

The global spread of community organizing: how ‘Alinsky-style’ community organizing travelled to Australia and what we learnt?

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Abstract Community organizing refers to a particular way of working in public life that aims to enhance the capacity of community leaders to act for the common good in collaboration across civil society. In the last two decades, this practice, founded in the United States, has spread to Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia. This article develops a definition of community organizing, then explores the history of the practice. The article focuses on the translation of community organizing to Australia and the development of the Sydney Alliance. The article identifies a series of ‘key factors’ that helped create a successful adaptation of community organizing ‘universals’ to another country. In doing so the article applies several frameworks developed in *Power in Coalition* to help understand the successes and challenges that the Sydney Alliance has endured (Tattersall (2010) *Power in Coalition: Strategies for Strong Unions and Social Change*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY). The author has a distinctive perspective, as she was the founder of the Sydney Alliance as well as the author of *Power in Coalition*. The article does not pretend to provide ‘objective’, disinterested observation, but is presented from the vantage point of active participant observation.

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Introduction

On a cool Saturday morning in February 2007 I sat in a church hall in the southern suburbs of Seattle with thirty-five other people. It was a mix of churchgoers, union members and community organization leaders. We were all attending the second day of the Sound Alliance's Two Day Leadership Institute. During the day we had learnt about the basics of community organizing – how to do relational meetings, power analysis and how to understand the community organizing life cycle. That afternoon I spoke with Joe Chrastil, Sound Alliance's Lead Organizer and asked him whether he would mentor me, and support me to set up an Alliance in Australia. In April 2007 I returned to Sydney and started working on a plan – to bring community organizing 'IAF style' to Australia, and to start by building the Sydney Alliance.

The Sydney Alliance is the first 'southern' affiliate of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). The IAF is the oldest and largest community organizing network in the world. It was founded by the 'grandfather' of community organizing – Saul Alinsky (Alinsky, 1971, 1989), who first built an urban 'people's organization' called the Back of the Yards Neighbourhood Council in South-Side Chicago in the late 1930s (Alinsky, 1989).

The Back of the Yards Neighbourhood Council received national attention in 1939 when it ran a successful campaign in partnership with the Packinghouse Workers Industrial Union (PWIU) that 'unionized the abattoir workers in the industrial areas of Chicago (Horwitt, 1992). The abattoir was a horrible place to work, so bad that it had previously inspired Upton Sinclair to write his protest novel, *The Jungle* (Sinclair, 1906). The Back of the Yards Neighbourhood Council was Alinsky's first organizing project and, with a team of local church and union leaders, the Council slowly built and strengthened urban relationships between local community-based organizations. The consequence of this deep web of unusual relationships between immigrant catholic churches and the union was that it built enough community power to dramatically change the lives of those who worked and lived in Chicago's South-Side immigrant communities (Horwitt, 1992; Bretherton, 2010).

In 1940, soon after he recorded these initial successes, Alinsky founded the IAF (Horwitt, 1992). Not long after, in 1946, he received national notoriety after the release of his first book, *Reveille for Radicals* (Alinsky, 1989). *Reveille* identified the organizing philosophy that Alinsky pioneered: the need for communities to build 'people's organizations', and the conceptual foundation for modern community organizing 'Chicago' or 'IAF style'.

This article takes the experience of community organizing in the United States and explores how it has been translated to Australia. The story is told from my perspective, as both a theorist and practitioner of coalition building. The article is informed by my 'participant observation' of the

Sydney Alliance, as its founder and Executive Director. That perspective is supplemented with secondary source material, and by my theoretical work on coalitions as published in *Power in Coalition* (Tattersall, 2010).

What is community organizing?

Community organizing is a way of working that aims to build community power for the common good, where the key objective is the cultivation of citizen leaders and strong, connected community-based organizations. Community organizing is a practice founded on a historically, theologically and philosophically grounded understanding of core concepts of public life, including leadership, organization, power and relationships (Chambers, 2003; Gecan, 2004).

While this definition might appear straightforward and specific, in the loose-lipped world of ‘activism’ and ‘social change’, community organizing is a vaguely used, sometimes faddish term. It is so liberally deployed that it is often hard to settle on a specific meaning. Indeed, the term has become so ambiguous in the United States that the US IAF took to using the phrase ‘broad-based organizing’ to more specifically define their particular approach to community organizing (Chambers, 2003).

To complicate matters further, the phrase ‘community organizing’ has recently become closely associated with Barack Obama, the first self-identified presidential ‘community organizer’. His rise to power was a Janus-faced victory for those who support community organizing: Obama popularized the idea of organizing while confusingly associating it with partisan and electoral politics. Certainly the Obama campaign did adapt several ‘community organizing’ techniques (like one-to-one meetings and ‘house’ meetings) to electoral organizing (McKenna and Han, 2014). Yet the campaign’s techniques were also radically different to IAF-style community organizing: after all, the focus of the Obama campaign was electing a person to office, not involving people in the creation of solutions to overcome problems in a local community.

In the tradition of the IAF and its commitment to resurrecting and defining the ‘root meaning’ of concepts like power, radical, confrontation and anger, I find it useful to continue to use and to clarify the term ‘community organizing’ (Alinsky, 1971, pp. 48–62; Chambers, 2003). So throughout this article, when I use the term ‘community organizing,’ I am referring to the quite specific methodology deployed and taught by the IAF across the world.

Key features of community organizing

Community organizing, as taught by the IAF, focuses on a few key practices and concepts. The key features are

- (i) Relational meetings
- (ii) Focus on power
- (iii) Focus on institutions
- (iv) Focus on leadership
- (v) The community organizing life cycle
- (vi) The habit of education and training

The centrepiece of the IAF is the *relational meeting*. Indeed, Chambers argues in *Roots for Radicals* that the one-to-one relational meeting is ‘the most radical thing that we teach’ (Chambers, 2003, p. 44). The relational meeting is radical because it is rooted in a heartfelt commitment to the dignity of all people. If we believe, either theologically or with a secular humanism, that all people have inherent value and worth, then we have a duty to listen and exchange the stories, impulses, passions and interests that each person brings to public life. It is in ‘relational meetings’ that leaders and organizers interpret, share and understand these interests. The technique was inspired by Alinsky, but became a key tool of community organizers through the teaching of Ed Chambers and Dick Harmon in the 1960s (Chambers, 2003, p. 46).

Alongside the radicalism of engaging with the ‘whole’ person, community organizing also has a focus on the ‘whole system’, and in particular how *power* pervades every aspect of public life. A feature of the dialogic pattern of IAF National Training is the recognition that ‘power’ is a loaded term (Warren, 2001; Chambers, 2003). The IAF, however, argues very forcefully that civil society organizations need to get comfortable with power. IAF organizers argue that civil society’s lack of power is one of the key reasons why public life is so hard. Our lack of power is demonstrated in the marginalization of many of the core values that civil society organizations, like churches and unions, preach. The IAF’s solution is for us in civil society to build power.

Yet the IAF has a discerning understanding of the kind of power it wishes to build. The IAF distinguishes between ‘power over’ and ‘power with’ as two extremes on the continuum of how power can work in public life (Chambers, 2003). While, as Lord Acton famously noted, power may have a tendency to corrupt (Dalberg-Acton, 1907, p. 504), it can also be a force for the common good when held collectively, accountably, creatively, diversely and respectfully. Many of the principles of community organizing focus on how to understand power, how to think about power, how to analyse how power works and how it can be challenged (Chambers, 2003; Cortes, 2010, pp. 14–15).

Core to the IAF’s interpretation of community organizing is a focus on *institutions*. This principle has its roots in Alinsky’s Chicago experience, where he argued that our civic institutions are the anchor for our democracy.

This insight was not new – Alexis de Tocqueville had previously noted that America was distinctive in its abundant presence of voluntary associations (Tocqueville, 1839). The IAF's strategy was to use this strong network of voluntary organizations and to focus on networking them more effectively between each other, and with their own members, as a strategy to build a more connected, and strong civil society capable of acting on many different issues. In contrast to social movements that erupt and collapse, organizing across and inside local institutions anchors a more sustained capacity for longer term social change – meaning that a community organizing Alliance can shift between issues, transition between different leaders and be sustained overtime (Gecan, 2004).

Like Rousseau's dialectic between the collective and individual, the IAF also emphasizes the role of *individual leaders* in the pursuit of the common good (Rousseau, 1947; Gecan, 2004). The purpose of the relational meeting is in part to identify talented leaders capable of transforming their organization and leading public action that makes meaningful change to their city (Chambers, 2003, p. 45). IAF organizations are 'leader led' – the organizer is there to identify, agitate, teach and coordinate leaders, and to support them to take action, but not to 'preach' and tell a community what it should do (Alinsky, 1971, pp. 71–80).

These 'organizing concepts' come alive in the '*community organizing life cycle*', which is the pattern of organizing that local Alliances adhere to. It has four stages. Every meeting, training, plan of action or building of an IAF organization follows this pattern of work. That is, it begins with the one-to-one meeting and a process of listening, then it moves to research and planning, then to action and finally to evaluation. That said, this cycle is an 'iterative process' – some people join the organization in action, others through relational meetings. The key is that the pattern and 'cycle' is followed (Figure 1).

These concepts and ways of working are core to the cultures and practices of the alliances that the IAF has built across the world. This 'organizing culture' is reproduced most visibly through the IAF's annual 'National Training' and its mirror regional and local trainings that are run across the network. The training ranges from five to eight days, and is remarkably similar, whether run in Chicago, Los Angeles, Sydney, London or New Jersey.

National Training was created by Ed Chambers and Dick Harmon towards the end of Alinsky's life (Chambers, 2003). The first training was run in 1969 in Chicago. The training involves extensive debate about key concepts like power, public/private roles, self-interest, action, reflection, the organizing cycle and relational meetings. There are also regional variations – in Australia we run a session on 'broad and deep alliances' instead of 'broad-based organizing' – but much of the content is similar and several top leaders in

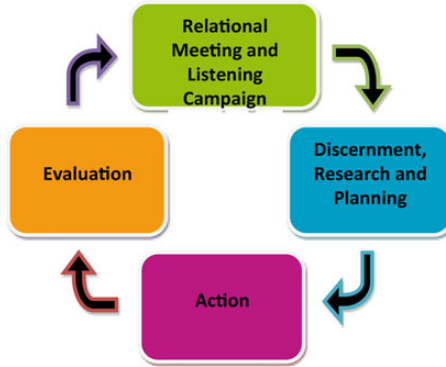


Figure 1 The community organizing life cycle

Australia have done the training in Sydney, the United Kingdom and the United States. In addition, every local 'Australian' training has featured an international guest from the United States or United Kingdom.

Community organizing – going global

It was in the 1990s that the IAF grew into a global network. In the early 1990s, Neil Jameson from the United Kingdom received a Churchill Fellowship to further explore community organizing in the United States. Following this he returned to the United Kingdom and with financial support from the Cadbury's Foundation began organizing in East London. Citizens UK and its dozen local affiliated organizations are the legacy of this work.

In the late 1990s, Fr Leo Penta, a Catholic Priest and leader with the IAF organization East Brooklyn Congregations, moved to Berlin to take up an academic post. There he built the Community Organizing Institute, and a series of local IAF organizations in Berlin and Hamburg.

'IAF style' community organizing has extended beyond the so-called developed nations in an *ad hoc* fashion (Beck and Purcell, 2013). The South-West IAF has undertaken extensive trainings in Spanish in Mexico and in South America. The IAF famously went and ran training in South Africa at the invitation of the Anglican church in the 1990s, and there is an embryonic organization called Hong Kong Citizens.

Moreover, during the 1980s and 1990s, there were numerous individuals in the Philippines and Guatemala who experimented with community organizing tactics as part of anti-dictatorship struggles. Sadly, one of the lessons from these experiences is that liberal democratic freedoms play an important part in the execution of 'traditional' organizing principles (Constantino-David, 1995). For instance, it is hard to stage an 'action' where

the 'reaction' is that you get shot! Nevertheless, there is an ongoing interest in the expansion of the network. Yet it is recognized that the network has only expanded, and successfully laid a base in a new country, when a dedicated locally based organizer has made it happen.

Community organizing in Australia

In Sydney in the late 1990s and early 2000s, there was an increasingly widespread recognition across different parts of civil society that there was a crisis in organizational capacity, and consequently a crisis in political and social influence. For the religious sector, that was felt most forcefully in the decline of the church. Australia is predominately a Christian nation – even in 2011, 61 percent of people identified as Christian in the census (ABS, 2010) – and yet frequent church attendance has declined from 44 percent of people attending church one Sunday a month in 1950, to 15 percent in 2009 (NCLS, 2011). Unions have similarly experienced a halving of membership, declining from 60 percent of all workers in unions in 1951 to 19 percent in 2010 (Peetz and Bailey, 2012). For community organizations, the decline has been felt as a shift from membership advocacy-based organizations to service-based organizations, whose activity is restricted by government contracts that fund service provision but often limit or prohibit advocacy (Hamilton and Maddison, 2007).

By the 2000s, some organizations had already begun to change. The most advanced conversation occurred in the union movement. Since the mid-1990s Australian unions, inspired by a similar conversation in the United States, had begun to discuss the 'need to organize' (Cooper, 2003). The phrase 'organizing' was liberally used but it generally meant a need to grow union membership by changing how unions sought to talk to and engage with non-union workers. Instead of seeing union business as handling individual grievances at work, the idea was to organize workplaces systematically, site by site, or even company by company, or industry by industry (Crosby, 2005).

Many union leaders recognized that this transformation in union practice would require a transformation in union culture. At the time, a key measure of the 'shift to organizing' was an increased investment in staff 'organizers', the training of organizers and workplace delegates and leaders in the skills of workplace bargaining and grievance handling, equipping unions with skills in industry research, and the development of staff with expertise in campaigning, public communications and data management (Crosby, 2005; Tattersall, 2010; Peetz and Bailey, 2012).

The shift to organizing helped steady the decline in union membership in Australia. It also was a force for catalyzing emergent change. Unions became

an attractive space for young student activists to work, particularly because unions became associated with ‘cutting-edge’ campaign techniques (Cooper, 2003). Training programmes like ‘Organizing Works’ (a year-long training programme for would-be union organizers) created connections between dozens of new union organizers, who knew each other even though they worked for different unions. Bi-annual Australian Council of Trade Union ‘organizing conferences’ brought hundreds of staff (and some workplace delegates) together to explore new and emerging strategies. Indeed, it was at the ACTU Organizing Conference in Sydney 2003 that a workshop on ‘coalition building and unions’ was first run.

This macro story connects with my own story, as I was the founder of the Sydney Alliance. I was the person who ran that first workshop on coalition building in 2003. This arose out of my early experience with coalition building in the Australian student movement, refugee movement and then peace movement. I was heavily involved in the ‘Walk against the War Coalition’ in Sydney that helped organize the largest rally in Australia’s history, in February 2003. While the Walk against the War Coalition successfully organized rallies, the peace movement failed to stop the war or Australia’s involvement in the war. The experience left many in ‘progressive politics’ sober (Tattersall, 2010). Indeed, only three years earlier hundreds of thousands had walked across the Harbour Bridge for Reconciliation, with no recognition or change in policy from the Prime Minister.

Many in Sydney’s civil society were asking the question: ‘does people power even work?’ I was one of those people. Eventually I decided to dedicate myself to some quiet reflection and research on this question. I enrolled in a PhD at the University of Sydney, focused on considering the circumstances under which ‘coalition building’ between unions and community organizations could be successful (Tattersall, 2007). In the course of comparing long-term civil society coalitions in Australia, Canada and the United States, I also made contact with the IAF. I had read Saul Alinsky’s books and was curious about the training programme that the IAF ran. I contacted lead organizer Mike Gecan and participated in IAF regional training. At the same time I also made contact with Joe Chrastil. The combination of the insights and agitation I experienced at IAF training, and a strong connection with Chrastil lead me to contemplate whether I could establish an IAF-style coalition in Australia when I returned. In December 2006, I travelled to London and met Neil Jameson from London Citizens. Witnessing how he had translated the practices of community organizing to the United Kingdom gave me confidence that perhaps I could also bring community organizing to another country.

The ingredients that built the Sydney Alliance

In April 2007, I returned to Australia and began to build the Sydney Alliance. This process required the translation of the so-called ‘universals’ of community organizing to an Australian context. We confronted many challenges in building the Sydney Alliance, which are described below.

A perennial challenge in building any new community organizing coalition is the difficulty of generating a sustainable base of *financial resources*. Talented professional organizers are a necessary ingredient for creating momentum to build an effective coalition (Alinsky, 1971; Tattersall, 2010, pp. 144–145). It is only with ‘organized money’ that community organizers can be employed.

For the Sydney Alliance, we resolved the question of ‘organized money’ by focusing on finding ‘hard money’ from dues-paying partner organizations. This evolved in several stages. In 2007, Unions NSW provided the first tranche of funding to subsidize the ‘canvassing phase’ of the Sydney Alliance. Its support enabled two organizers to work on building the Alliance two days a week for seven months. By November 2007, those organizers secured US\$ 110,000 from thirteen partner organizations to fund the next year of organizing, called the ‘building phase’. By November 2008, the Alliance had raised US\$ 1 million from twenty-two partner organizations to fund a three-year ‘organizing phase’. This culminated in September 2011 with the public founding of the Sydney Alliance. The Sydney Alliance continues to be predominately funded by dues contributions from partner organizations, with additional funding coming from tied grants and fundraising.

The next organizing challenge for the Sydney Alliance was *geographic*: where should this organizing project be located? In the 1970s and 1980s, the IAF frequently built sub-city ‘neighbourhood’ organizations that were located in the poorer areas of town, especially in large cities (Horwitt, 1992; Gecan, 2004). In the 1990s and 2000s the network shifted, recognizing that organizations may need to operate across a wider scale and be city-wide. City-wide organizing strategies were subsequently pursued in places like Los Angeles and London.

In Sydney, the political landscape and the geography of political power shaped the decision to build an Alliance city-wide, covering all of metropolitan Sydney. The centre of power in Sydney is the NSW State Government. The NSW Government has primary responsibility for hospitals, schools, transport, housing and has ultimate decision-making power over land use (Drum and Tate, 2012, p. 85). Sydney’s vast population dominates the State and most of the state members of parliament come from electorates in the Metropolitan Sydney Area. The geography of Sydney’s civil society also created an impetus for a ‘city-wide’ community organizing coalition. Most

Sydney-wide civil society organizations are actually 'state-wide organizations', which is especially the case for unions. Consequently, the decision to organize a 'city-wide' Alliance (as opposed to a Western Sydney or Inner-city Alliance) was shaped by the practical consideration about how the Alliance could interest and raise money from large organizations, alongside the political consideration that a city-wide organization would be necessary for it to exercise sufficient political influence with the NSW Government (Tattersall and Acklin, 2007).

In order to identify appropriate partner organizations for the Alliance, the community organizers applied the principle of '*standing for the whole*' (Harmon, 1990). This 'universal' community organizing principle argues that in order for a broad-based alliance to stand for the complex interests that make up a city, the alliance needs to recruit organizations and leaders that cut across its complex diversity. A broad-based alliance, by its nature, cannot be made up entirely of 'left-wing' organizations or organizations only deriving from a single ethnicity or religious practice (Chambers, 2003). The alliance needs to involve a diverse range of organizational types, and it needs those organizations to include members from diverse array of constituencies. For instance, when it came to recruiting unions to the Alliance, we were aware that we needed to move across traditional sectarian boundaries by involving both sides of those traditional divides. Consequently, for every 'right-wing' union, a 'left-wing' union was recruited. For every public sector union, a private sector union was recruited. For every male-dominated union, a female-dominated union was recruited. In the same way, we intentionally cultivated diversity across our religious and community membership. For instance, amongst Christians, we actively built relationships not only with mainline Catholic and Uniting Church congregations but with Pentecostal and more conservative Anglican denominations (Sydney Alliance, 2014).

To build the Alliance organizers needed to *create and train multiple teams of leaders* that could slowly take up ownership of the Alliance, while learning and practicing the skills of community organizing. Everything we did was an opportunity for team development. This was particularly the case with how we ran our organizing training and education programme. The IAF is known for its intensive community organizing training programme (Warren, 2001). We adapted and ran a two-day 'Foundations Training' and a six-day 'National Training' to teach the principles of community organizing to our growing network of leaders. In the running these trainings, the Alliance modelled the technique of leadership development and team creation. For instance, the training was run by a leadership team that included trainers and small group leaders from partner organizations. The training thus sought to model the practice that the Alliance needed to be led by community leaders not paid Alliance organizers (Alinsky, 1971).

One of the greatest challenges in building a community organizing alliance, particularly in a country where IAF-style organizing is new, is *finding the right organizers*. Initially it was hard to attract talented, paid organizers, because the Sydney Alliance was a new concept and was really only known to others through word of mouth. Many of the initial organizers came from pre-existing relationships rather than advertised positions. Developing talented organizers takes time and often requires a complex combination of hands-on mentoring, and hands-off innovative space, where organizers can experiment with ‘trial and error.’ As the Alliance became better known, it became easier to recruit talented organizers. However the principle of testing ‘would-be organizers’ remained the same. We frequently tested potential organizers, first as leaders inside partner organizations, then in the recruitment phase, and then again as trainee organizers.

Informed by the findings in *Power in Coalition*, we were aware that the Sydney Alliance needed to develop *multi-scaled power* (Tattersall, 2010, pp. 147–148). That is, in order for the Alliance to act for the city as a whole, it needed to have suburban and neighbourhood networks across discrete parts of the city. The organizing approach was different to that in London or New York, where the organizing had begun with neighbourhood style organizations. In Sydney the approach was city-wide from the start, with the challenge being to create a more local, neighbourhood network of power inside that city-wide organization.

At its first Leaders Council retreat in October 2009, the Alliance endorsed a strategy of building local districts. Over the following three years, we experimented with districts – initially building three large regional areas, then moving to a more localized approach. We learnt to build districts only where we had a team of leaders ready to run the district, and so even in 2015, while we had nine vibrant districts, we do not have districts across all of metropolitan Sydney (Sydney Alliance, 2015). However, we have found that our districts are located where the largest number of volunteers and lay leaders are active, and where we break away from involving paid staff people to involving people who are active congregants. A perennial challenge with the districts is balancing their need for relative autonomy in determining what they focus on, and the need for city-wide coordination (Tattersall, 2010). For instance, during the 2014–15 Year of Action Campaign, in the lead up to the 2015 State Election, we held six District Assemblies. At each Assembly, the specific issue agenda varied based on the district’s relative interest in the Alliance’s three pronged agenda, focused on housing, transport and jobs.

The Sydney Alliance focused on the universal lesson of building ‘*power before program*’ and consequently did not campaign on any issues until 2011 (Alinsky, 1971). This was a controversial strategy for many. Many leaders struggled to understand how we could build a coalition if we were not

focused on specific issues from the start. However, the ‘self-interest’ of the organizations that are part of the Alliance is based on their interest in revitalizing their organizations as much as it is based on making Sydney a better place to live. Consequently, during the ‘organizing phase’, organizations began to recognize that the increasing skills and capacity of their leaders, and their new relationships with civil society partners were new strengths that were important to them, beyond an ability to ‘win’ specific outcomes. Furthermore, this time of relationship building meant that organizational leaders, who had until now had low levels of trust and understanding, were able to build a common language of how they would work together. Together they learnt the ‘language’ of community organizing’ and learnt to know each other well. This formative stage was vital for creating the kind of trust required for working together on campaigns.

Four years after the idea of the Sydney Alliance was first canvassed, the Sydney Alliance launched with over 2000 people at Sydney Town Hall on 15 September 2011. It was a triumphant moment. By that time there were forty-five partner organizations in the Sydney Alliance and over 2000 people had been trained in community organizing. However, we were still learning how to work on issues – and our ‘research action teams’ were struggling to identify specific and concrete demands that we could take action on. The struggle between an appetite for ‘changing the city’ and the reality that we were more powerful and capable of winning change in a more local, suburban setting caused friction inside the Alliance. Some organizations were concerned that the focus of the Alliance was too small to be useful. Indeed, a critique of the early years of the Alliance was that we had taken too long to build power, and, when we used that power it only achieved modest victories. As one climate campaigner quibbled, ‘they took seven years and all they won was a lift’ – a not so subtle critique of the modest initial success in our train station access campaign (Leader, 2014).

Reflections on the Sydney Alliance

A guide post for understanding the effectiveness of the Sydney Alliance is the diagram (Table 1) of coalition success developed in *Power in Coalition* (Tattersall, 2010). This table is used as an educative tool at our National Training to help leaders interpret the strengths and limits of coalition work. It is often used as a touchstone in Sydney Alliance leaders meetings to understand and evaluate how we are going in balancing the challenging trade offs in alliance building.

The Sydney Alliance, and community organizing practice more generally, emphasizes the importance of the ‘organizational strength’ measures of coalition success. Community organizing argues that it is essential to actively

Table 1. Measures of successful coalitions

| Coalition success | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|--|------------------------|
| Social change | | Organizational strength | |
| Wins | Shifting the political climate | Stronger relationships between organizations | Leadership development |

Adapted from [Tattersall \(2010\)](#).

tend to the power and vitality of civil society organizations as the vehicle for anchoring our democracy. While social movements may come and go, people can engage in a lifetime of collective action if they are part of civil society organizations like churches or unions that are prepared to take action in pursuit of the common good. Consequently, the patient building of the Alliance, the commitment to frequent and regular leadership training, the commitment to regular action and constant evaluation are all practices that create a culture that focuses on enhancing the strength of the organizations involved in the Alliance's coalition work.

By focusing on the organizational strength measures of coalition practice, the Alliance actively seeks to overcome some of the persistent tensions in coalition practice that I identified in *Power in Coalition*. There, I argued that issue-based coalitions frequently sacrifice organizational strength outcomes in the struggle to achieve a social change victory. The effect of this trade off may require that in order to expediently win a social change outcome, a coalition may make decisions that mean that once strong relationships between coalition partners become brittle and tense. Alternatively, in an attempt to 'win' on an issue the coalition may overlook opportunities to skill up or mentor new volunteers or leadership talent ([Tattersall, 2010](#)). The Sydney Alliance is, of course, still subject to these pressures and 'trade offs'. However, with its extensive community organizing training programmes, its focus on values and relationships, the development of numerous local districts, and its creation of distinctive roles between organizers and leaders (where the organizer's role is to help leaders to lead), the Alliance seeks to enhance organizational strength while working for the common good.

Building the Sydney Alliance has brought into focus the importance of key concepts like power, leadership, geography and action as strategies for successful community organizing. Three of these concepts – power, leadership and action – are foundational community organizing concepts, explored extensively at IAF National Training. Geography, and the places and spaces of political action, have become clearer as geographers have got involved in the IAF and reflected on the geographic dimensions of urban alliances

(Tattersall, 2010; Wills, 2012; Iveson, 2014). These concepts help us better understand the relationship between the list of different community organizing strategies outlined above, like power analysis or building districts (see Table 2).

This table serves to explain the interconnected nature of the universals of community organizing. Power has its own geography that is brought to life in community organizing. For instance, it matters where these organizations are located and with whom and in what place action happens (Massey, 2005). Geography and scale also inform the kinds of leadership development that occur, and community organizing emphasizes the local scale – the church, the union branch – as the space for leadership development. This insight is akin to the Catholic Social Teaching principle of subsidiarity which argues that decision-making should be undertaken by the smallest, lowest or most decentralized authority (Ivereigh, 2010).

Consistent with the root meaning of the word ‘power’, which means ‘to be able’, power and action are intimately related concepts, where action is the mobilization of power to achieve impact (Chambers, 2003). Similarly, action facilitates leadership development of organizational members by providing them with opportunity to both use power, but also learn about the uses of power – particularly through the habit of evaluation (Chambers, 2003).

Beyond the exploration of these concepts, it is also relevant that the ‘practice’ of community organizing is continuing to spread. The Sydney Alliance, for instance, is not only a product of the IAF; it is also seeking to influence and shape the development of that network in other cities and countries. The Sydney Alliance is currently supporting the development of a sister Alliance in South-East Queensland (Queensland Community Alliance) and exploring the possible development of broad-based alliances in Melbourne, Adelaide, Canberra and Auckland. In addition, we seek to enhance the tradition that we come from – and to both learn from and teach to our sister organizations. We have had lots to learn about engaging with

Table 2. Community organizing strategies

| | Geography | Action |
|------------|--|--|
| Power | Power analysis – where to act? Who to act with? | Building our capacity to act together. Testing each other in action |
| Leadership | The ‘local’ organization and suburb is a site for building leadership and participation. Multi-scaled action: the local scaled up to the city, the state, the nation. The city as a ‘place’ for creating common interest across diversity. | Leadership development not only happens through training, but through reflecting on and evaluating action. Learning happens through ‘doing’, then evaluating. |

Islam and with schools, and we have a lot to teach with our successful experience of working with unions. Leaders and organizers from the Sydney Alliance play an active role in the global network, attending annual global lead organizers meetings and global leaders retreats. We hope this work will continue as we seek to prepare the IAF and community organizing for responding to the challenges and opportunities embedded in the global issues of our time, such as climate change, people movement and the rise of China and India.

Conclusion

In 2015, community organizing 'Alinsky-style' is 75 years old. The universals of community organizing have stood the test of time, not only continuing to be used to revitalize churches and community-based organizations in the United States, but these universals have travelled across several continents, including to Australia. The Sydney experience brings these universals alive, showing how the building of a successful community organizing alliance requires the sustained alignment of strong power analysis, relational work and leadership development. Community organizing is one of many traditions for sustained, community-led social change, sitting alongside the traditions of community development, social movements, political parties and now more recently digital campaigning. Community organizing in the 2000s is a tradition on the move, and its ability to spread across the South Pacific, and potentially into Asia, may help it become a force for twenty-first century democracy and citizenship movements across the globe.

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