

## **Why Complexity Science in Community Development? By Kirsten Moy, Past Visiting Scholar, San Francisco Federal Reserve Bank (2020)**

The purpose of the research for the Community Development Unit of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco was to explore the applicability of complexity science frameworks, concepts, principles, and approaches to the practice of community development in the United States. Communities are complex adaptive systems, and the social, economic, political and environmental issues they face are complex in nature. Thus, would the awareness of phenomena such as self-organization, emergence, strong and weak ties in networks, path dependency, feedback loops, tipping points, and positive deviance among others provide new insights and guidance for the actions we take in our attempts to transform our neighborhoods and communities?

While a review of the community development literature led to the discovery of a number of articles and initiatives on the attempted management and evaluation of so-called complex initiatives, the research turned up very little actual guidance for practitioners on how to embed and/or apply complexity thinking in practice.

Over the 2-year course of the project (2017-2019), the research team did a scan of over 50 community development initiatives around the US that displayed at least some elements of complexity thinking, wrote 5 case studies on the ones most striking for their application of complexity frameworks and principles, produced a short primer of terms we felt would be useful for practitioners in the field and summarized our findings in the form of a Powerpoint presentation. (Please contact Kirsten Moy at [kmoyaspensf@gmail.com](mailto:kmoyaspensf@gmail.com) for copies of any of these deliverables.)

Part of the goal of this research for was to connect practitioners with complexity scientists such as those from the Santa Fe Institute (SFI) and the Waterloo Institute for Complexity and Innovation (WICI) to help deepen our understanding of the science and further develop our ability to utilize it in the practice of community development. It is our hope that we can further develop these connections and grow the group of interested scientists and practitioners, and that this conversation may ultimately lead to some fruitful collaborations.