



Deltares

Coastal Resilience Talks

# THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN SCIENTIFIC AND POLICY PROJECTS



September 30th, 2025 - 14:00 CEST  
Register to attend the Zoom event

Speaker:

**Pancho Argüelles Paz y Puente**, Senior Director  
at The Praxis Project



**The Praxis Project** is a national non-profit organization that works in partnership with national, regional, state, and local partners to achieve health equity and justice for all communities. **Our mission is to build healthy communities by transforming the power relationships and structures that affect our lives and communities.** Praxis supports policy advocacy and local organizing as part of a comprehensive strategy for change.



## **Pancho Argüelles** *He/him/él* *Senior Director for Network and Power Building*

Pancho has a long career as a community organizer and is the former executive director of Living Hope Wheelchair Association, an organization of migrants with spinal cord injuries.

His four-decade career on human rights issues includes teaching and supporting Guatemalan refugees in Chiapas, Mexico, co-founding Universidad Campesina in Nicaragua, and promoting rural cooperatives in central Mexico.

Argüelles co-founded Fe y Justicia Worker Center, a community organization for low-wage immigrant workers in Houston, and co-authored an award-winning curriculum, BRIDGE: Building a Race and Immigration Dialogue on the Global Economy, for the immigrant rights movement.

He served on the board of the Highlander Research and Education Center. He lives in Houston, TX and recently joined the international advisory board of the UN Decade Collaborative Center for Coastal Resiliency

He has published articles about his work in human rights in academic journals and books as well as in publications for the general public; including the article, *We are never alone*, about accompaniment, in the public theology magazine Comment. He holds a Bachelor Degree on Education from UNAM (Autonomous National University of Mexico) and a Master on Science on Multicultural Education from University of Houston – Clear Lake.



Check In: In the chat, please Tell us your name... and instead of your last name, your favorite food.  
(for instance, I would be *Pancho Black Beans*)





# Our Webinar Today

- Welcome & introduction
- Overview of Praxis' Working Principles for Health, Justice & Racial Equity
- What are the social determinants of community engagement?
- Reflecting on our experiences
- Some concrete practices
- Closing



# Social Determinants of Health





# Why do we do this work? Por qué hacemos este trabajo?

- Our work is always an ethical and political project, we are invited to be critical, open, inclusive and compassionate to ourselves and others
- *Nuestro trabajo es siempre un proyecto ético - político, estamos invitadxs a ser críticxs, abiertxs, inclusivxs y compasivxs con nosotrxs y con lxs demás.*





# What can we see? – ¿Qué es lo que vemos?



# Behaviors, Needs, Problems – Comportamientos, necesidades, Problemas

Services and Opportunities  
-Servicios y Oportunidades

Problems, Needs, Behaviors –  
Problemas, Necesidades,  
Conductas



# But what is under the surface? – ¿Pero qué hay más abajo?

An iceberg floating in the ocean. The tip of the iceberg is visible above the water surface, while the much larger base is submerged below. The image is used as a metaphor for the visible vs. invisible aspects of public policy.

Services and Opportunities  
-Servicios y Oportunidades

Advocacy Policy  
Campaigns – Campañas  
de Política Pública

Problems, Needs, Behaviors –  
Problemas, Necesidades,  
Conductas

Rules and Public Policy –  
Reglas y Políticas Públicas

**And if we look for the deeper causes?  
¿Y si buscamos las causas profundas?**

**Services and Opportunities -  
Servicios y Oportunidades**

**Problems and Needs -  
Problemas y Necesidades**

**Advocacy Policy  
Campaigns – Campañas  
de Política Pública**

**Issues and Public Policy  
–Temas y Políticas  
Públicas**

**Movements for  
Social Change –  
Movimientos para  
el Cambio Social**

**Structures, Systems and  
Historical Processes –  
Estructuras, Sistemas y  
Procesos Históricos**



The background of the slide is a photograph of an iceberg floating in the ocean. The tip of the iceberg is visible above the water, while the much larger, submerged part is below the surface. Overlaid on this image are several colored boxes and a central circle containing text.

Staying afloat –  
Mantenerse a flote

Problems and Needs -  
Problemas y Necesidades

Making Waves -  
Hacer Olas

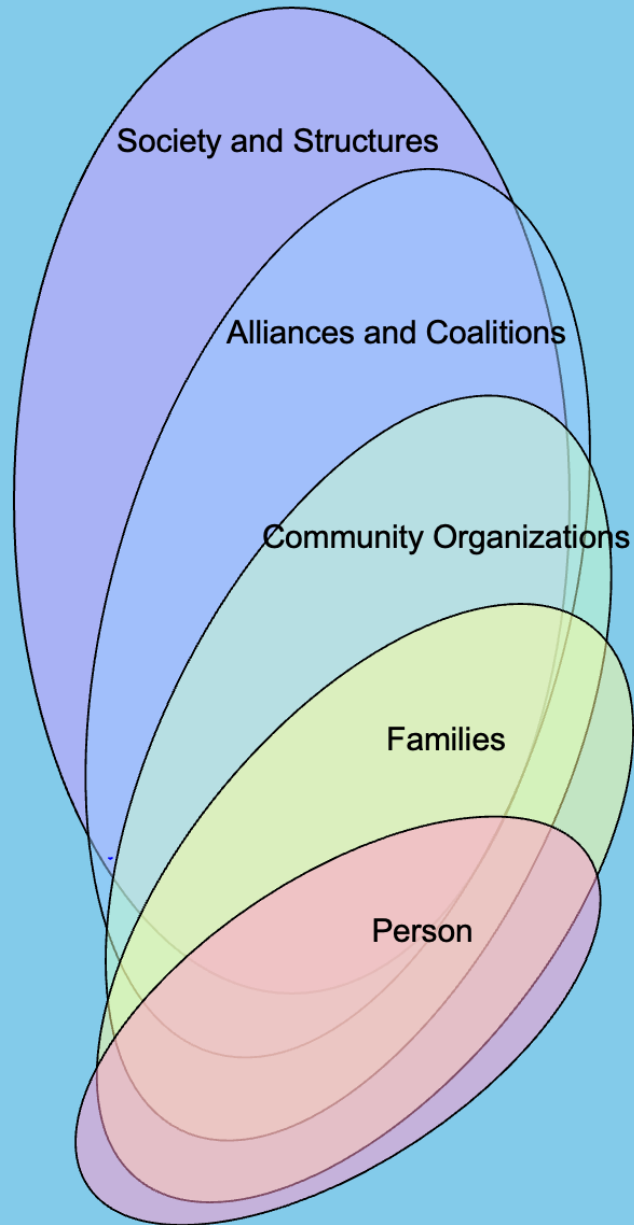
Issues and Public Policy  
–Temas y Políticas  
Públicas

Turning the Tide –  
Cambiar la Maréa

A praxis of  
survival,  
resistance and  
transformation

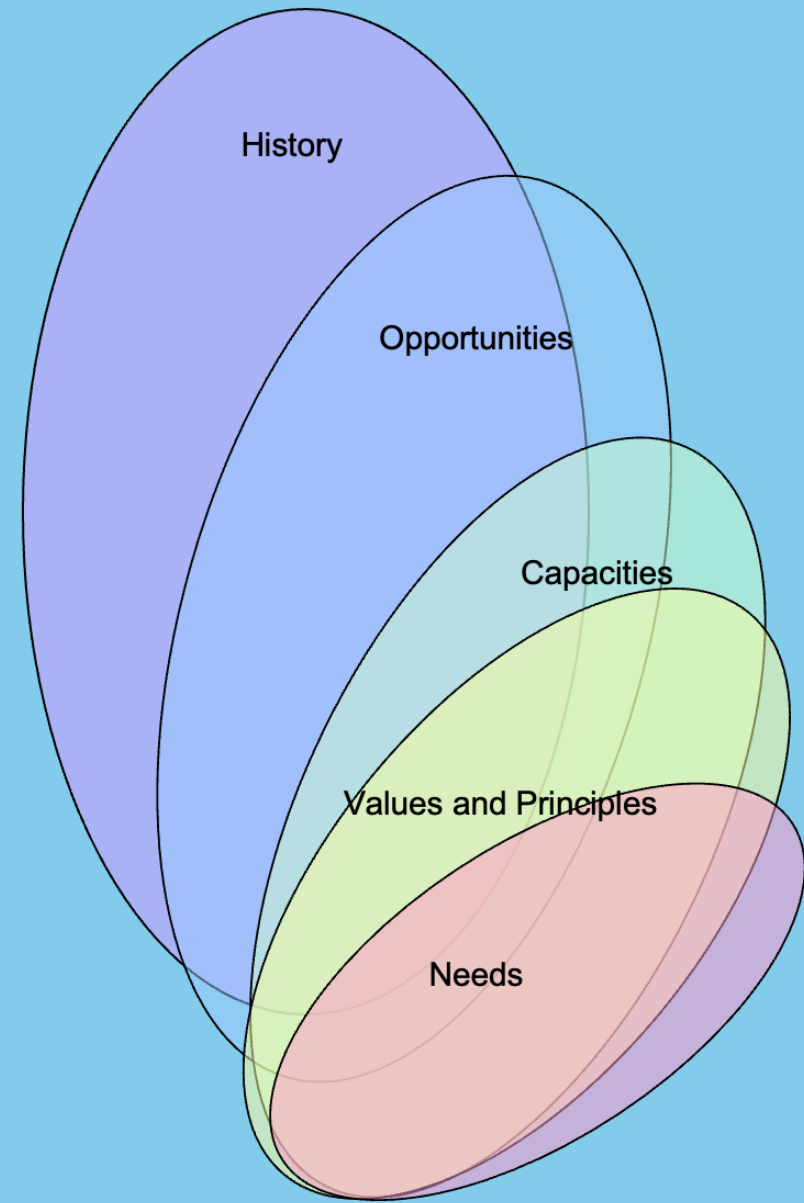
Structures, Systems and  
Historical Processes –  
Estructuras, Sistemas y  
Procesos Históricos





## Complex Contradictions and complementarities of the Research to Policy process!

- How can our research, education and policy efforts navigate these complexities?



- To better understand the context of our work we need to engage in dialogue with the multiple sectors or “stake holders” in the space. This means we need to be intentional seeing and listening those who are most silenced or marginalized.



# *Walking through suffering and hope*

Our work has to honor the historical process of communities resisting oppression and fighting to live with dignity. We need to be open not only to acquire information and produce knowledge but to be transformed by a wisdom that comes from the human experience of walking through suffering and hope.





# Small Group Discussion/ Personal Reflection

- Please take a moment to reflect on these questions:
- What are barriers you are finding for community engagement?
- What helps remove those barriers?



# SO WHAT, THEN WHAT?

## SOME CONCRETE THINGS TO DO (AND SOME TO AVOID)

1. Remember the difference between knowledge and acknowledgement
2. Community members have not only information... they also possess knowledge and wisdom.
3. Give yourself the time to listen to understand not to just to respond or “educate”.
4. Ask yourself not only what is your research question but also what is your building question. How are you building trust and conditions for long-term relationships.
5. Include power analysis in your project to better understand contexts and risks. Recognizing multiple and contradictory agendas at work is key to navigate contradictions and make principled decisions. Solidarity is always intentional.
6. Embrace the complexity also of socio-historical spaces too: be inter-trans-multi-disciplinary
7. Ask yourself, your team and your institution how to avoid extraction and instead develop genuine collaboration. (hint: this has a lot to do with how resources and decision-making flows)
8. Popular Education is a philosophy – methodology centered on dialogue and respect of community. It is very effective addressing social determinants of community engagement. How are you incorporating creativity, critical thinking and joy in your project?
9. Is our work relevant to communities search for a dignified life? Can they see the relevance?
10. What else? \_\_\_\_\_



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# Thank You!

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