FOSTERING COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AS THE KEY TO A JUST AND SUSTAINABLE SEATTLE

Sydney Porter*, Program of the Environment, University of Washington
Dr. Jessica Hernandez and Em Piro, Sustainable Seattle
Branden Born, Urban Design & Planning, University of Washington

🐦 @SydneyLPorter

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CONTEXT

Environmental risks and degradation disproportionately impact oppressed groups (frontline communities).

- Mainstream environmentalism excludes the experiences and needs of frontline communities.

Holistic implementations of sustainability should be led by the interests of the most impacted, frontline communities.

- Frontline organizers are generally not well supported.

Participatory research is an emerging method to engage community knowledge, addressing the underrepresentation of oppressed voices.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How can Participatory Research be used to elevate community agency and knowledge in Seattle?

What barriers stand in the way of frontline organizer's sustainability goals in Seattle?
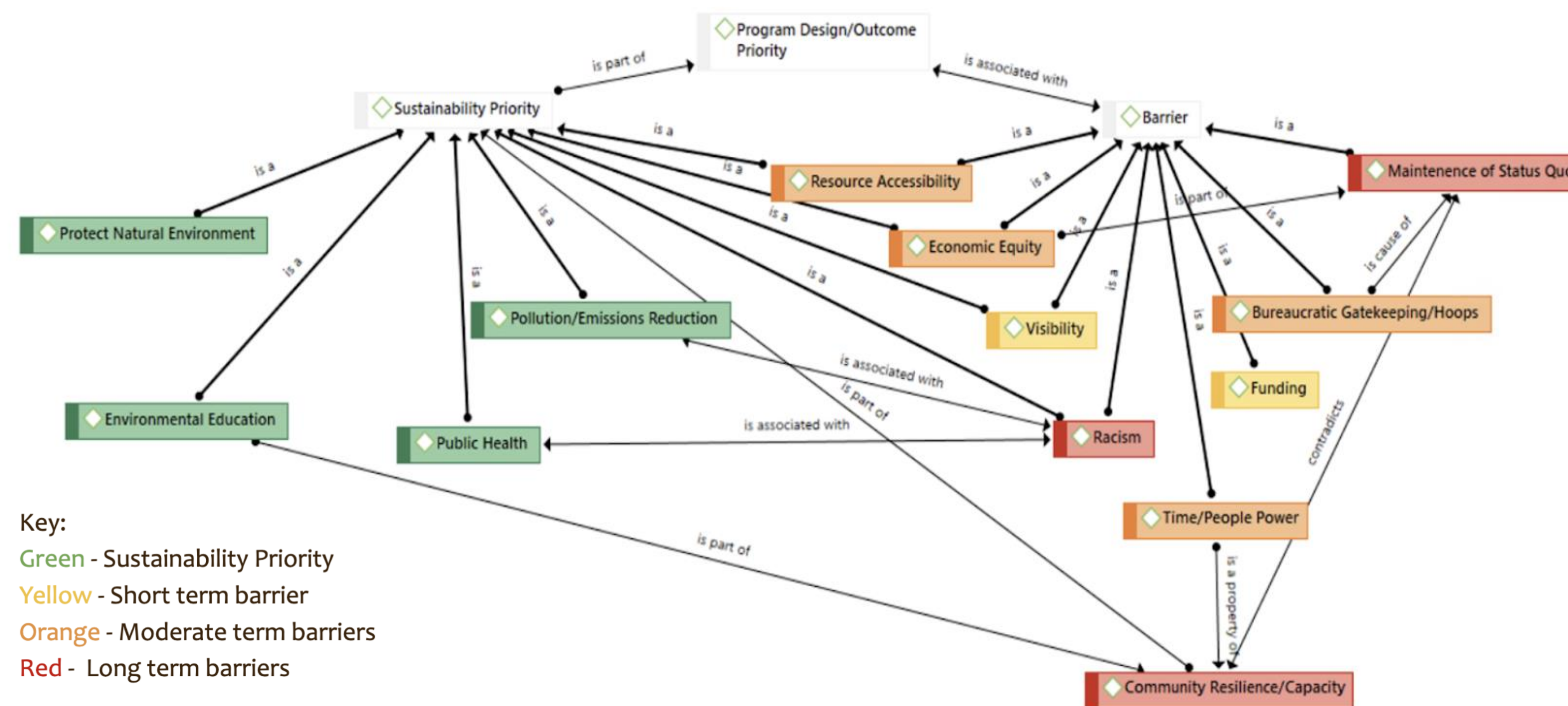
INTERNSHIP & METHODS

Interned with Sustainable Seattle ("S2") to design a revitalized Participatory Research Program to be facilitated by S2.

LITERATURE REVIEW · INTERVIEWS · QUALITATIVE CODING

Conducted 10 interviews with 11 participants with experience as a sustainability organizer working with frontline communities in Seattle.

RESULTS

S2 Program Design Framework Systems Map

Key:
Green - Sustainability Priority
Yellow - Short term barrier
Orange - Moderate term barriers
Red - Long term barriers

Figure 1: A systems map of the broad sustainability priorities and barriers expressed by members of the S2 community in interviews. This map highlights the barriers that shape the context of the work that sustainability organizers do in Seattle. These barriers were identified from a series of ten interviews with eleven participants in total, with the participant pool being strategically selected due to their sustainability work and proximity to my own host organization Sustainable Seattle.

Figure 2: Visuals created by interview participants in response to the prompt "Please draw something that represents your, or your organization's, vision of sustainability". This method allows for visual representation of concepts along with spoken expression in the interviews.

Top 5 barriers

Ordered from most reported to least, excluding repeated mentions within a single interview.

Barriers capture top issue areas that make it difficult to achieve goals within organizing work.

Frontline organizers reported having few resources to handle institutional barriers

1 Maintenance of Status Quo
"The reason we're not making progress towards a healthier regional ecosystem based on other values is because the white supremacy culture is based on power, [...] and those [with power] want to retain it and protect it at any cost..." - P

2 Environmental Education / Engagement
"Education is really important. The public needs [...] to be informed on all these decisions that are impacting their lives [...] people have to learn how to really engage [...] and really have a space at the table to make decisions." - A

3 Racism
"There's a lot of distrust [among] people of color, especially engaging with science because it's been used to marginalized and target ... So being able to break down those barriers and engage people in these processes, to better our planet." - M

4 Funding
"Because of the funding model, it becomes extremely challenging to acquire the resources that are necessary for a well functioning organization to support staff ... full time and also long term ... working for that cause in that community. - L

5 Time / People Power
"Una de las principales barreras que [nosotros] ha afrontado para cumplir con nuestra visión como organización es la capacidad, ya que sólo estamos conformados por cautro miembros los cuales nos dedicamos a tiempo parcial al crecimiento de la organización." - R
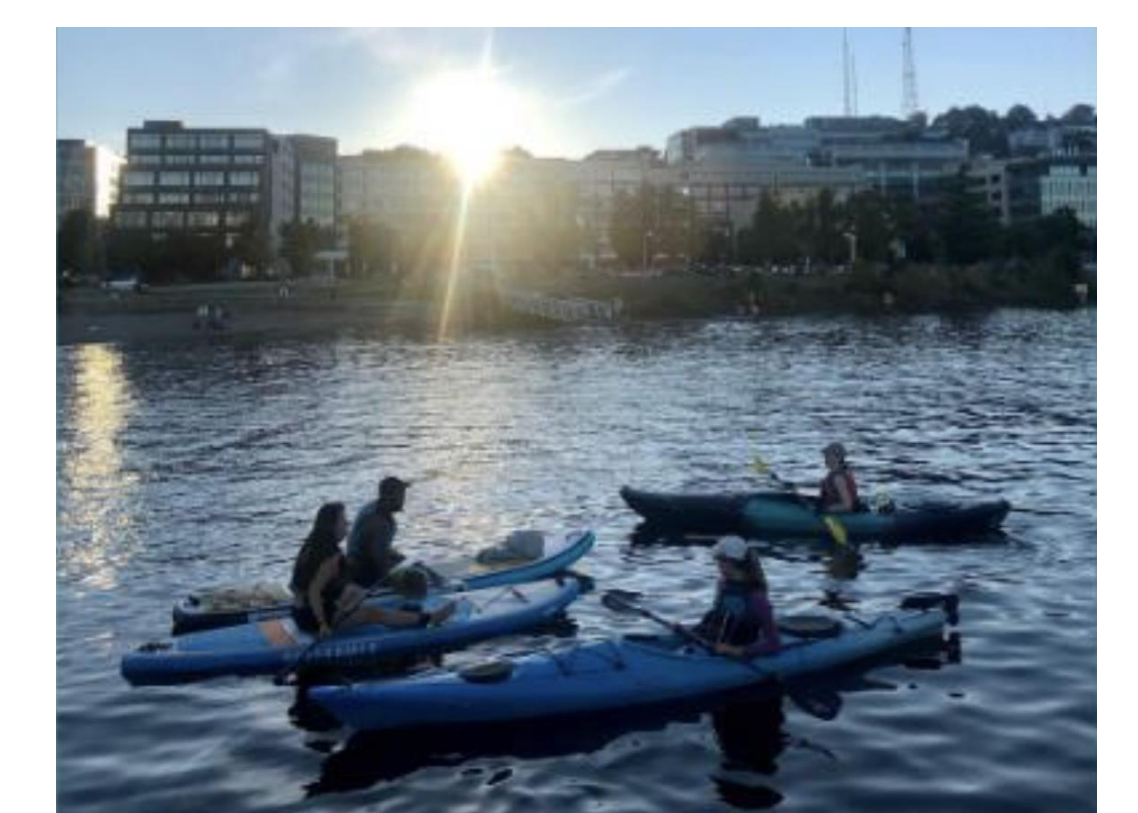
TAKEAWAYS

The Participatory Research Program must…

- Be **community owned** and led, being **continuously shaped** by community feedback

- Address **existing concerns** with a **long-term** focus

- Advocate for **change**

- Utilize local **community relationships** and pathways

- Accounts for and **seeks to undercut the barriers** that organizers experience

SIGNIFICANCE

Create hubs of **formalized community** knowledge.

Production of **inclusive materials** that can be used by **decision makers.**

Holistic vision of sustainability that can be **led** by the most historically **excluded** and highly **impacted communities.**

Recognize how local **institutions must change** to best **support community** projects and visions.