

A TINY BOOK OF INSURGENT PLANNING

**More stories of
collective action in
hard times**

**JUST
COLLAPSE**

A TINY BOOK OF INSURGENT PLANNING

This tiny book of big ideas is about living and acting in hard times. In part, it's about dispelling the myth that unfolding and irreversible climate-ecological collapse means there is nothing left to do.

In collapse, there is more to do now than ever before!

Insurgent planning is a way of living and acting in hard times when governments break the social contract and fail to act in the public good.

Developed by activists and academics, particularly in the Global South, it involves communities and citizens setting their own agendas and acting with autonomy to secure basic needs like housing, food, and safety.

As illustrated in this tiny book, and in the bigger [Little Book of Insurgent Planning](#), insurgent planning is happening in communities all over the world. As global systems breakdown and resources dwindle, more people and places will experience hardship. Instead of waiting for governments and powerbrokers to act, we can seek insights from those already dwelling in collapse, on the peripheries, and in the margins.

Why 'insurgent'?

Collapse is scary enough, why use the word 'insurgent'? Insurgent planning is about living and acting against or in parallel to powerful interests – not by choice, but out of necessity.

In an uncertain and deteriorating social and political environment, those in power can be hostile to people standing up for basic rights. 'Insurgent' is an accurate descriptor of the courage and dangers involved. It doesn't disguise hardship and struggle by painting a rosy picture of the present or the future.

What is 'community'?

Insurgent communities are based on the idea of mutual aid and revolve around cooperation for the common good. Recognising that everyone has diverse skills and abilities, reciprocity and sharing are not predicated on the existence of a wealthy largesse and come with no strings attached.

As insurgent citizens, we act collectively, wherever we find ourselves, for a more equitable and just distribution of power and rights.

In collapse, some types of community perpetuate inequity and injustice and should be resisted. For example:

- intentional groups that share lifestyles and aspirations based on unacknowledged privilege
- those bestowing charity upon 'the needy' without dismantling inequity and inequality
- those protecting privilege and status via border control and state sanctioned social exclusion
- those based on a fascistic blood-and-soil connection between place and people

What about post-collapse?

As climate-ecological collapse unfolds, some argue that we should focus on what comes after – on the creation of a better world post-collapse.

However, climate-ecological collapse is not an overnight event. It is a process and if, and when, the Earth reaches a new stable state, there is no guarantee that it will be habitable for humans or other forms of complex life.

Given this dire and prolonged trajectory, any plans made now for post-collapse will be lost in the sands of time. But action we take now for equity and justice can produce tangible outcomes – making a real difference now in people's lives and for ecosystem health. This is a meaningful way to ease the impacts of unfolding collapse.

Self-care as collective action

Facing collapse, and living in hard times, takes a psychological and physical toll, particularly for those experiencing oppression and marginalisation.

In this context, caring for oneself is an act of resistance; it is an act of defiance that contributes to collective well-being and capacity. As African American writer and activist Audre Lorde said, 'caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and it is an act of political warfare'.

So, take care!

Resources

[Just Collapse](#) – an activist platform dedicated to socio-ecological justice in unfolding, irreversible global collapse

[Collapse Camp](#) – a German network fostering new approaches to activism in a collapsing world

[Prepping Together](#) – a Swedish initiative for solidarity prepping in face of escalating disasters

RESISTING

Occupying the Brandenburg Forest in Germany, 100s of activists resisted the expansion of a Tesla Gigafactory that threatened the forest and water of the region.

These activists acknowledged the intersecting processes of oppression created through such developments: how mining of rare minerals exploits children in the Global South; how patriarchal structures support billionaires like Elon Musk to run rough-shod over places and communities; and how the swing to the far right necessitates inclusive and empowered collective action.

This nine-month forest occupation ended in a police raid and arrests, but resistance continues with a broader alliance of residents opposing the Tesla Gigafactory – running information sharing activities, lobbying, community forest walks, banner drops, and public rallies.

* * * * *

In the 20th century, activism has achieved many social and environmental outcomes. Tracts of wild land have been protected and life-sustaining ecological systems preserved. Yet, the scale and rate of destruction continues to outstrip these gains and wins are few and far between.

The 21st century is also seeing a solidification of anti-democratic intent like increased surveillance and prohibitive protest laws. This poses significant challenges for those pursuing a theory of change based on mass mobilisation triggered by non-violent action and the dedication and sacrifice of a few.

This popular and once successful strategy needs rethinking in unfolding, irreversible collapse.

Instead of acting on an assumption of progress, we must now learn to resist within the process of collapse. Collapse is becoming the defining

zeitgeist of the 21st century, influencing every aspect of culture and society. ‘Riding’ this emerging collapse zeitgeist is a powerful means of effecting change – not to ensure a happy ending and a better world, but to salvage from what remains as a means of easing the unfolding descent.

Don't just collapse. #JustCollapse!

Resources

[Turn off the tap to Tesla – Alliance for Water Protection and Mobility Transition](#)

[The desperate last stand to save a forest from Tesla | Environment | Al Jazeera](#)

[Theory of change: riding the zeitgeist – Just Collapse](#)

Photo credit: Alberto Mazzieri/Al Jazeera



SALVAGING

The legacies of capitalism and colonialism are writ large in the lives of many. Within our own local areas, and on the outskirts of metropolitan cities, some already live in collapse. Lives and livelihoods are maintained through salvaging an existence from the wreckage and waste of the contemporary world.

In Naarm/Melbourne, Australia, and other parts of the affluent West, communities of dumpster divers source food and other necessities from the bins of supermarkets and food outlets. This creates an informal mutual aid system based on insurgent knowledge and sharing.

These communities act to address the social and economic exclusion resulting from the cost-of-living crisis. Collectively, they demand a less wasteful and more inclusive world.

In poorer parts of the world where waste collection and recycling may not exist, waste pickers organise collectively and through their

practices, also assert power to address inequity and inequality.

Ordinary people recover resources discarded by the wealthy and share these through informal networks. They produce solidaristic communities of learning, educating, and economic sustainability, independent of government processes and initiatives.

Insurgent action in these contexts changes the location and intent of activism – from outside the home and everyday concerns to part and parcel of survival and day-to-day life.

How to salvage? Start where you're at!

Resources

[Waste pickers and their practices of insurgency and environmental stewardship - Gutberlet et al., 2021](#)

[Diving into shadow places: dumpster diving, food waste, and care - Ross and Phillips, 2025](#)

[Williams, E.C. \(2011\) Combined and Uneven and Apocalypse. Zero Books](#)

Photo credit: Mumtahina Tanni/Pexels



DECOLONISING

Since the annexation of West Jerusalem (1949) and East Jerusalem (1967), the Israeli state has used formal planning to diminish and nullify the rights of Palestinian residents. With Palestinians making up 37% of this city's population, over 300,000 people exert their rights informally in ways deemed 'illegal' by the state.

The practices of the Israeli state include the physical occupation of space as well as social and economic exclusion. This has included the creation of a 'national park' in an area home to 1000s of Palestinians. Hundreds of houses were listed for demolition under the pretence of violating building laws.

In Jerusalem, most Palestinian homes and businesses are described as 'illegal'. In one neighbourhood, for instance, only six of 6000 Palestinian buildings are deemed to be legal, placing most Palestinians on the wrong side of the law.

In response, Palestinians assert power by effectively boycotting the Israeli state – they do not participate in formal planning committees

and processes and, as permanent residents rather than citizens, do not vote in elections.

Palestinians also participate in silent dissent and decisive action, asserting their rights to basic needs, like housing. For example, when a home is destroyed by Israeli authorities, collective action ensures that impacted households are provided with financial and material support.

The decolonising practices and politics of Palestinians resist attempts by the Israeli state to unsettle homes and fragment communities.

These oppressed people respond with صمود (sumud) – tenaciousness and determination.

Identify colonisation – resist and decolonise!

Resources

[The right to space production and the right to necessity: Insurgent versus legal rights of Palestinians in Jerusalem - Jabareen, 2017](#)

[Explainer: What is decolonisation? - O'Dowd and Heckenberg, 2020](#)

[Israel ramps up settlement and annexation in West Bank with dire human rights consequences – UN report, 2025](#)

Photo credit: TIMO/Pexels



HOUSING

Housing is a basic human need, but one that is frequently denied on the basis of financial or social capital. Even in affluent countries, late-stage capitalism means more and more people are experiencing housing precarity and homelessness.

In Naples, Italy, informal housing is widespread, usually in the form of housing that doesn't meet planning and building regulations. Some also squat – occupying vacant houses out of necessity and an assertion of basic rights.

Many more are finding legislative loopholes for informally occupying public housing. With 770,000 public housing units available and 650,000 households on waiting lists, some are subverting a practice called 'takeover' – where family members informally inherit a house from the original, legitimate occupier. Increasing numbers of public housing units are now being bought and sold illegally in an extension of this 'takeover' tradition.

For example, of the 24,700 available public housing units, only 11,000 were legitimately occupied by approved persons. In poor neighbourhoods, around 50% of residents are living informally in this way.

Public housing has become part of a complex informal economy, born out of necessity and survival. This 'takeover' lacks an overt political impetus or message and, instead, represents how basic needs drive adaptative responses.

The law and the formal economy are bypassed and worked around as people create lives for themselves under difficult circumstances and in diverse ways.

Need shelter? Take, don't ask!

Resources

[Juggling the formal and the informal: The regulatory environment of the illegal access to public housing in Naples - Esposito and Chiodelli, 2020](#)

[The human right to adequate housing - OHCHR, 2025](#)

Photo credit: Kosmo Lashinsky/Pexels



PLAYING

When money is short and people are excluded from gentrified urban spaces, self-organised recreation can build networks and empower communities. Unlike the commercialised and commodified sport and leisure industries, such play is cheap and accessible.

This makes insurgent play a powerful and subversive act. It provides a space for joy, self-determination, and community under otherwise difficult circumstances.

Skateboarders, for example, claim rights to access and use urban places. These are often young people stereotyped as unruly, disruptive, and dangerous, leading to forcible exclusion from places supposedly 'accessible to all'.

As exemplified at Philadelphia's LOVE Park in the United States, exclusion can take place through regulation and removal of skateable features. However, in asserting their rights,

skateboarders counter this, in solidarity, through play and action.

Shooting hoops and playing basketball in informal places can likewise be a powerful expression of identity and belonging for African Americans experiencing poverty and marginalisation. It forms part of the fabric of everyday life, circumventing privatisation and racialisation of public space and activities.

Attempts to claim spaces through play can be met with resistance but playing and a sense of community adapts and evolves.

Play hard!

Resources

[Conflict, exclusion, relocation: Skateboarding and public space - Nemeth, 2011](#)

[Play matters| Playground hoop, streetball, and possibility in racialized, contested terrain - Roberts, 2005](#)

Photo credit: Amiel Joseph Labrador/Pexels



FIGHTING

Successful non-violent action is a hallmark of the 20th century. From human rights to the protection of wild land, this activism has transformed lives and maintained the integrity of some ecosystems.

However, just as this arc of progress is now failing, non-violent approaches can be ineffective and detrimental. Under some circumstances, people are pushed to take more forcible action.

In Durban, South Africa, women in marginalised and precarious communities are pro-active in insurgent planning for the basic needs of residents. With a lack of amenities and high unemployment, this work is essential for individual and collective well-being.

These communities are also places with high crime and violence, including rape and murder. Insurgent planning in this context includes actions and initiatives to address and counter such violence and the lack of effective response by the state.

Sometimes, because of a lack of trust in authorities, informal trials are conducted and punishment applied before drawing on formal processes of justice. This can include violent recriminations against those found guilty of crimes or the forceful removal of problematic individuals from communities.

This collective vigilante-style action is an insurgent version of the private security forces employed by wealthy South Africans to maintain their own safety and well-being. This community action is often supported and administrated by women.

* * * * *

The rise of the far-right, and the grossly unequal and inequitable global distribution of food, water, and other basic needs, push some to think and act beyond the idea of non-violence.

When populations are forcibly displaced through conflict and climate change, what actions are needed against oppressive forces? When children are being starved, what responses are justifiable? How can marginalised groups be protected from the violence of the far-right?

In a collapsing world, how do we need to re-think ethical opposition to domination and oppression? How do specific circumstances unsettle ideas of non-violence and change understandings of equity and justice?

*'There is no justice, there's just us' –
#JustCollapse!*

Resources

[Unsettling Insurgency: Reflections on Women's Insurgent Practices in South Africa - Meth, 2011](#)

[How to Blow Up a Pipeline - Wikipedia, 2025](#)



JUST COLLAPSE

WWW.JUSTCOLLAPSE.ORG