

ASSEMBLE, NOW! AYUH, MERAPAT!

PROPOSAL FOR A COLLECTIVE DECISION-MAKING MODEL FOR THE VISUAL ARTS COMMUNITY IN MALAYSIA (DRAFT 01, 17 May 2018)

- This proposal calls for visual artists and art practitioners to assemble in self-organized groups based on affiliation or locality, known as **Sidang Lokal** (Local Assemblies), to discuss issues directly affecting them.
- It then calls for a **Sidang Umum** (General Assembly) to be held at a public space or institution, where delegates appointed by each Sidang Lokal present, coordinate and administer the viewpoints and decisions of their local assemblies.
- Each Sidang Lokal appoints **two members, 1 female and 1 male**, to be delegates at the Sidang Umum.

SIDANG LOKAL

- **Sidang Lokal** groups are self-formed and self-organized amongst artists and art practitioners.
- Groups may be based on affinity, locality, or already existing associations.
- The purpose of the Sidang Lokal is for artists and art practitioners to gather in groups of their choice, to discuss and make decisions on issues that impact them directly.
- Membership can change, but each Sidang Lokal must consist of **at least 11 members**. There is no upper limit on membership.
- Existing registered associations can only form one Sidang Lokal regardless of their membership size.
- **A person can only be a member of one Sidang Lokal.**
- Attendance and minutes should be recorded at every Sidang Lokal meeting. This duty rotates amongst the members.
- Decisions are made by consensus and majority vote.

- Each Sidang Lokal appoints two members, 1 female and 1 male, to be delegates at the Sidang Umum.
- The **delegates** are strictly mandated, recallable, rotated frequently and responsible to their Sidang Lokal. Their function is purely administrative and practical.
- The power of policymaking is the exclusive right of the Sidang Lokal. Delegates to the Sidang Umum are strictly responsible for the coordination and execution of the policies adopted by their Sidang Lokal.

SIDANG UMUM

- **Sidang Umum** is a general assembly, held at regular intervals, where appointed delegates from the various Sidang Lokal present, coordinate and execute the viewpoints and decisions made by the local assemblies.
- The purpose of the Sidang Umum is to form a **network for information sharing and collective decision-making** on issues that impact the entire visual arts community.
- The role of the Sidang Umum is **limited to coordination** between the many Sidang Lokal.
- The goal is always to **maximize local power and autonomy** while achieving a necessary degree of **communication and coordination** across the community.
- All decisions made at the Sidang Umum must be formally adopted by the Sidang Lokal in order to be binding to their members. For example, if the Sidang Umum votes that a formal written request be made to the ruling government to establish a separate Ministry of Arts and Culture, and one or more Sidang Lokal do not agree, the members of those local assemblies are not required to be signatories to the request.
- Sidang Umum should be held in a public space or institution in open session. If the assembly moves into closed session, this will be voted on by the delegates of the assembly.
- Responsibility for chairing and recording minutes of the meeting rotates amongst the delegates of the Sidang Umum.
- Decisions are made by consensus or majority vote.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- This system is based on the principles of **direct, face-to-face democracy** and **participatory administration**.
- The crucial elements are **decentralization, localism, self-sufficiency and interdependence**. This model democratizes community interdependence without surrendering the principle of local control.
- **Distinction between policymaking and administration** must be emphasized. The power of policymaking rests in individual citizens at the Sidang Lokal level. The Sidang Umum or other regional councils have the responsibility of administering and coordinating those policies.
- Appointed delegates or representatives are **strictly mandated, recallable and rotated frequently**.
- **Differences and diversity** are welcomed. Minority opinions should be given space and hearing, but decisions can be made by majority vote.
- **Consensus should not override democracy** in decision-making. It is the process of discussion and decision-making that drives innovation and adoption of new ideas.
- **Gender equality** is paramount. Delegates to the Sidang Umum must consist of 1 female and 1 male from each Sidang Lokal. Assemblies at all levels must strive for at least 40% representation of either gender.

IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS

- Translate this proposal into various languages. *Anyone!*
- Provide comments and suggest improvements to this proposal. *Anyone!*
- Artists and art practitioners are encouraged to start forming their own Sidang Lokal, organizing meetings, recording minutes and sharing the outcomes publicly.
- Prepare an updated draft of this proposal based on feedback.
- Send this proposal to key government officials in charge of arts and culture, as well public art institutions in Malaysia, calling for their endorsement and for them to organize and call an inaugural Sidang Umum for the visual arts community.

SCOPE & BASIS

- This proposal is based on American social theorist and political philosopher **Murray Bookchin's** (1921 – 2006) model of **LIBERTARIAN MUNICIPALISM**, in which citizens make decisions collectively through face-to-face democratic neighborhood assemblies. These decisions are implemented through a **CONFEDERATION** or network of administrative councils, whose delegates are elected directly by, and are responsible to, the popular assemblies.
- It draws heavily from two essays in particular (linked below): '*A Politics for the Twenty-first Century*' (1998) and '*The Meaning of Confederalism*' (1990).
- It was prepared by Sharon Chin, in consultation with Tan Hui Koon, Danny Lim, Zedeck Siew and Ooi Ying Nee.
- It was prepared in the context of the Malaysian visual arts community, but the model and its principles can be adapted to communities exploring bottom-up, directly democratic ways of collective decision-making.

FURTHER READING & RESOURCES

- **Loomio**

<https://www.loomio.org>

Loomio is a simple, user-friendly online tool for collaborative decision-making. Loomio lets you host discussions online, invite the right people to participate, come to timely decisions and transform deliberation into real-world action.

Explore by joining the Sidang Lokal Test Group here:

<https://www.loomio.org/join/group/a1gxHEtWQNSkGQciwAPUjMj4/>

- **Murray Bookchin, 'A Politics for the Twenty-first Century' (1998) and 'The Meaning of Confederalism' (1990)**

These two essays are from the book *The Next Revolution: Popular Assemblies and the Promise of Direct Democracy*, published by VERSO. They can be found in PDF format here, strictly for educational and non-profit purposes only: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LXvUM9UG9c8Leo-3Vr2C4JHrhUEeqno/view?usp=sharing>

- **Murray Bookchin, *The Next Revolution: Popular Assemblies and the Promise of Direct Democracy* (Verso, London, 2015)**
<https://www.versobooks.com/books/1777-the-next-revolution>

From Athens to New York, recent mass movements around the world have challenged austerity and authoritarianism with expressions of real democracy. For more than forty years, Murray Bookchin developed these democratic aspirations into a new left politics based on popular assemblies, influencing a wide range of political thinkers and social movements.

*With a foreword by the best-selling author of *The Dispossessed*, Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Next Revolution* brings together Bookchin's essays on freedom and direct democracy for the first time, offering a bold political vision that can move us from protest to social transformation. A pioneering voice in the ecology and anarchist movements, he is the author of *The Ecology of Freedom* and *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* among many other books.*

- **A Small Key Can Open a Large Door: The Rojava Revolution (Strangers In A Tangled Wilderness, USA, 2017)**
<http://www.combustionbooks.org/products-page/non-fiction/a-small-key-can-open-a-large-door-the-rojava-revolution/>

There's a revolution going on in northern Syria, one that challenges everything we know about government and society and freedom. With centuries of ethnic oppression behind them, their backs against the embargo wall of Turkey, and the ruthless forces of the Islamic State laying siege to their cities, the people of Rojava are trying what might be the most ambitious social experiment of our times. Two-and-a-half million people are trying to live without a nationstate, using direct democracy to build a society ruled from the bottom up. As the Syrian civil war rages, the Kurds and other ethnic groups of Rojava fight for autonomy, feminism, ecological stewardship, cooperative economics, and ethnic, linguistic, and religious pluralism.

It behooves us to understand their struggle as best we can. This book, compiling the words of militia members and academics alike, lays out the Rojava Revolution in plain language.

The introduction and overview of the Rojava situation can be read in its entirety at: <http://www.tangledwilderness.org/a-mountain-river-has-many-bends/>

- **Kali Akuno and Ajamu Nangwaya, *Jackson Rising: The Struggle for Economic Democracy and Black Self-Determination in Jackson, Mississippi* (Daraja Press, USA, 2017)**

<https://darajapress.com/catalog/jackson-rising-the-struggle-for-economic-democracy-and-self-determination-in-jackson-mississippi>

A chronicle of one of the most dynamic experiments in radical social transformation in the United States. The book documents the ongoing organizing and institution building of the political forces concentrated in Jackson, Mississippi dedicated to advancing the "Jackson-Kush Plan".

Jackson Rising documents the history of this movement, its contributions towards the radical transformation of the United States, and its political implications for social movements throughout the United States, the global South and the world.

- **Cooperation Jackson**

<http://www.cooperationjackson.org/>

Building a solidarity economy in Jackson, Mississippi, anchored by a network of cooperatives and worker-owned, democratically self-managed enterprises.