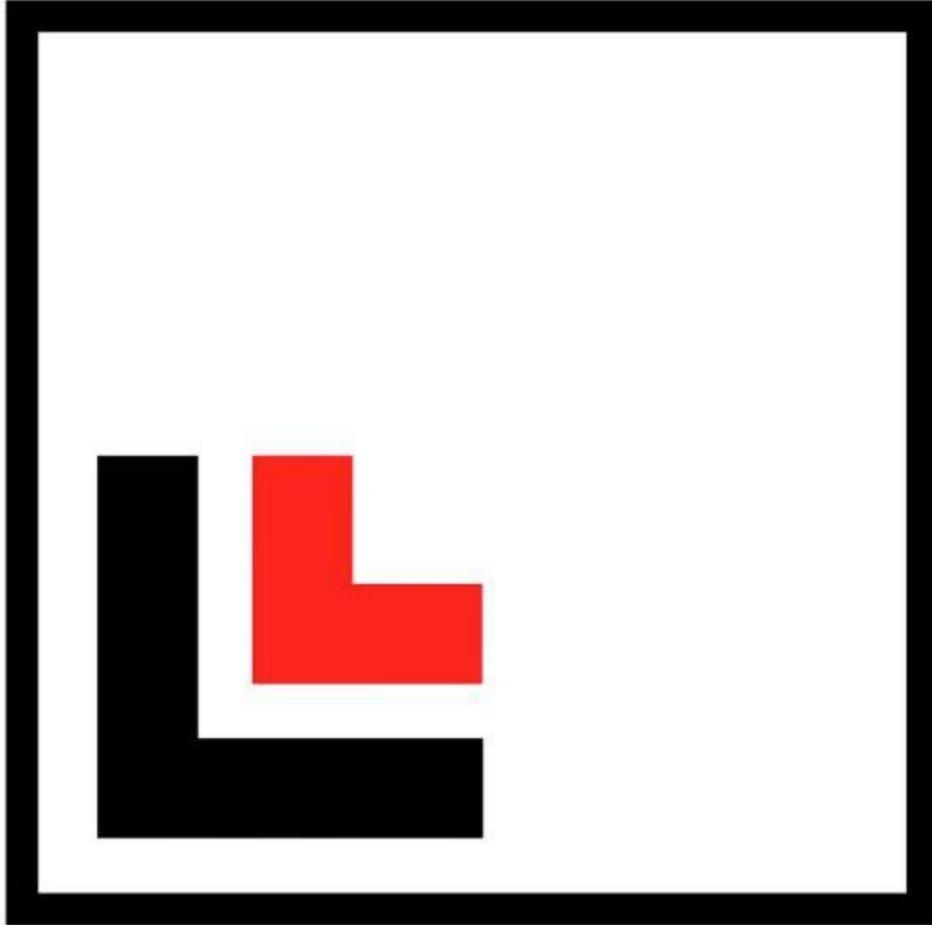


# The potential for internal solidarity in the 'lower left'



Dr. Edurne Scott Loinaz

Version 1: November 2019.

A follow-up to [\*No profit, no hierarchy: A comparative study of the 'lower left'\*](#).

## What is the lower left?

The lower left is defined by anarchist writer [Margaret Killjoy \(2016\)](#) as “any society that does not desire a state and does desire economic cooperation ... [which] is unique in its potential for internal solidarity.” For our purposes, the lower left is defined as any organisation or participant therein that meet the following criteria:

- Autonomous (do not rely on state funding for operations);
- Use horizontal organisation for planning and decision making (non-hierarchical, eg., AK Press’s ‘No boss, no managers, no bullshit’ policy);
- Not for profit;
- Anti-capitalist (organisations run as worker-owned cooperatives, by volunteers, by crowdfunding etc., and which have no aims for ‘job creation’ a.k.a. the perpetuation of ‘bullshit jobs’);
- Are actively forming new social institutions and transforming oppressive ones.

## How to nurture solidarity within the lower left using dimensional language.

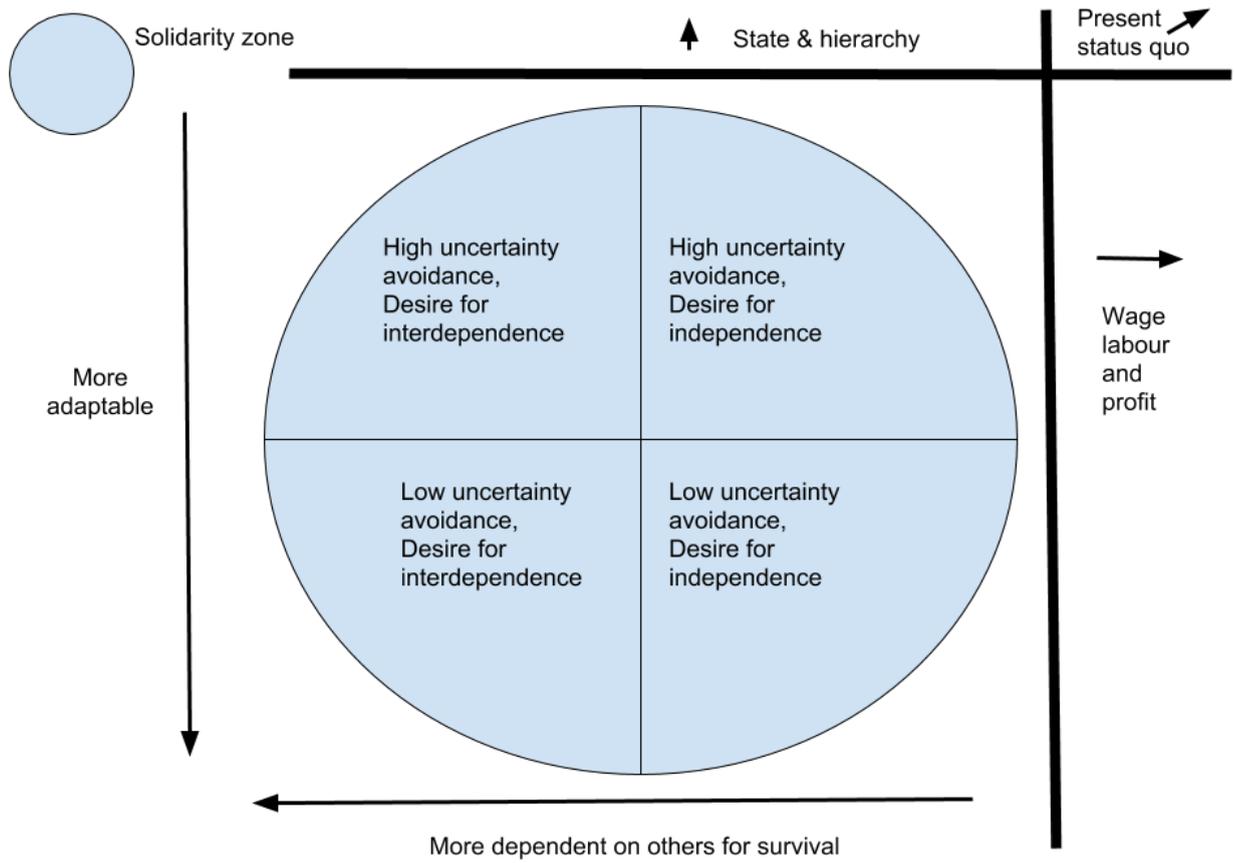
An unfortunate habit when discussing differences within the lower left (both individually and organisationally) is using the same kind of binary language that is used when contrasting the lower left from the powers-that-be (**anti**-capitalist, **non**-hierarchical etc.). It’s no surprise this binary language is used - it is the mother tongue of the lower left which has allowed groups to define themselves and fight against dominant and damaging ideologies. Applied internally to the lower left, however, binary language can be toxic and counter-productive. When someone from the lower left uses binary language to talk about a lower left person or organisation with compatible values, aims and organisational structures, they can easily end up labeling them as authoritarian, capitalist or fascist. This accusation then completely dominates the time and energy of those having to defend themselves (or their allies), and if the label sticks, can cause permanent damage.

This is why the lower left needs a kinder way to understand differences within its ‘zone of solidarity’. I am proposing such an approach based on the theory of cultural dimensions which is used to study cross-cultural differences (the most famous of the studies being by Dutch comparative psychologist Geert Hofstede). Two of Hofstede’s dimensions (or spectrums) that can be used to understand differences in the lower left are:

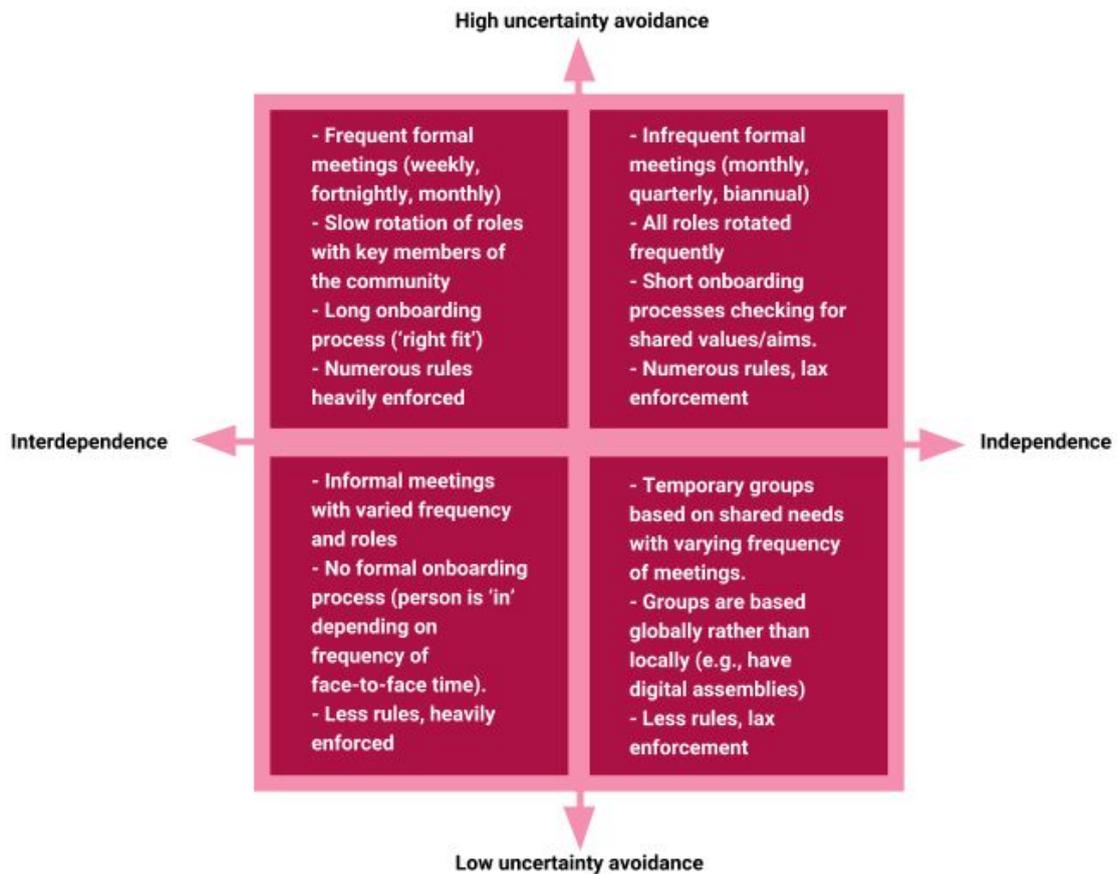
- (1) The uncertainty avoidance dimension: The degree to which someone feels uncomfortable with ambiguity. This dimension can help express the differences between how adaptable organisations want to be within the lower left (e.g., whether they create and enforce bylaws at assemblies, how new approaches or technologies are trialled and adopted, how open groups are to new members or to participation by non-members, and how open they are to conflict in assemblies and between individuals); and,
- (2) The individual versus collective dimension: Preference for a more loosely-knit social framework (independent), versus a tightly-knit framework (interdependent) (e.g., how

much a group or individual is comfortable depending on other people in their day-to-day affairs, and how often they wish to organise with other people: from weekly to annual meetings).

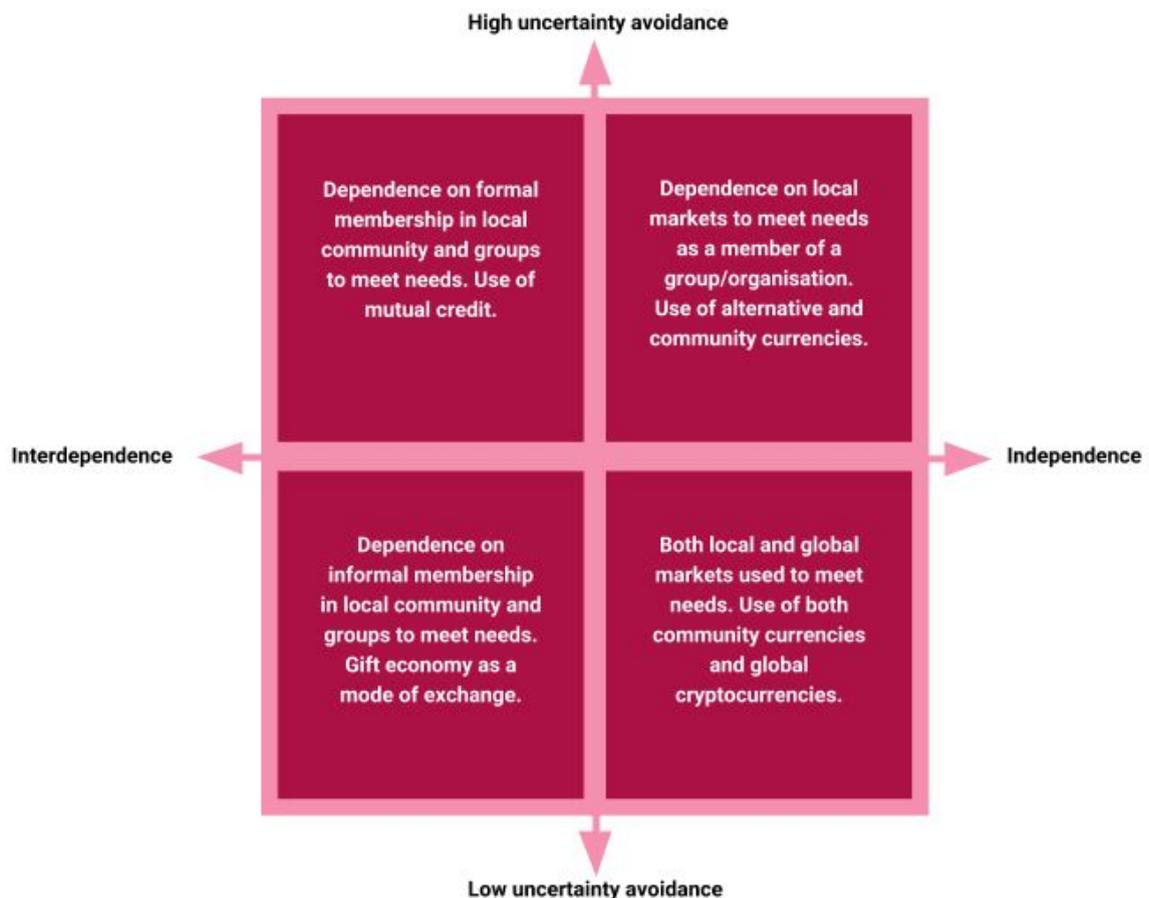
**Figure 1: Lower left cultural differences within the zone of solidarity**



**Figure 2: Differences in the lower left regarding organisation**



**Figure 3: Differences in the lower left regarding exchange**



## Some illustrations of possible individual differences within the lower left

<p><b>High uncertainty avoidance, interdependent aims (HUA, Inter.):</b> <i>Jessie</i> is a member of a rural ecovillage of nearly 80 people who co-own a piece of land. The community is run through weekly assemblies and there is a comprehensive code of conduct in place which is heavily enforced. There are no currencies used within the community and members in good standing share their goods and services through a gift economy. They organise permaculture workshops for visitors to the ecovillage which contributes to a common pool of money that is allocated to collectively chosen causes or members with one-off financial needs.</p>	<p><b>High uncertainty avoidance, independent aims (HUA, Indep.):</b> <i>Rocco</i> is a worker-owner at a bakery cooperative run using sociocracy. He lives in a housing cooperative with his family in an urban area which has clear and simple bylaws created and agreed upon by all the members of the housing cooperative who meet four times a year. He uses community currencies to buy resources for the bakery, to sell bread and to meet most of his family's other basic needs.</p>
<p><b>Low uncertainty avoidance, interdependent aims (LUA, Inter.):</b> <i>Mikah</i> lives in a squat with several of her friends. She is part of a gift economy and mutual aid network in her local community which she can rely on to eat vegan food most days thanks to a squatted community garden. She volunteers at several solidarity organisations as a language and music teacher.</p>	<p><b>Low uncertainty avoidance, independent aims (LUA, Indep.):</b> <i>Talia</i> works as a freelancer online and is constantly shifting her location according to where accommodation is cheapest, the weather is warmest and internet is fastest. She doesn't pay taxes and relies on her own funds for health costs/retirement etc. Although she's not a member of any physical community she is part of several online time-banks and skill-swapping networks that help her with both professional and personal projects.</p>

## Using dimensional language within the lower left

When binary language is used within the lower left I believe it does untold violence to our communities and makes solidarity impossible. Here are some examples to illustrate:

***Mikah*** (*low uncertainty avoidance*) ***talking about Rocco*** (*high uncertainty avoidance*)

**Binary language:** He's a closet authoritarian.

**Dimensional language:** He seems more comfortable being part of an organisation with a clear structure where he is certain that the code of conduct will be enforced.

***Rocco*** (*high uncertainty avoidance*) ***talking about Mikah*** (*low uncertainty avoidance*)

**Binary language:** She isn't serious about organising.

**Dimensional language:** She seems more comfortable being part of informal groups that meet only when the need arises.

***Talia*** (*independence*) ***talking about Jessie*** (*interdependence*)

**Binary language:** They are gatekeeping their little empire.

**Dimensional language:** They seem more comfortable being a part of a tight-knit group.

***Jessie*** (*interdependence*) ***talking about Talia*** (*independence*)

**Binary language:** She pretends not to be a capitalist, but she's very individualistic.

**Dimensional language:** She seems more comfortable roaming between different groups based on shared needs.

---

**One step towards making the potential for internal solidarity within the lower left possible is to consciously use dimensional language within the zone of solidarity and reserve binary language to speak truth about capitalists and authoritarians.**