



REORGANISING POWER
FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

CONFERENCE REPORT

"Do we
know
where
we want
to go?"

Question of a participant during
the second panel.

Impressions of the EDGE Conference 2017

This April, for the first time outside of the U.S., 260 funders, donors and movement allies came together to “Reorganize Power for Systems Change” at the 6th annual EDGE Funders conference. While funder and civil society partners from across the globe have made EDGE an international space since its beginnings, bringing the conference to Europe allowed EDGE to fully embrace the still new transatlantic nature of the Alliance, to bring European and American funders together, and to more formally step into its role as global convener. Convening in Barcelona allowed for the rich activist history of the city to inspire us throughout our days together. From the pre-conference “fishbowl” discussions on concrete ways Just Transition manifests in movement spaces, to walking tours throughout the city, to panel discussions, engagement labs, dine arounds, site visits and more, EDGE Conference 2017 brought us all a little closer to answering the hard questions and strategies we’ve been developing since the start of EDGE, namely: how can we be more effective and collaborative at dismantling oppressions while moving resources to key sectors and constituencies working to promote systemic alternatives at the local, national, and international levels, while simultaneously “building the new” in just, inclusive, equitable and sustainable ways?

This year’s conference was our second year working in a semi-open conference format, and once again with the expert guidance of facilitator Adrienne Maree Brown, lab leaders shepherded conversations about systems change across seven broad topics, engaging in deep discussion, cross-sector relationship building and both personal and professional growth. In topics ranging from regenerative economics to non-extractive narratives and worldviews, conference participants committed to investing time, thought

and heart into listening, sharing, and sharpening the vision of the world we want to live in. And while the open conference format sometimes seemed messy, we come to understand that stepping away from the typical rhythm of speakers and audience fit more with EDGE’s organizational personality, our political and social commitments, and our “outside-the-box” ways of thinking about the world we’re trying to build together.

The EDGE community’s challenge felt particularly daunting this year, considering the accelerating rise of right wing and often radicalised populism, corporate power and enclosures of the commons all over the globe. Many participants joining us came from situations of great violence and struggle in their home countries. Acknowledging this sacrifice, the work accomplished and relationships built over our days together are all the more precious, and reinforce EDGE’s critical responsibilities in philanthropy and towards our movement partners at large. As a key global funder conference inclusive of working sessions with civil society activists and grassroots movement partners, the breaking down of barriers among sectors at the conference reflects the shattering of borders we seek in the broader world. A Barcelona Commitment Statement for EDGE members and concrete recommendations from movement partners challenge us all to step up, bring our personal and political commitments to our professional environments, and deepen our solidarity with one another.

Thank you for joining us, and see you next year!

EDGE Funders Alliance

Plenaries

Based on the pillars of people power, systemic alternatives and progressive philanthropy, the plenary panels brought together civil society experts, movement representatives and funders from different parts of the world to talk about the challenges of organising alternatives to the system we live in, and reaching for what may seem as utopian goals.



People Power - Organising to Build the New

The first plenary brought to the stage stories that confirm the systemic causes of the different struggles. Our guest speakers shared their experiences on how their respective movements co-ordinate and balance resistance and resilience and political organizing with the cultivation of solutions. They shared reflections on day-to-day challenges they face, and long-term strategies towards systems change.

Presenters



Elizabeth Tang
International Domestic Workers Federation



Graça Samo
World March of Women



Miguel Stedile
Movimento dos Sem Terra



Rosalinda Guillen
Community 2 Community and Grassroots
Global Justice Alliance



Xavi Ferrer
Barcelona en Comú



Systemic Alternatives across borders - Thinking backwards from Utopia

As the dominant political economic system seems to be the problem itself, alternative ways of living and building our communities are needed. In this panel, speakers explained the importance of envisioning a different type of democracy to dismantle the various borders (racial, geographic, linguistic, technological) and to expand the human capacity to act, empowering people to actively engage in alternatives to the system we live in.

Presenters



Danijela Dolenc

Institute for Political Ecology and Faculty of Political Science Zagreb



Kali Akuno

Cooperation Jackson



Sinam Mohamad

Autonomous Region of Kurdish Rojava Democratic Administration

Progressive Philanthropy - Re/Organizing Philanthropy for System Change

On the funders side, representatives of foundations, challenged by the contributions of movement partners urging more structured and long term support, and reflecting on deliberations in labs and workshops over the previous few days, discussed funding strategies, whether foundations should spend down and devote their entire endowment rather than a only a percentage of their wealth to this work, and how to better mobilize and move resources to various frontlines of struggle.

Presenters



Aisha Mansour

Dalia Association



Mutisya Leonard

UHAI EASHRI



Chris Stone

Open Society Foundations



Regan Pritzker

The Libra Foundation



Dennis Van Wanrooij

Red Umbrella Fund



Sarah Gunther

Astraea Foundation



Isis Amlak

Edge Fund UK

Engagement Labs



2017's conference marked the second year EDGE allotted extended time for engagement labs, relying on lab leaders to craft sessions on chosen topics, and allocating time at the end for action labs, so participants could continue conversations beyond thinking and learning towards strategizing and building. Although topics varied, certain ideas and vocabulary permeated all engagement labs, from Progressive Philanthropy to What's the Story? to Reworking Economies, recognizing that while vocabulary might differ across sector and geography, shared values are most important on our paths to systems change.

Having a long-term vision was also called up as something equally critical yet under-developed, linked to current values and necessary for our future work together.

Despite this emphasis on shared broad values, there was also a request across labs for more specificity around words and individual contexts. Lab participants also called for further transparency across sectors and frameworks, with honesty and healing as core elements necessary for systems change. While the lab format allowed for an exploration of power and privilege, often omitted in funder conferences, there was nevertheless a request from participants for more support in this area from facilitators, to help better guide the sometimes painful conversations that we must necessarily navigate as part of a just transition.

Most labs noted that the strategic alternatives - the "building the new" part of transition - are currently less developed than resistance and the breaking down of the old; and how shifting this imbalance is critical to our work. Some labs did come up with concrete follow-up actions, like the lab *Seeds of Systemic Change: what can we learn from municipalism, new relationships with money and models of commoning?* As a first very concrete outcome, some foundations are supporting the international summit on municipalism, Fearless Cities, described on page 9. Furthermore, following the conference, 12 of the lab participants convened a steering group to explore future collaboration opportunities and to implement the recommendations highlighted throughout the conversations enabled by the lab.



Movements

“It is the only funders’ conference where movements have a voice”

Conference participant

One of EDGE’s taglines is “For Funders, with Movements”: EDGE holds a fairly unique position within philanthropy precisely because of its relationship with movement partners. Andrew Milner, in his article published in Alliance Magazine entitled, “Can funders and activists work together?”, mentioned something pointed out by a speaker: “EDGE deserves praise because although it’s not perfect, it’s the only forum where movements come and speak out to this extent”.

Throughout the years, the EDGE Conference has been expanding

the active participation of civil society to promote the exchange between funders and activists. Barcelona was the perfect setting for this interaction, as it concentrates an impressive number of collectives that inspire social movements from all over the world in creating different ways to organise our societies.

This year, over 75 delegates were representing social movements and the local host committee had a crucial role to shape their participation in the conference.

Funder-free zone

The EDGE Conference had a series of Movement to Movement spaces, where 75 organisers from all over the world had the chance to gather, connect and strategize for the future. These discussions were held under the auspices of three broad themes, in three meetings:

- Organising Visionary Movements to Win
- Moving Money for Movement Needs
- Building Global Solidarity with Local Organising

Linking local activism with global system change

Barcelona was not chosen to host the conference just because of its charm. The city has a vibrant history of activism and very active civil society, which enabled important social achievements. In order to integrate this scenario into the conference, the local advisory committee worked hard to prepare a set of walking tours and community meetings and share with the conference participants how local initiatives organise to tackle the threats of the multiple crises.

The city will host in June the Fearless Cities International Municipal Summit, bringing together people from all over the world to discuss the empowerment of the cities and to build a "municipalist" network. As a result of the interactions between movement partners (local and international) and funders during the conference, EDGE members committed to supporting this important event, both bilaterally and through a pooled, EDGE facilitated travel fund, which will enable activists to continue to build solidarity with Barcelona movements, and to attend the upcoming summit. This is an important outcome of the conference, as it continues to facilitate exchange between movements internationally.

In addition to the networking opportunities, the local committee also put a lot of effort and thought to shape a photo exhibition and performances by Idrissa (Metromuster), *Ende Gelände* (with Kevin Buckland), and Filastine, and organized with the team of La Nau Bostik, a lively performance filled evening in a recovered factory transformed into a cultural center for the community. All these elements set the tone of the conference - provoking and integrating at the same time.

Movement Recommendations

Based on discussions held throughout the week, civil society participants representing various organizations, networks and social movements provided feedback on the last day of the conference, along with recommendations urging EDGE and our community to deepen efforts aimed at shifting philanthropy towards support for transformational change.

Specific suggestions ranged from ways to improve participation and broaden representation of movement allies in the conference and in our overall work, to supporting members' capacity to help organize within the field of philanthropy and improve grantmaking practice by deepening understanding of complex dynamics between funders and grantees, including around issues of power and privilege.

EDGE was urged to prioritize representation of partners accountable to communities, continuously deepening our collective understanding of diverse movement strategies, cultures and practice so that grantmaking goals and principles can better align with and support allies on the frontlines of systems change.

Conference in numbers

The EDGE
Conference 2017
had over

260

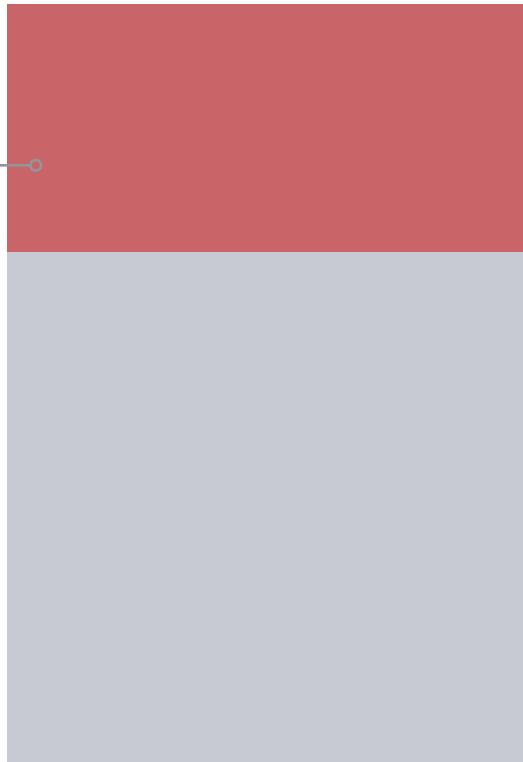
participants,
coming from

34

countries



A total of 75 movement partners attended the conference, which represents almost 1/3 of participants.



Counting the engagement labs, workshops, dine arounds, walking tours and community meetings, there were

85

people organizing these sessions, working together since January

Number of site visits

6

walking tours:
workshops including
a visit to an initiative
in walking distance
of the venue

3

community
meetings: visit to
movement initiatives
and discussions with
local activists in or
around Barcelona

Based in Spain



To make the magic
happen, over

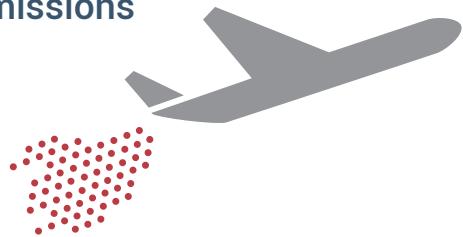
31

registrants were
based in Spain,
including the
local advisory
committee and
some volunteers.

40

people worked
on catering,
venue organizing,
translation, party
and performance
organizing and
technology and
photography
services. Most
service providers
were part of the
local social and
solidarity economy.

CO2 emissions



EDGE, like every other actor, is part of the problem as much as part of the solution: Climate gas emissions through air travel to the conference was 500 tons CO2, equivalent of the emissions of the same number of people living in Colombia during one year.



Kontent Films conducted formal 30 minute interviews with nearly 28 participants, gathering content that will be used in future short films produced by EDGE.

Survey preliminary results

Almost

60%

of the respondents are funders

85%

would recommend the conference to others interested in progressive philanthropy. Why?

"Good politics and innovative people. We need more of that, and of people drawing strength from such alliances."

"I don't know anything else of its kind. It's not perfect, but it's trying."

Location

90%



agreed that the context and setting of Barcelona were well incorporated into the program

Almost

70%

of respondents believe that the conference fulfilled their reasons to attend

"This is the only funder forum I know with a (socially) radical vision for systemic change."

"All in all I think it's sometimes good for funders to be pushed out of their usual comfort zone and EDGE should remain this place within philanthropy - otherwise who's gonna do it?"

Deeper debates

60%

Almost 60% would like to deepen the debates around strategy development

Engagement Labs

60%

said EDGE should retain the engagement labs format and also suggested improvements for future conferences.

Networking, Local dimension and plenaries & plenary table conversations were the most mentioned positive aspects

Reorganizing Philanthropy for Systems Change

Noting the urgent need to support a transition towards societies and economies rooted in notions of dignity, justice, ecology, planetary boundaries and the importance of place and culture, EDGE members with civil society organizations and movement partners gathered in Barcelona drafted **The Barcelona Commitment on Reorganizing Philanthropy for Systems Change**, which will help orient and guide us in our work. This Commitment calls on our community to advance a collective vision that helps clarify the directions in which philanthropy needs to move, and to shift philanthropic culture and practice from transactional grantmaking towards support of networks and movements building long-term systemic transformation. The full text of the Barcelona Commitment can be found on our website edgefunders.org/statement.

Next EDGE Conference

Join us in Spring 2018 for the next EDGE Conference, which will take place in the United States again!

Acknowledgements

Conference Co-Chairs

Chung-Wha Hong, Grassroots International
Donal Mac Fhearraigh, Open Society Initiative for Europe

Conference Planning Committee

Amanda Gigler, Mama Cash (Netherlands)
Graça Samo, World March of Women (Mozambique)
Guppi Bola, Activist and Organiser (UK)
Kali Akuno, Cooperation Jackson, Climate Justice Alliance/Grassroots Global Justice (US)
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Lyda Fernanda, Transnational Institute (Netherlands/Colombia)
Manish Jain, Shikshantar (India)
María Palomares, Calala Women's Fund (Spain)
Nicolas Krausz, Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation (Switzerland/France)
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Juan del Río, Red de Transición
Kevin Buckland, ARTivist Network
María Palomares Arenas, Calala Women's Fund
Mariel Vilella, Zero Waste Europe/GAIA
Xavi Ferrer, BCN en Comú

Conference Facilitators

Adrienne Maree Brown
Ana Huertas, Juan del Río, Guppi Bola and **Jules Peck** as Lab Facilitators

Sessions Organisers

EDGE Funders would like to thank the organisers of all sessions for their huge contribution to the conference content.

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Conference Art

"Movements in Movement: 100 Years of Activism in Barcelona"

Kevin Buckland, ARTivist Network

EDGE Funders Board of Directors

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