pet products are not exempt from this! Younger generations have recently reported that they

chose adopting a pet instead of having a child because of the large expense differences (Rover, 2022). Unfortunately, the cost of caring for a pet has increased 10% between 2021-2022 and that includes an additional 1- 1.5% change for each month this summer (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Sept. 2022). To help reduce the cost of caring for a loved one, members may often peruse their group webpage for needed items. Clothing and toys for young children are popular, but perhaps equally as enticing are pet related items such as carriers, leashes, treats, or food. Items that are not eligible for store returns – such as partially eaten treats or accessories- are likely to be offered among the Buy Nothing group members on the site. Caring for any living creature can be stressful and expensive, regardless of how many others are being cared for.

Actions and Processes

Engagement Types and Frequencies

How do members of these organizations interact with each other? Checking Buy Nothing can be a sort of compulsion when members fear they will miss out on items if they are not frequently perusing the site throughout the day. Frequently the items posted are given to the first person to comment, although, exact time frames are not visible after a post has existed for 24 hours because Facebook controls the way timestamps are displayed. This makes it impossible to determine how quickly items were offered and gifted; therefore, it is possible that some items were offered and went unrequested for quite some time before they were claimed. Most Buy Nothing members (63%) check the site at least once per day and another 31% visit the site a few times within the week (See Table 7.). This is not surprising due to the nature of both social media and the process of gifting and receiving in this community. Many members have commented online that they prefer “simmer” posts because they allow time for a wider audience to interact

since not everyone can check Facebook often. The author often states “simmer” in the post and frequently includes a specific date and time when the recipient will be selected. For example, the author may offer a queen bed frame on Tuesday but mention that they will select the recipient on Friday night.

Table 7. Frequency of Viewing Online Posts

| | 3+ Times Daily | Once or Twice a Day | Several Times a Week | Once a Week | Once a Month |
|-------------------|----------------|---------------------|----------------------|-------------|--------------|
| Buy Nothing | 31% | 32% | 31% | 5% | 1% |
| St. Pete Timebank | 6% | 8% | 42% | 29% | 15% |

Posts within the Timebank are generally less urgent or time sensitive. These members are less active on the social media sites, 29% visit once a week, and only 13% visit daily. This is partly because time is the value, not a tangible item, so the organization is designed to connect humans in the physical space. Prior to health risks and isolation periods, the St. Pete Timebank held frequent gatherings around the city including meetings, potluck dinners, plant sales, entertainment events, and community item swaps. More than half (52%) of this sample indicated that they participate or plan events within the Timebank, but only 17% of Buy Nothing members responded acknowledged the same level of activity and 83% said they never engage in event type posts. Attending a local event is often considered an important job that builds the connection Timebank is striving for; and therefore, time credits can be earned for engaging in these activities.

Gifting

Both organizations can be categorized as gift economies, although the gifts given are somewhat different. Survey responses indicate that 70% of Buy Nothing members participate in

both giving and receiving gifts equally, but 30% of those respondents ranked these categories differently. (See Table 8.) When analyzing that difference, 22% of all members said that they offer gifts more frequently than they receive them. This could indicate that the intention of these members is to gift instead of to receive, highlighting an altruistic nature. To explore this situation further, a comparison was made between socioeconomic factors found in this subset.

Table 8. Types and Levels of Engagement

| | Receiving | Offering | Events | Non-Group Related | Post Engagement |
|-------------------|-----------|----------|--------|-------------------|-----------------|
| BN Frequently | 39% | 31% | 1% | 4% | 39% |
| BN Occasionally | 68% | 64% | 15% | 32% | 60% |
| BN Never/Rarely | 13% | 5% | 83% | 64% | 1% |
| SPTB Frequently | 19% | 25% | 4% | 17% | 40% |
| SPTB Occasionally | 67% | 60% | 48% | 46% | 54% |
| SPTB Never/Rarely | 15% | 15% | 48% | 38% | 6% |

Members that give more than they receive were generally found to have higher incomes (58% earn \$125 k or more), higher education backgrounds (74%), and were also homeowners (74%). When reviewing other survey results, these members noted their primary reason of joining Buy Nothing was to “give/receive” and frequently commented about their happiness in gifting others. Combining these factors together, supports the claim that this smaller portion of members really enjoy helping their neighbors and are not very interested in receiving items from them. There was a similar difference (27%) in the frequency of giving and receiving assistance in the Timebank community; however, the analysis of socioeconomic factors did not yield results for interpretation as the analysis for income, homeownership, educational background, and even whether the person received or offered more frequently was nearly evenly split among all levels.

Several members mentioned helping each other, sometimes with tasks that just are not manageable by themselves; often these comments were less about “stuff” and more about the “spirituality” and “remain(ing) human in a world gone mad.”

Connected or Othered

For many Buy Nothing members, it appears that the group is solely about the gift economy and not developing deeper relationships. More than half (64%) of them indicated that they never or rarely communicate with other group members outside of the group; however, only 6% of Timebankers responded the same way showing that these people interact with each other significantly more. This was also supported by the percentages that frequently communicate, selected by 17% of Timebankers and only 3% of Buy Nothing members. Nearly all the BN sample engages with online posts on some level, but 6% of the Timebank sample never or rarely does so. These rates are evidence that the Buy Nothing community is primarily interacting on specific posts online, but the Timebank community members more frequently connect with each other in real time or space.

Although most Timebank members wrote about their involvement on a deeply connected level, some did remark that they are not as involved as they would like because there is a difference in the “popular” people who get responses and the “people like me... (where) nothing happens.” This sense of otherness can fracture well-intentioned communities and leave some relying on the Timebank interaction as an “alternative (resource) beyond my immediate circle of friends.” Dissatisfied members do not feel the sense of community experienced by others, nor do they think they reap the same benefits other members do. These raw perspectives were not shared by members of the Buy Nothing community and have drawn attention to an undercurrent of dissatisfaction. Both organizations recognize that everyone is in a different position and stage

in life; some may have the ability to give while others need a helping hand. The community needs both givers and receivers for the project to work, and with membership count being hundreds to thousands of people it is very difficult to have an exactly equal ratio of exchanges for each member. When community groups are spread across large distances, or barriers to connecting with other members are considerable factors, leaders may need to spend extra time checking in with marginalized members.

Evaluating Adherence to Solidarity Principles

An investigation into the Solidarity Economy principles emphasized and represented within the case study groups was conducted. To understand how these principles are utilized and conveyed within the groups, it helps to have a broad idea of the similarities found within different types of organizations found under the SE umbrella. A generalization of many effective SE organizations includes a diverse representation of the population the organization is designed to bolster (Bell et al., 2018; Hudson, 2018). It is not enough to give all parties equal invitations, the table itself must be a safe place where all skin tones, educational backgrounds, financial statuses, and abilities are not just welcomed but valued. These alternative economies must be able to accept each member with their own circumstances, instead of holding them against a rubric of predetermined stages and characteristics, as found when exploring the barriers to adequate housing in Montréal (Table des groups de femmes de Montréal, 2021). Acceptance of the individual allows for respect for their humanity and not their marketable attributes, assets, or checkmark demographics. Ensuring an inclusive and respectful representation creates the foundational ethics and value codes that will enable true sustainability, not just for the health of the planet but for the resiliency of people and the community.

A generalization of the process of creating a Solidarity Economy, widely applicable to the case studies and other groups, begins when a problem is realized, or a sense that something is amiss is felt, and affected people begin talking about it. As discussion grows, more neighbors and locals join in. Concentration on minute details makes a consensus among people unlikely; however, similarities are often found when perspectives include a slightly broader image. Problems are more easily identified and brainstorming sessions to remedy the issues can lead to collaborative and creative solutions. This may spotlight the shared disparities and inequalities between groups while highlighting the oppressed group's strengths and weaknesses. Utilizing democracy enables the formulation of plans that lead to solutions as individualist thoughts turn into collective action. Each member matters: therefore, each should prosper from the solution. By connecting the single person to the collective group moral values of humanity, equity, and justice develop and grow.

This research explored values expressed by members of the Buy Nothing Project (BN) and St. Pete Timebank (SPTB) and compared them to values found in Solidarity Economy framework. Confirmation of these shared values can help determine if the organizations are effective and viable alternatives to the complex issues created by capitalism. Many Solidarity Economy principles including democracy and pluralism, justice and equality, mutualism and cooperation, and sustainability and environmental stewardship are reflected in the framework of both organizations.

Democracy and Pluralism

The expression of democracy allows members of SE organizations to shape and guide development of the movement into something that benefits those in need, whereas pluralism opens that possible alternative to a large variety of potential solutions and creative exchanges.

Both organizations operate under a global name which suggests a widely applicable format; however, they focus on local interactions, and are guided by small teams of members. Outside of a few basic guidelines, members help shape their community and aspects of their own experience which leaves space for creativity in gifting and interactions.

An example of pluralism in the St. Pete Timebank is the development of new member profiles during the orientation process. During this phase members are encouraged to think of any skills or hobbies they enjoy as assets. These are often explained in the written profile but are also selected as categories of interest displayed to other members. This process helps members recognize that the value they have to offer is more than a job they perform; it is a “Timebanker Talent”. There are 13 broad categories of talents including help at home, business services, hurricane/disaster assistance, and the largest response category of community activities. This category is listed 777 times with over 100 individual and organizational members feature community volunteering as a talent.

Some survey prompts explored SE principles of pluralism and democracy through group creativity, collaboration, and creative problem solving. Creativity shows the community structure is more fluid and allows for members to utilize and engage with the website and each other in ways that best suit their needs. Survey respondents were asked if their group valued creativity and responses indicated that most members within the organizations agreed. Agreement was higher in the SPTB (90%) than the Buy Nothing (75%) group. A significant portion of BN members were neutral (24%) and 4% of the Timebank disagreed.

Creativity is also useful for problem solving, which relies on people working together to find solutions for individuals and the community. The majority of respondents, 83% in Timebank and 88% in Buy Nothing, felt their members worked together to solve problems;

however, 17% of SPTB were neutral. Perception is a key factor here. During the participant observation stage of this research, problems were solved on a frequent or even daily basis. Common problems observed in both groups included food insecurity, lack of transportation, or needing a specific item. These were solved when members shared their resources with each other. Jessie, a Timebanker, shared a story during their interview about collaborative problem solving within the group. Jessie needed to collect more than two dozen gallon sized jugs for a project with area youth. Asa offered a large selection of them, but lived too far away from Jessie, causing a transportation problem. Devi saw this online conversation, realized that they frequently travel between those two areas, and volunteered to pick-up and deliver the supplies, quickly resolving the issue for all parties (personal communication, April 30, 2022).

During the observations and interviews it was evident that members did collaborate with each other; however, it was unclear whether these community groups often collaborate with other local organizations or if members discuss resources available outside of their group. Many SE organizations collaborate with other initiatives in their area to help ensure more impactful results for their members. In the St. Pete Timebank, 79% felt multi-group collaboration existed; however, in the BN sample, 53% did not agree. This is not surprising because posting of outside resources is a violation of BN “Rule # 8 Give from your own abundance” which is a posted rule inside each community and on the overall Buy Nothing Project website. This rule encourages members to work directly with their neighbors instead of looking for outside sources or posting recommendations to services and other providers, even if there is no associated cost. As part of the democratic and pluralistic framework found in Solidarity Economies administrators are allowed some adjustment to group guidelines to suit the needs of their neighbors. During the

interviews, some members mentioned how their group relaxed rules to allow the sharing of outside resources such as food pantry locations or relief fund programs in times of crisis.

A combination of factors helps explain why the BN respondents were divided over collaboration opportunities. Rule fluctuations may be remembered by long-term members and there may be slight differences between local groups. Also, posts are not approved before submission, allowing a group member to break Rule #8 and share information. Buy Nothing administrators can remove any post that violates guidelines but because the admin team is volunteer based, the amount of time those posts are visible can vary from a few minutes to days. If an admin happens to be on the site and/or the post contains certain keywords, it is usually removed quickly. A member's perception of collaborative efforts can be biased by seeing posts before their removal or remembering the type of resources that were shared during a crisis event.

Justice and Equality

Document analysis of the Buy Nothing guidelines found information relating to principles of justice and equality within the group's creation guidelines. These guidelines include analyzing population demographics and addressing historical redlining or segregation within that geographic area. This is not a perfect system as it is done on a case-by-case basis and may be overlooked or inconsistently applied during the group formation process. Population size and socioeconomic demographics, as well as the physical landscape of an area, can also create inequalities between or within Buy Nothing groups. The framework of the SPTB strives for justice and equality by valuing traditionally unrecognized labor and using alternative currency as a type of wage.

These SE principles were also observed in the Buy Nothing gifting process. When posting an offer for gifts or services, there are no rules about how to choose a recipient. To help

maintain fairness and equality, Buy Nothing members have created a variety of methods to help them select the receiver. Members may operate on a “first come, first served” basis awarding the item to the first person that responds, or they may declare the post a “simmer” which notifies the group that the receiver will be chosen at a later date. A simmer post is more just and fair because longer timeframes give community members more opportunity to see and comment on the post. Group participants may have limited access to technology, social media, or time available to visit the Buy Nothing Facebook. They may be in an environment where cellphone/internet use is restricted such as hourly wage jobs, meetings, classes, or caregiving responsibilities. Office workers, retirees, and people with free time are more able to access the site throughout the day which enables them to see posts more quickly than those with limitations. Posts created in the morning are quickly seen by early risers, giving them the advantage to request items. Frequently checking the Facebook page is a great strategy when it comes to ‘first come, first served’ posts. Simmering the post creates equal opportunity for those unable to respond quickly due to their daily tasks and responsibilities. Sometimes members selected someone they had not interacted with before, which removed the idea of bias that appears when someone frequently gifts to the same select group of people, but more than that, it can broaden the web of connections for those members. Participant observation also found that some members used technology to help them select recipients by adding the names of interested people into a website or app that randomly selected who the gift went to. The multiple methods of selecting recipients reduced pressure on the gifting party when there were many interested members and kept the gifting process fair by eliminating bias and giving everyone an equal opportunity.

Mutualism and Cooperation

Mutualism means neighbors can rely on their community to help them in a time of need. An example of mutualism observed in the Buy Nothing group is when members helped others find what they were looking for regardless of how recently the request was made. Many members within the group were aware of these situations either through recent posts or by searching for the key term “wishlist.” This term was frequently used when a member requested something that was not a typical item offered. Often, members tagged each other because they thought that item could be useful. Mutualism was also seen through the cycle of passing along bulk items such as a “mystery box”, a closet cleanout, or a bag of clothing. The first recipient was selected to pick up the items; then they sorted through the box, kept what they wished, sometimes adding some of their own things to the selection before they passed the remaining contents on to the group. Sometimes the next receiver was selected from the commenters on the original offer made by the initial poster, instead of generating a new post and new request list.

Mutualism was also observed within the Timebank, but it was more difficult to see because many exchanges were conducted behind the scenes through private messages and phone calls. St. Pete Timebank uses two different online pages for exchanges – one on the social media platform Facebook, and the other on their own software site where exchanges of time credits and member profiles are kept. Several Tampa Bay area Timebanks were hosting an Abundance Swap this year, to help raise the funds needed to pay for software and educate the surrounding community about the organization. Facebook posts about this topic included updates, reminders, requests for donated items, and opportunities to help in other capacities by finding a location to host the St. Pete event, attending the event, and sharing the information with their friends and

neighbors. In the software, Timebankers were given time credits for any level of assistance such as a partial credit for liking or sharing the social media post or larger credits for donating goods.

Another frequently observed example of mutualism was helping someone achieve their goals, often boosting a local entrepreneur by engaging with their online content through liking, subscribing, and watching YouTube videos, visiting, or shopping an artist's discounted Etsy sale featuring handmade pottery, or reminding people to take an online survey for a local student. These situations remind us all how easy it is to help support one another and how little time, effort, or cost we have to spend to do so. These interactions are what transform individual strangers into community. The mutualism expressed in both Buy Nothing and St. Pete Timebank is truly remarkable, especially when you consider that there is no tangible benefit for those that are looking out for the other members. There is no profit, or item, or gold star, just the knowledge and peace of mind found when helping someone else achieve their goals.

Most survey respondents strongly agreed (69% BN and 65% SPTB), that their fellow members help each other. For the BN community, this prompt was the only one in the entire survey that did not have any neutral or negative responses. Helping each other is one of the greatest signs of solidarity, because it relates to SE framework principles, shows if the organization is effective in reaching its goals, and can create the bonds neighbors need to be resilient in the face of adversity. This support can bring peace of mind to many within the community, like the example shared by an interviewee that is a member of both organizations. As a hurricane moved closer to Tampa Bay, Ezra began to panic (personal communication, April 25, 2022). Ezra worked a full-time job and their family was out of town that weekend, leaving them with limited time and no one to help them prepare for the storm. Natural disaster preparations are common for many Floridians and can require a lot of work such as stacking

lawn furniture, bringing outdoor plants in, trimming trees, and covering windows or doors. In desperation, Ezra requested help from the groups, although they thought everyone would be so consumed with their own preparations. Ezra was overwhelmed when other Timebank members rushed over to assist. In a frightening time where help is needed the most, it can mean the world to someone knowing that all they need to do is just ask.

Sustainability and Healthy Environments

Goods and services are featured in both groups; however, these organizations believe that human interactions are often more important than items because interactions help build stronger connections between individual members while strengthening the fabric of community. The founders of both organizations believe that strengthening the web between individual members is beneficial to building strong, resilient, and sustainable communities. A sentiment found in each group is that the “real wealth is the people involved and the web of connections that forms to support them” (Clark & Rockefeller, 2021b). There are several social and environmental benefits when neighbors share resources with each other, including the reduction of the production and consumption cycle, as well as reducing the amount of waste sent to a garbage site. Financial and emotional health are increased when fears of scarcity are no longer driving factors, which allows members room to focus on Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Refuse, Rethink. This can lead to reducing environmental harm by rethinking about capitalist tendencies through refusing to purchase brand new items and recycling unwanted items within the community for their reuse (Clark & Rockefeller, 2021a). This way of thinking can increase soil and water quality by limiting overproduction, resource extraction, and waste accumulation.

Exchanges that promote health and sustainability were observed in the St. Pete Timebank where the Sustainable Urban Agriculture Coalition gave time credits for invasive plant removal

or planting native species. Members also earned time credits by organizing and restocking a Little Free Library or tending a compost pile. Some of the activities most vital to building a community were applicable at any time of day on any day of the week; however, there were also a wealth of opportunities that connected people in real time and space. When asked if their group builds community, 96% of Buy Nothing members and 98% of Timebankers agreed. One member commented that the Timebank is “putting the neighbor back in the (neighbor)hood!” Another remarked that “despite what we feel we are not... alone” and regardless of the need building a community of “like-minded people that are willing to support each other” can meet those needs.

Perhaps building a sustainable and resilient community does not depend on deeply rooted connections or physical interactions but instead it is the overall sense of connection, respect, and like-mindedness shared between members of a group. Simply using a Facebook provided emoji (thumbs up, care, love, wow, laughter, sadness) was a sign of support and acknowledgement often observed during the research. When Buy Nothing members shared personal details about their lives within their post, emojis and comments of support indicated a “sense of community, acceptance, and showing of empathy by members,” emotions that are strongly tied to the creation and implementation of effective Solidarity Economies. Respect for others is vital to a strong community organization. Members come from different cultures or may have opposing beliefs and opinions on a large variety of topics, yet if they can learn to respect each other and value everyone’s humanity, collective action can occur. When asked if the community respects others, 96% of BN members and 94% of the St. Pete Timebank sample agreed.

Sustainable Development Goals and Community

In the 1990s the United Nations started a decades long process that led to the creation of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To aid in the evaluation of the strengths and limitations of the case study groups to address SDGs, careful observation of specific group interactions and how they could work towards SDG achievement was conducted through a multi-phase process. Not all 17 goals were found during observation, surveys, or interviews. Goal 7 Affordable Clean Energy and Goal 9 Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure were absent from both community organizations. Some goals were less prominently observed; however, during research analysis these small reflections were found to support broader categories that related to the SDGs. (See Table 9.) For example, an environmental group classification was created during analysis that contained Goal 13 Climate Action, Goal 14 Life Below Water, and Goal 15 Life on Land.

Table 9. SDGs Represented within the Groups

| | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| Goal 1 No Poverty | Goal 2 Zero Hunger | Goal 3 Good Health and Well-being | Goal 4 Quality Education |
| Goal 6 Clean Water and Sanitation | Goal 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth | Goal 12 Responsible Consumption and Production | Goal 17 Partnership for the Goals |
| Environmental Group: Goal 13 -15 Climate Action, Life Below Water, Life on Land | | | |
| Community Group: Goals 5, 10, 11, 16 Gender Equality, Reduced Inequalities, Sustainable Cities and Communities, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions | | | |

Survey respondents were asked to rate their group’s ability to impact Sustainable Development Goals using the same Likert scale of agreement levels to reflect upon broad categories. Individual steps towards Sustainable Development Goal achievement were often witnessed throughout the participant observation phase where community interactions helped

reduce poverty, food insecurity, and other inequalities for the members. Semi-structured interviews also offered insight into an individual's thoughts about the natural environment including concerns for the future and climate change, and global inequalities of financial distribution, adequate housing, and food insecurity.

Goal 1 No Poverty

Three survey prompts were directly related to understanding how member participation impacts their financial status. Over 60% of members in either group did not believe that their involvement had noticeably increased their own financial stability, with most of these respondents selecting the neutral option. However, members do believe that reducing financial burdens is important to their group, as 74% of BN and 50% of Timebankers selected this option as a key principle expressed by the organization. Both communities offer free services or items, which reduced spending on some level and allowed for finances to be allotted for other concerns but a shift in budget flexibility is difficult for members to quantify and tally. Further discussion about the change in spending habits is located under the section on Goal 12.

During the observation period, two well-known SPTB members that specialize in financial literacy and resiliency were featured in the organization's podcasts and shared on social media. It appears that two financial experts are easily accessible to those within the group, but their knowledge and insights are not being utilized by the members. Although the organization is described as an alternative economy and even has their own currency, financial stability has not improved for most people. Feeling that this opportunity is available but not seeing a shift in reality can be disheartening evidence of systemic issues and structural factors within the community. Recall that most SPTB members were older single women and the Buy Nothing population has many young families. Members within either organization care for elderly relatives or someone with a permanent condition. A significant percentage of respondents pay

rent for the living area and some interviewees discussed paying their mortgage, flood insurance, and car payments. These community organizations cannot change the cost of nonnegotiable everyday living expenses, an ability that some Solidarity Economies do have such as how RebElles impacts affordable housing in Montréal or how growing produce in community gardens reduces the amount spent at a grocery store, but they can help members redirect where their finances are allocated. Participation in the case study groups did make life a little easier for some members but it did not result in rectifying the drastic imbalances and personal struggles abundant in society. Although these large-scale changes are outside the scope of the Buy Nothing Project and St. Pete Timebank, members still believe their involvement is a step in the direction to relieve financial pressure.

Goal 2 Zero Hunger

Food insecurity is a pervasive problem that many suffer in silence, and it has gotten worse throughout the pandemic. Signs of food insecurity were observed within both organizations as evidenced by the offer of off-brand labels or bulk quantities of a specific shared items, and posts about donations to the neighborhood fridge/pantry. Frequently, large non-profit organizations that host bulk food sites, such as the St. Pete Free Clinic and Feeding Tampa Bay, do not allow users to hand select the items they will use; therefore, responsible residents often pass unwanted items along to others grateful to receive them.

Food posts were witnessed dozens of times during the observation period and included everything from sauces and seasonings to canned or fresh vegetables, and even pots and pans to cook food in. Members of both organizations were witnessed sharing gardening supplies, compost, and their own homegrown nutritious plants including amaranth, cranberry hibiscus, and moringa. Members may feel embarrassed by their food insecurity; however, knowing they can

safely ask their group for help without stigmatization is a great support, as evidenced through participant observation and survey respondent comments. When members shared food with each other, not only were they helping to feed their neighbor but also showing a deeper level of care for another human. Interviews with BN members provided evidence of past meal trains organized for those in times of recovery such as a death in the family, surgery, or birth. Ninety five percent of Buy Nothing and 82% of SPTB survey responses indicated that members agreed their group shares food resources. In the Buy Nothing community where members are a short distance from one another, some members offered to share portions of their recently homecooked meals.

A common post observed on the Timebank Facebook page were updates on a free neighborhood pantry hosted by a member. This person has a small vegetable garden, a pantry for breads donated by a local restaurant, a cooler for salads and frozen items donated from a nearby grocery store, and another cabinet for dry goods including cans, pastas, and dried beans. Anyone within the area is welcome to stop by and take home the food they need, but Timebank members are requested to send time credits to the pantry host when they visit. To help ensure no one visits the pantry when it is not well stocked, and to help keep perishable items moving quickly, another member frequently updated when there was a new delivery or assortment of food items available. This let the community know that it was a great time to pick up fresh fruits and vegetables before the hot Florida sun ruined them.

Goal 3 Good Health and Well-being

Many factors impact a person's well-being, including financial status, nutrition, physical ailments, emotional distress, and mental stability. Life stressors, a respiratory illness, or an unseen illness such as depression and anxiety can drastically impact someone's ability to interact

and relate to the world. The health and well-being goal was observed in over one third of Timebank posts and over half of the Buy Nothing interactions. (See Table 10.) Observations included activities or offerings that encourage physical movement, time outside, postpartum supplies, as well as mentions of medical conditions, stress levels, and needing assistance. In the SPTB community, these posts were often related to needed services including garden or yardwork, but in BN posts were associated with material accumulation. The Timebank had a unique inter-group exchange not be possible in the Buy Nothing group. Through a global Timebank connection website, a disabled member from another community found necessary assistance to visit a local beach while on vacation. Without the physical support of the local Timebanker, walking across the sand would have been too dangerous for the visitor.

Table 10. Wellness Goals During Participant Observation

| Goal | Buy Nothing | St. Pete Timebank |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| No Poverty | 15% | 19% |
| Zero Hunger | 12% | 18% |
| Health & Well-being | 53% | 38% |

When asked about the community’s ability to improve personal health, 67% of BN and 75% of SPTB agreed that their group improves personal health. The samples had roughly equal percentages of neutral responses, but the Buy Nothing group had a 5% disagreement. In this gift economy, members were sometimes observed expressing distress over the clutter they had accumulated and wished to disperse through the group, which often resulted in a “first come, first served” type of post. Members occasionally offered a large variety of items and called it a “purge,” said their post was the “tip of the iceberg,” or that the explanation of their need was a “long story.” These comments indicated they were experiencing distress. If the gifting process

took too long and items were not picked up quickly, the stress some felt resulted in disposing of “everything in the trash”.

Goal 4 Quality Education

In the U.S. free education is available to all children in K-12 public schools; however, not all nations have equitable access to free education. In the survey, respondents were asked if their community group promotes or supports education. Most Buy Nothing members agreed (80%) that their group “shares education or knowledge,” and 92% saw their group sharing books or school supplies. Timebankers also agreed (96%) that their organization shares knowledge and 69% believed sharing books and school supplies happened among them. Roughly a third of them were not sure about that. During the observation period, a former pharmacy student offered nine books that were used during their education in a Florida university program. The value of these books was estimated to be around \$2,000, which would certainly benefit a student seeking that degree. Educational related supplies including desk chairs, desks, children’s books or toys, and nutritional information were observed within the BN community. Previously, the Buy Nothing Project specifically allowed for requests to be a “gift of knowledge” where a member could ask a question of the larger group. This specific type of gift is no longer included in the official guidelines, but it is not uncommon for a member to create a post seeking information about a topic, such as the member that requested information about becoming a notary and asking about the likelihood that it would help their career. The administrators may remove these posts for violating the guidelines.

Educational support was witnessed in different ways in the Timebank. Members sought information about outside resources or offered assistance in tutoring and financial literacy. Several members own Little Free Libraries or plant stands where these items are freely supplied

or swapped. These members also offered guidance on socially acceptable books, libraries to donate to, and how to propagate, trim, or grow a variety of plants. New skills and hobbies are also taught between members, such as the survey respondent that learned Thai cooking through a Timebank exchange. An interviewee also noted that their inability to cook has helped them connect to other Timebankers who have taught them simple recipes they now feel confident making on their own.

Goal 6 Clean Water and Sanitation

St. Petersburg residents do not have the severe water and sanitation issues that developing nations are still struggling to remedy; however, each year there are sewer leaks and spills that run over residential streets and enter the surrounding water bodies. Interviewees also noted other large concerns including saltwater intrusion, flooding, and adequate freshwater supplies. Forty-nine percent of respondents felt neutral, and 16% disagreed, that their Buy Nothing group improves water quality. Further analysis of water concerns is discussed in the environmental section. This portion will focus on potable drinking water and cleanliness. Cleaning surfaces has become even more important since the Covid-19 pandemic began in spring 2020, but household cleaning items have been around for decades. There were limited observations recorded for this goal in either group. Although there were a few posts that were tangentially related to clean water, they were more strongly related to other SDGs and categorized under those goals. For example, a pet life vest and a child's beach towel are both used near water, but they are also reflections of well-being through participation in outdoor activities. Timebank members are almost equally divided between agreeing and feeling neutral about whether their group can improve water quality. During observation of their group, the only post related to clean water was a request for dozens of empty gallon jugs.

Participant observation in the Buy Nothing group revealed that mops and cleaning supplies were gifted as well as some unique sanitation items that are also related to other SDGs such as shower chairs for elderly people or differently abled individuals. Some items used for cleaning included a laundry organizer, a hamper, and miscellaneous boxes that appear to have cleaning agents inside the box. Members were observed passing along partially used laundry soaps and spray cleaners, sometimes noting that they did not like the smell, it was the “wrong scent” and they were “too sensitive” to use it. One member did offer several new bottles of dish soap and a floor cleaner. Sanitation was also reflected in the condition of items offered within the group. Items should be gifted in a decent condition and clean, but when this is not the case Buy Nothing members might note “full disclosure” and inform the group of any rips, tears, or that an item “needs a good wash.” Sanitation within the Timebank was observed twice; once when members posted a trash pickup event and again when hygiene items were collected and distributed to homeless people. These events have multiple positive benefits for marginalized community members and reflect both SE principles and other SDGs.

Goal 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth

Caring for children, elderly, or the ill is just as important as teaching young children to tie their own shoes or to be kind to others. A vibrant thriving community relies on both white- and blue-collar workers, but it is also safer and more resilient when neighbors look out for one another and follow the Golden Rule. As an organization, a Timebank has a unique ability to address this goal for all participating members. Timebank operates as its own economy, where interactions between members often result in being “paid” for the exchange in their special currency, time credits; therefore, assisting a neighbor in any capacity is viewed as “work”. This organization reconceptualizes the notion of “work” that we are most accustomed to, by

mimicking the traditional capitalist economy where people earn money based off the amount of time they participate in work activities. For Timebankers, work is not a typical clock in/clock out job. Fundamental tasks that build strong and resilient communities, such as helping an elderly neighbor, supplying reading materials for the community, participating in neighborhood clean-up events, or volunteering with marginalized communities are all considered valuable work. This network of interactions throughout the alternative economy enables the St. Pete Timebank to excel and fulfill this SDG, especially when compared to gift economies like the Buy Nothing Project, towards fulfilling this SDG. Timebank views all group exchanges as work, which would require coding all observations as “Goal 8 Decent Work.” An analytical adjustment was made that considered only posts that related to direct financial gain or fully completed exchanges recorded in the software. This resulted in fewer coded observations than what Timebankers would consider actual instances of work. (See Table 11.) Posts that related to direct financial gain and completed exchanges recorded in the software were coded as representations of this SDG; however, all exchanges within the Timebank should be recognized as “decent work.”

Table 11. Infrastructure Goals During Participant Observation

| Goal | Buy Nothing | St. Pete Timebank |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Quality Education | 7% | 25% |
| Clean Water & Sanitation | 2% | - |
| Decent Work & Economic Growth | 2% | 26% |

Being a Buy Nothing member may help others achieve decent work and economic growth in their personal lives; for instance, if someone needs certain items for their job, such as a uniform or a tool, and they were gifted these items through their group. In the Buy Nothing

group this was witnessed when a pair of “6 inch high leather work boots in women’s size 8-9 and leather work gloves” were requested to help a member with their “wildlands fire course” and learning about prescribed burns. Offers or requests for work related equipment were also seen within the Facebook group, including many different desk chairs and a 7ft long desk with multiple drawers and a granite top, that weighed about 170 lbs.

Observation of the Timebank revealed posts of job offers from members and area employment opportunities found outside of the SPTB community. Help wanted offers included various opportunities at a local vacation resort and a gourmet popcorn sales position. The popcorn salesperson was offered both a rate in U.S. currency and partial time credits for their assistance. Members also made requests in the Timebank software for help growing their small business by watching, liking, sharing, and subscribing to their social media pages – most frequently their YouTube channel. Time credits were exchanged for supporting events such as visiting in person the Sustainable Saturdays Sunshine Fresh Market, or listening to a podcast on financial resiliency, or purchasing pottery at someone’s Etsy shop during a sale.

Goal 12 Responsible Consumption and Production

Being a gift economy gives the Buy Nothing group the edge on working towards this goal because the foundation of the group is to recycle or upcycle items between members. This increases the longevity and usefulness of those products, which ultimately decreases the materials extracted from the earth and slows production rates. Shared items within the group had longer use lives before being discarded. Observations of kitchen items were great examples of stretching this cycle, such as when members shared reusable ice packs used for shipping or glass jars with lids that might have contained pasta sauce or pickles. Other large categories of goods

noted during the observation phase were toys, clothing, decorations for birthdays or special occasions, cardboard boxes, and furniture including dressers, chairs, lamps, and beds.

Because of the importance of consumption and production to any economy, respondents were given multiple survey prompts that sought to understand how group participation related to this SDG. (See Table 12.) Participation in the Buy Nothing Project impacts the cycle of production, consumption, and waste. Ninety-four percent said they have thrown less away since joining their group. When asked if they noticed a reduction in their spending, 70% agreed and 63% said that they shop less often. Nearly half (45%) of the group said they have changed the type of items they now purchase. The SPTB also found similar benefits as results of participation, including reduced spending (67%) and shopping less frequently (55%). A change in the types of items they purchase was not noticed by most of them as shown by the 44% that felt neutral about this reflection; however, more than half (55%) claimed a reduction in the amount of waste they generate.

Table 12. Production/Consumption Cycle Survey Responses

| Agreement | Shop Less Often | Reduce Spending | Changed Items Purchased | Reduce Waste |
|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| BN Agreement | 63% | 70% | 45% | 94% |
| BN Neutral | 14% | 14% | 26% | 4% |
| BN Disagreement | 22% | 15% | 28% | 2% |
| SPTB Agreement | 55% | 67% | 39% | 55% |
| SPTB Neutral | 29% | 21% | 44% | 29% |
| SPTB Disagreement | 17% | 12% | 16% | 8% |

Observation showed that both small everyday items and large expensive items were gifted on the site. Some categories of observed items were home goods (furniture, small appliances, and paint), medical equipment and supplies (first aid kits, knee scooters, and shower chairs), and items for infants and small children (clothing, diapers, bassinets, and yard toys). The rehoming of material items was not often witnessed among the Timebank population; however, on the rare occasion these items were offered, they were classified as small home goods including moving boxes, felt furniture pads, and epoxy. It is possible that material goods are more frequently exchanged than what was seen during the observation period. It should be noted that during this time the organization was actively collecting items for the Abundance Swap. Members that generally would have posted material goods to the group may have chosen to donate them to the organization in an effort to help raise funds at this event. The SPTB board members made posts specifically asking for any material items that had a retail value of \$20 or more. Additionally large furniture items were collected, repurposed/upcycled, and sold online to aid in fundraising.

Environmental Group: Goal 13 – Goal 15

These goals are connected to each other and therefore were grouped into one category (Environmental) for the purpose of this research. The environment was discussed at length through both the online survey and in interviews. In the survey, over 80% of Buy Nothing respondents believed the group helped the environment and improved planetary health, but 96% of those surveyed in the SPTB community claimed their organization produced environmental benefits. (See Table 13) Most members believed participation in their organization increased sustainability (98%).

Table 13. Perception of Environmental Benefits

| | Improve Planetary Health | Increase Sustainability | Improve Water Quality | Reduce Climate Pressures | Help the Environment |
|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| BN Agreement | 81% | 98% | 36% | 61% | 90% |
| BN Neutral | 18% | 2% | 49% | 31% | 8% |
| BN Disagreement | 1% | - | 16% | 7% | 2% |
| SPTB Agreement | 96% | 98% | 48% | 75% | 96% |
| SPTB Neutral | 4% | 2% | 48% | 25% | 4% |
| SPTB Disagreement | - | - | 4% | - | - |

Members of both samples did not think the group improves water quality, as noted under Goal 6, but many reflected upon the ability to reduce climate pressures to some degree. A significant percentage of Buy Nothing members were neutral about the organization’s ability to improve planetary health, water quality, or reduce climate pressures. One quarter of SPTB respondents were unsure if their group could reduce climate pressures but 75% believed that it did. Members in this organization have provided opportunities for environmental collective action. Notices advertised sustainable gardening practices, plant trades and care information, and neighborhood cleanup days were observed within the group. Members were also recorded asking for assistance with outdoor projects including removing impervious surfaces (bricks and pavers) from their lawn, yard cleaning and gardening help, and composting.

Community Group: Goals 5, 10, 11, and 16

There cannot be true justice or peace without equality; therefore, this research combined Goal 5 Gender Equality, Goal 10 Reduced Inequalities, and Goal 11 Sustainable Cities and

Communities under this subtitle's umbrella. The terms used to help clarify and define these broad goals often includes words such as inclusive, equal, and sustain. Goal 16 is to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels." Although this is a fair summary of all SDGs, it is less concrete than "No Poverty" and "Zero Hunger." Measuring gender equality requires a complex matrix and perhaps a detailed understanding of cultural norms. Inclusion is much more than checking demographic boxes on list. Safety, peace, and justice are all relative to the location where they are being discussed due to someone's lived experiences plus the geopolitical and socioeconomic factors of their region. To thoroughly investigate these aspects requires more detailed information from respondents than what was provided during this research; however, a snapshot of the combined goals represented within these two communities can be a steppingstone. Members of both organizations believe their participation helps create positive social change within their communities.

Goal 5 Gender Equality is supported by the Timebank organization because unpaid domestic labor is often conducted by women, yet this community pays for these activities through time credits. Many of these roles are foundational support services required for building strong communities and may include a variety of caregiving jobs. Women are most often responsible for caring for young children while earning less per dollar than male counterparts in the same career fields. In the Buy Nothing sample, where the majority of members were women with children, gifts of tangible items allow personal finances to be stretched further. When we consider the Timebank sample, where most of the members are single women aged 60 and above, exchanging credits for services could be largely beneficial. Possible assistance could

come in the form of handywork around the home, strenuous yard care, transportation, and even social recreation or lunch dates.

Goal 10 Reducing Inequalities should not focus only on the differences between developing nations and developed countries but can be a useful strategy on a small scale, such as different neighborhoods or even within Buy Nothing communities in the same city. To some degree, both organizations help reduce inequality, but they also offer ways for individuals to perform collective actions. Gifts of clothing, shoes, toiletries, and backpacks as well as services including dyeing Easter eggs, serving holiday meals, physically collecting and transporting donations from one location to another are just a few of the simple ways neighbors have helped support war-stricken Ukrainians, housing insecure people in St. Pete, and even abandoned and rescued animals.

Goal 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities include reliable networks that neighbors feel safe and confident participating in due to shared basic values such as respect and kindness. Without these basic values volunteer community organizations are not likely to succeed. Sustainability is a broad term that is used to express a variety of different things. For some, it is always tied to the environment and climate change. Others think of resource use and allocation. Many consider something sustainable if it has the ability to last over a long period of time. This goal was designed to make “cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable” (United Nations, n.d.). This includes not only waste management and disaster mitigation but also collective action, supporting marginalized communities, and equity. Achievement of each goal is also a step towards the sustainability of humanity and life on this planet. The nature of the organizations studied support this goal, and evidence of this has been supplied throughout this thesis.

Goal 17 Partnerships for the Goals

Goal 17 is another SDG where the St. Pete Timebank clearly shines in comparison to the Buy Nothing Project. The main reason for this is, again, due to the fundamental principles of this organization. Timebank members believe in reciprocity. They view interactions as exchanges where both members are equally valued: the person giving the hours and the person receiving both need each other. Timebank members asked for help doing things or for others to complete services for them without the physical interaction. Buy Nothing does allow for gifts of service, but this was not observed in the group, nor does the group allow for “exchanges” or “trades” or reciprocity other than “gratitude.” The time credits exchanged might be the valuable incentive members need to help fulfil these service requests, especially if the task is lengthy, tiring, difficult, or dirty. It is much easier to gift someone a coffee mug you no longer use than it is to weed their garden for an hour. Both of these would have the same value in Buy Nothing, but they would have different values (and time credits!) in the Timebank. These differences may seem minor on the surface, but they mark a great difference between the two organizations.

Motivations, Principles, and Values

As an overall capture of the values related to Solidarity Economy principles, respondents were asked to select the two combinations of values they felt were best represented by their community. (See Table 14.) These combinations were created by the researcher using keywords symbolic of the SE framework. Compassion and kindness was selected by the majority of respondents in both samples. As previously discussed, expressions of humanity are crucial to building connections for strong and resilient communities. In times of trouble, this helps unify isolated individuals or convey support to those in need. Thirty-nine percent of Buy Nothing members believe their community values respect and humanity. This was observed through the

pleasant and friendly ways most members interact with each on social media. One quarter of Timebank respondents also agreed that these values are represented in their group, due in part to the “5 Core Values” created by Dr. Cahn. However, an even larger percentage (38%) of Timebankers believed that solidarity/collaboration and sufficiency/resiliency are present in their organization.

Table 14. Perceptions of Prominent SE Values

| Value Combinations | Buy Nothing | St. Pete Timebank |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Compassion & Kindness | 73% | 58% |
| Respect & Humanity | 39% | 25% |
| Solidarity & Collaboration | 21% | 38% |
| Safety & support | 14% | 8% |
| Sufficiency & Resiliency | 14% | 38% |
| Diversity & Inclusion | 4% | 8% |
| Honesty & Fairness | 1% | 6% |
| Democracy & Multi Solutions | 1% | - |

Survey responses indicate that members of both groups do feel connected and supported by others on some level, but there is more work to be done if leadership wants to increase representation of Solidarity Economy principles. These values have laid the groundwork to build stronger connections; but there are many Solidarity Economy principles that could be improved within the groups. Recalling the member demographics of each organization highlights some of the specific areas where Diversity and Inclusion can be increased. In an interview with a SPTB board member, increasing diverse representation among the members and also the board, were conveyed as important ideals. This interviewee acknowledged that the group and board are

mostly white women and said, “We are aware of it... We talk about it in each meeting. I don’t know what we can do other than just continuing to go out in the community and do things.” A board member runs a homeless outreach program in downtown St. Petersburg and several others help collect food and supplies for distribution. As part of the St. Pete Timebank, a youth affiliation was created that works with vulnerable residents. Two of their biggest projects are teaching young mothers to read so they can read to their child, and operating a youth led sustainable urban garden.

Participants were asked to select the top three principles, related to Sustainable Development Goals, that they thought their community best represented. (See Table 15.)

Table 15. Perceptions of Prominent SDGs

| Principles | Buy Nothing | St. Pete Timebank |
|--------------------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Promote Equality | 10% | 27% |
| Improve Justice | - | 4% |
| Environmental Stewardship | 38% | 27% |
| Sustainability | 57% | 71% |
| Education | 2% | 19% |
| Improve Mental/Physical Health | 12% | 10% |
| Positive Social Change | 64% | 84% |
| Improve Planetary Health | 24% | 8% |
| Reduce Financial Burdens | 74% | 50% |

Members in both groups believed their community reduced financial burdens, advanced positive social change, and sustainability. Promoting social change recognizes a multitude of ways that systemic issues can be addressed. These communities cannot drastically alter the

economy and structural forces we are all subject too; however, their small differences can collectively result in creating a slightly better world. According to survey respondents, the St. Pete Timebank promoted equality (27%) and education (19%) more than the BN (10% or less) group.

There is great work towards the SDGs of justice and equality being done by members within both communities; however, these are not collective actions taken by the whole. Although they are not considered for analysis in this research, these individual and small group efforts should be acknowledged. These stories were often told during interviews with St. Pete Timebank members. Brandon shared stories about their outreach efforts to help people living in the nearby woods. Some Timebankers worked together to offer regular transportation to a shower facility, provide nonperishable meals, job assistance, and even finding housing. Alex explained how a member kept a food pantry in their own driveway and welcomed anyone, regardless of SPTB membership, to help themselves to items. Jessie told stories about outreach efforts for housing insecure people in downtown St. Pete.

Survey participants were asked to select their primary reason for joining their group. (See Table 16.) Nearly half of Timebankers favored the sense of belonging to a like-minded community and 23% claimed that it was the opportunity to give and receive help or services that drew them in. Responses indicate that the top two reasons members joined their Buy Nothing group were to give/receive items (42%) or to reduce their ecological footprint (23%). This is consistent with the overall goals of those communities. Both samples of members believe their groups express compassion and kindness, strive for positive social changes, and reduce financial stress; however, the methods used to reach these goals differ.

Table 16. Primary Motivation for Membership

| Motivation | Buy Nothing | St. Pete Timebank |
|---|-------------|-------------------|
| To give/receive items | 42% | 8% |
| To give/receive help or services | 27% | 23% |
| Reducing my ecological footprint | 18% | 13% |
| Sense of belonging to like-minded community | 6% | 46% |
| Friendship and Building Relationships of Mutual Support | 5% | 10% |
| Making Financial Resources Last Longer | 2% | - |

Survey participants were asked to supply their own response to indicate what they found most meaningful about their community group. The answers are heartwarming and beautiful. Buy Nothing members commented about giving “directly to someone who can use” the items. They were pleased that these items were not being donated to centers to be resold or heading to a landfill. These interactions may seem like simple things, but to those involved it allowed for “giving back and receiving support” or “showing kindness while making an imprint on society.” For others, it reduced feelings of loneliness or isolation just “knowing that there are so many kind and generous people” nearby and that it helped new residents “connect with my community.” Some members commented that they participate because they “enjoy helping others,” or “seeing old items get new life” especially when they can “directly fulfill a need or wish” or if the recipient has limited “access to necessary or special items.” When asked in previous prompts about the relationships they developed with others in the group, responses seemed lackluster; however, when reading the member supplied comments the love, respect, and connection they express about their neighbors was breathtaking. Many expressed how they got to

know neighbors they “would otherwise never have met”, how the group supported them in times of need (unemployment) or great difficulty (pandemic), and how the community came together to help them celebrate important events too. The altruistic and positive environment created within the Buy Nothing group has given people “hope” and “restored faith in humanity.”

Timebankers overwhelmingly expressed a feeling of building community in this comment section. They “love the consensus that everyone’s time is valuable” and that “everything doesn’t have to be about ‘the money’.” Valuing everyone’s time equally instead of money, education, or job status “evens the playing field” for participants within the group. They feel like they belong, that it is a “community of people that care for one another.” Many of them offer or receive help in times of need and some feel overwhelmed and “can’t do everything” by themselves. One participant wrote about the “tremendous impact” the group had on their “mental and physical well-being” when they lost their housing and members not only gave moving supplies but also helped them relocate. Another encourages others to join “so they can participate in a community of support instead of feeling despair due to poverty, disabilities, or other limitations.” Some members feel so strongly about their organization that they believe that “the entire Tampa Bay Region benefits from our outreach and activities.... enhances lives in our state, our country and the entire world.” For some Timebanking continues their “lifelong commitment to peace and justice” or introduces opportunities for “bonding with diverse people... homeless and refugees” or other “areas of life not normally accessed.”

Chapter Six: Conclusion

To determine a conclusive stance on whether either community group is effective at utilizing Solidarity Economy principles or supporting Sustainable Development Goals is a complicated process that analyzed both emic and etic perspectives. Organizational documents, surveys, and interviews offer insight into what these communities and their members believe is happening within their group, but these ideas are sometimes in opposition to evidence found during the participant observation phase. Members in both groups were unaware of Solidarity Economy principles; therefore, they were not consciously striving to place themselves within that framework, but most members are cognizant of Sustainable Development Goals. These projects were created by a couple of founders decades ago, and although the SDGs were not explicitly included in organizational documents, their representation and expression are still relevant. A determination of what SDGs the community most efficiently addressed was due to a combination of survey responses and interview comments; however, observations weighed more heavily as they were actions recently taking place and not perhaps an old memory.

Overall, both community groups demonstrated the Solidarity principles of mutualism and cooperation most strongly as participants felt connected and supported by other compassionate and kind group members. The groups were weakest in manifesting justice and equality. Diverse representation and inclusive membership should be enhanced; however, strict neighborhood boundaries found within the Buy Nothing Project may impact this community's ability. When a group is limited to geographical boundaries where ethnic minorities or other marginalized people

are not present, these places will remain primarily white spaces, limiting the effectiveness of justice initiatives. When efforts exclude vulnerable and marginalized populations, through design, purpose, or willful blindness, they continue to replicate the same societal problems, engraining them deeper into the structure instead of exposing and scouring them out. Justice based organizations that ignore the systemic issues they are surrounded by may lose credibility and public support when their initiatives are seen as pats on the back instead of the radical changes needed to promote equity. Regionally based groups, such as the Timebank, are much more capable of ensuring that all residing populations are included in their membership. The Timebank utilized collaboration by supporting community initiatives and connecting with local organizations, yet this style of collaboration is not available to Buy Nothing members.

The SDGs that Buy Nothing appears to work towards fulfilling most strongly are Goal 12 Responsible Production and Consumption and the goals that strive to improve environmental health. Buy Nothing members have seen some fluctuation in their finances, but only so much as it is related to their shopping behaviors, specifically how frequently they shop and how much money they spend. Recycling items instead of sending them to a landfill does help improve the planet and focusing on a small geographical area reduces carbon footprints from reduced transportation; however, nothing in the work of the group approaches SDGs about sustainable energy or clean water. Outside of being a community dominated by women, there is very little work towards gender equality.

Gender equality is more effectively addressed in the St. Pete Timebank as part of the fundamental principles which challenges the modern concept of valuable work. Although it is nice to be rewarded for good deeds, time credits are only useful for exchanges between members and organizational sponsors, meaning members will still need U.S. currency to pay bills and

make purchases. An increase of skilled labor and craft-based talents could greatly benefit the SPTB and reduce financial burdens for the members, if needed services were sourced through the group. This community does support SDGs that increase the sustainability of the planet through events related to urban agriculture, tending the earth, and pick up trash.

Both groups do work that slowly advances Sustainable Development Goals. These goals are global problems and cannot be drastically altered by small collective actions; however, each opportunity to take one step closer to these important goals does have ripple effects. When considering the global efforts of the Buy Nothing Project and the Timebank, the small experiences found in neighborhoods and communities around the world can have a powerful impact.

SEs as Viable Alternatives to Capitalism

Many ways that conventional capitalist economies do not support the needs of the community have been discussed along with arguments for seeking alternative methods that go against mainstream traditions. Capitalism is not working for millions of people around the world because of its unsustainable methods of production that harm the planet and its people. Natural resources are being depleted which impacts ecosystem health, food production, and climate change mitigation abilities. Capitalist economies have created inequalities between the wealthy and those less fortunate through generational wealth accumulation and oppressive labor practices. Digital technology and social media increased the visibility of environmental crises, food scarcity, poverty, and systemic inequalities. It is time to change the way modern capitalism runs societies.

People are looking for ways to support themselves and their families, reduce disparities, and increase the health of the planet, but changes must be easily implemented, obtainable, and long lasting. Solidarity Economies offer viable alternative solutions to navigate some of the large-scale problems found throughout the world. They also support efforts to reach Sustainable Development Goals and are malleable enough to adapt to a variety of locations and situations. The two case study organizations researched here through participant observation, interviews, and surveys are two examples of how local community groups utilize a Solidarity Economy framework while working toward the SDGs. Although these groups are small, they have global representation. When individual efforts are combined it creates more substantial impacts experienced on a local level. Combining the benefits of these local groups around the world results in strong collective action.

The Buy Nothing Project seeks to remove capitalist tendencies by valuing connections over profits, shifting mindsets to focus on abundance instead of scarcity, and increasing social connections that foster health and vitality. Abundance here does not mean the accumulation of things that we typically think of in capitalist societies, but instead “The Buy Nothing Project is about setting the scarcity model of our cash economy aside in favor of creatively and collaboratively sharing the abundance around us” (Clark & Rockefeller, 2021b). This is very similar to the purpose of Timebanks where abundance is represented by Timebanker Talents and recognition that each member of society has many valuable assets, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

Members primarily design and create their own experiences in both of these organizations which supports the principles of democracy and pluralism found in Solidarity Economy framework. Mutualism is a key component of both organizations as is the creation of a

sense of a community, but this feeling is not the reality for all members. Like many other collaborative community support groups, a member's experience is largely determined by their engagement within that group. The idea that "we are all in this together" is fantastic but it is framed by "you get what you put into it." The first cliché is unifying but it can leave community members cold if they are not able to participate on the same level as their neighbors, or as conveyed through interviews, when members feel like outsiders or "othered." Being a member of a community organization may feel like having partners or friends with the same concerns but operating in an online space might lead to repetition of the same feelings of isolation many are already experiencing. Leaders within both communities have the ability to address these areas of disconnection.

In the BN group, gifting material items and interactions in virtual space allows for the connection between individuals, but a deep level of connection is not required. For Timebankers, the value is placed on time, giving this organization more opportunity for members to connect one-on-one, in physical time and space, without the voyeurism typically found in online environments. Both communities offer a variety of experiences and interactions that may lead to connections with other people. Interactions with others include your direct or nearby neighbor in the St. Pete Buy Nothing groups, but in the Timebank they could live in a city at the far end of the county or even across a bridge. It is nice to have a connection and someone to reach out to about different topics, but if they are far away can they be resources in times of emergency such as Florida's inclement weather, or power outages?

The organizations are similar in many ways, yet the Timebank can be utilized for a broader range of exchanges, such as helping promote someone's online business page which is an activity that would not be conducted through Buy Nothing. Buy Nothing is where people go

for things and Timebank is used for services. Someone looking to connect with their neighbors, or the community, could benefit from joining both organizations, and since they are free and require little time commitment, this is an easily acceptable option. For those that are more geared towards civic engagement or seeking to learn new things, the St. Pete Timebank community would be better suited for them, especially if they are older adults without the limitations of full-time employment and caregiving responsibilities. St. Petersburg residents under the age of 50 that have young children would likely enjoy the Buy Nothing community more.

Utilization in St. Petersburg

In St. Petersburg where sustainability initiatives are already being considered through government policies and academic research, the recognition of community-based Solidarity Economy organizations can be greatly beneficial. The city is aware of urban agriculture, the benefits of community gardens at reducing food insecurity, and even the St. Pete Youth Farm; however, this recognition does not use a Solidarity Economy lens (City of St. Petersburg, 2022). The barriers that restrict marginalized residents from accessing the Meadowlawn Ecological Center & Community Garden, featured on the city sustainability website, are replications of the same system problems found throughout the city. Barriers of inadequate transportation, operating hours, and start-up fees could be alleviated if community gardens were planned within SE framework. Connections between Buy Nothing Project, St. Pete Timebank, and the city would support initiatives and action plans already in place by putting more power into the hands of individual residents and communities. Partnerships between community groups and local government can turn large scale plans and ideas into daily collective actions across the city. St. Pete Timebank currently works through their Youth Timebank to support the St. Pete Youth

Farm. The purpose of the Buy Nothing Project supports the city's "Road to Zero Waste". Civic Engagement initiatives at University of South Florida can connect students to field experiences within these communities and educate them on Solidarity Economies and collective action in a variety of sectors. The synergy between all of these organizational stakeholders should be explored to help foster a more sustainable future for St. Petersburg, which could be modeled by other cities and regions.

Future Research

Further research should continue to explore both case study community groups for their adherence to Solidarity Economy principles and their ability to achieve Sustainable Development Goals. Research should investigate how these organizations are utilized across not only the U.S. but also in nations around the world. Although it is valuable to understand and compare the strengths and weakness of both the Buy Nothing Project and the Timebank, a further analysis of each umbrella organization would create a robust understanding of the differences in how group principles are applied as well as how the entire umbrella utilizes Solidarity Economy framework or supports Sustainable Development Goal achievement. Analysis of these groups in various geographical areas or with different membership demographics may yield results that add to the complexity of these captivating organizations. A longitudinal study should be conducted that explores membership participation and influences of long-term community commitment. Additional insight can provide a wide array of benefits and implementation scenarios that support community development, which supports local organizations as well as city planning. Understanding the demographics and reasons why these groups are incredibly popular provides valuable insight on the struggles of residents. Like many other cities, St. Petersburg officials can

utilize this information and incorporate foundational principles of Solidarity Economies into local governments to create a sustainable and resilient community that care about each other and their environment. Helping promote organizations that share Solidarity Economy framework and work towards Sustainable Development Goals, like the Buy Nothing Project and St. Pete Timebank, enables residents to build support networks and become aware of resources within their own community.

Limitations

Survey responses were a result of many factors, especially personal perception. Prompts were not clearly defined with explanations or descriptions; therefore, each term was left up to the member to determine what that meant or how it could be expressed. Some terms may overlap in a respondent's mind, for example, equality, justice, and social change can be intricately woven together just as environmental stewardship, sustainability, and planetary health are. This overlap was designed to evoke an honest and thoughtful response from survey participants and not designed to confuse them; however, reflection upon the survey design showed prompts and keywords that should have been more clearly defined. The combination of chosen principles helped identify the buzzwords most associated with each organization as well as areas that can be improved upon. For example, improving personal health was rated low in both groups, giving the leadership team members an opportunity to reflect upon ways they can address this and foster health and wellness for members. Community based research has associated barriers which may be more difficult to breach in a virtual setting. The typical events, gatherings, or other interactions may have shifted due to changes brought on by the pandemic. Interviewees discussed some of the changes they had seen within their group.

Research is always limited by available technology. Problems in observation existed in both Facebook and the Timebank software and interviews were not always able to be captured by both audio and video devices. An online survey platform that allowed for respondents to rank principles and values may have yielded slightly different results for lesser chosen responses. Online communication between the researcher and community members was acceptable in the SPTB; however, this was not the case in the Buy Nothing group. This restricted the ability to create posts to notify the Buy Nothing group members, engage with the community, and also show gratitude for their support. All research has limitations and the brief commentary about those limits here should not be mistaken as a complaint. In the words of Buy Nothing members, “full disclosure!”

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APPENDIX A: EXEMPTION LETTER



EXEMPT DETERMINATION

March 21, 2022

Dear Julie Beach:

On 3/21/2022, the IRB reviewed and approved the following protocol:

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Application Type: | Initial Study |
| IRB ID: | STUDY003938 |
| Review Type: | Exempt (2)(i), (2)(iii) |
| Title: | Synergies between Solidarity Economies and Sustainable Development Goals found in community groups within St. Petersburg Florida. |
| Funding: | None |
| Protocol: | • SE SDG Synergies_Beach_HRP-503a - SBP_IRB Edits Clean.docx; |

The IRB determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review.

In conducting this protocol, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Please note, as per USF policy, once the exempt determination is made, the application is closed in BullsIRB. This does not limit your ability to conduct the research. Any proposed or anticipated change to the study design that was previously declared exempt from IRB oversight must be submitted to the IRB as a new study prior to initiation of the change. However, administrative changes, including changes in research personnel, do not warrant a modification or new application.

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any

changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit a new request to the IRB for a determination.

Sincerely,

Shanitra Butler
IRB Research Compliance Administrator

Institutional Review Boards / Research Integrity & Compliance

FWA No. 00001669

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