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Political Strategies for More Livable Cities

*Lessons from Six Cases of Development
and Political Transition*

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What has looking at Bangkok, Budapest, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Mexico City, São Paulo, Seoul, and Taipei told us about the politics of urban livelihood and sustainability? We began our comparative analysis with two general propositions: first, that any analysis of livability should begin by looking at communities, NGOs, political parties, and “the variegated collection of organizations that constitute the state”; second, that all of these were likely to be imperfect agents of livability and therefore it was necessary to think of agents of livability in terms of “ecologies of agents” rather than single actors. Both propositions were vindicated by the specifics of the cases.

Across this highly diverse range of cities, community action in pursuit of livability is ubiquitous. Communities consistently appear as the motivating force in struggles for livability. They take on problems and powerful adversaries with remarkable tenacity. NGOs enter as invaluable allies, providing ideological resources, new “imaginaries,” and linkages to broader arenas and potentially powerful allies. Political parties play a more equivocal role but are sometimes crucial allies as well. States emerge as disaggregated actors, simultaneously part of the problem and part of the solution. Some set of state agencies must be part of the mix if greater livability is to be achieved.

The imperfections of all these actors were as evident as their centrality. Local communities often had difficulty coming together internally around common projects. Their parochialism divided them from other

communities, and their tendency to abandon ecological goals for livelihood when the two came into conflict made them undependable as agents of sustainability. NGOs were less present than we expected they would be, operating as auxiliaries to communities that had begun mobilizing on their own more often than as independent agents of livability. The imperfections of political parties and state bureaucracies were obvious from the beginning.

Given the imperfections of each type of actor, progress toward livability could be envisaged only by thinking in terms of ecologies of agents, in which synergies compensated for imperfections and the overall effects transcended the capabilities of individual actors. Each case offered examples of synergistic interactions among different actors (accompanied, of course, by examples of conflicts, cross-purposes, and undercutting). It was also evident, as Keck emphasized in her analysis, that the operation of ecologies of agents depends fundamentally on networks of individuals, situated in different organizational settings, whose connections across these settings create the possibility of synergistic action.

This concluding chapter will try to build on these basic insights by doing three things. First, it will try to present an integrated picture of the findings of the six studies with respect to communities, NGOs, political parties, and states as actors in pursuit of livability. Then it will evaluate the impact of the global context of the “twin transitions” to market orientation and electoral democracy on the pursuit of livability in this set of cities. Finally, it will elaborate the overall implications of this research for the feasibility of generating ecologies of agents that will in fact contribute to livability.

Communities

The initial intuition that communities are the place to start is thoroughly reinforced by these studies. In each one, communities come to the fore as agents of livability both in the sense of trying to secure livelihood and in the sense of defending the urban environment against degradation. Wat Chonglom takes livability into its own hands, turning its thoroughly degraded location into a livable community. Los Belvederes wrests a foundation for livelihood from a hostile state and tries (albeit unsuccessfully) to do it in a way that will not prejudice the sustainability of the larger urban region. O'Rourke finds that community pressure is the most important check on industrial pollution in Vietnam. In Taiwan, communities are the key political force in the fight against industrial

pollution and the most important political counterweights to overdevelopment. In São Paulo, it is a local community—Eldorado—that spearheads the fight to protect the Billings reservoir from the “accumulationist” strategy of degradation promoted by the state and private industry. In Gille’s case, it is the political impotence of the local communities that makes dumping toxic industrial wastes a “rational” economic strategy for the Budapest Chemical Works.

Given this fundamental role, the question of community empowerment comes immediately to the fore. What gives communities the capacity to act? What gives them the capacity to prevail in the face of what Dougláss calls the “manifold, seemingly unrelenting forces [that] challenge the viability of low-income communities”? Is there evidence that communities’ capacity for collective action is likely to be robust over time? Or is community action an anachronism, left over from a more place-based world, likely to wither in the face of the social dislocations and concentration of power that are the hallmark of the information age (cf. Castells 1997)?

The social and political assets of communities as revealed in these studies are consistent with a “social capital” perspective and suggest important extensions to that perspective. As would be expected, shared longevity of residence and common cultural ties are associated with the ability to act collectively. The residents of Wat Chonglom, who epitomize effective collective action, have for the most part been living together in the same slum community for a quarter of a century, share the same religion (Buddhism), and in many cases come from the same province of origin. O’Rourke’s most successful community, Dona Bochang, is similar. A shared history going back almost fifty years and a shared, actively practiced, minority identity (Catholic) underlie its ability to act cohesively.

Likewise, again consistent with a social capital perspective, the existence of an associational life helps. Churches, like Dona Bochang’s (or Wolgoksa-dong’s), are one source of associational life, but there are others. Keck shows how Eldorado’s long-established neighborhood association helped nurture and make effective a strong sense of identification with the locale. The residents of Wat Chonglom are actively involved in a multiplicity of neighborhood committees. In Hsiao and Liu’s study, the membership of the Chihshan Yen community’s housewives in the Homemakers’ Union Environmental Protection Foundation help knit the community together.

While the long-standing social ties and associational life emphasized

by a social capital perspective produce the expected positive effects, other dynamics are also at work. On the one hand, one of the communities that would seem most socially “traditional”—Gille’s Garé—is also one of the most powerless (at least pre-1989). On the other hand, there are examples in which cohesion and the capacity for collective action seem to be “bootstrapped” rather than based on a long-standing endowment of social capital. In Pezzoli’s analysis of Los Belvederes, community is created out of the struggle for land. To be sure, a number of community members had previous experience with organizations and collective action, but in Los Belvederes social capital is less a heritage and more a consequence of the experience (and necessity) of working together.

Even when a community has the advantage of initial endowments of social capital, the positive effects of collective action are important. In Wat Chonglom, Douglass and his collaborators emphasize, the sense of efficacy gained through the successful execution of projects was central to enhancing community cohesion and capacity for future collective action. These studies argue for a reciprocal relation between social capital and collective action. Social capital helps make collective action possible, but collective action is an important source of social capital.

These studies do not suggest that the demise of “traditional” communities will mark the end of communities as important political actors. They suggest that contemporary urban communities can construct the capacity for collective action and that the experience of engaging in struggles for livability is a good way to construct it. They also suggest that the capacity for collective action may emerge, even in unlikely communities, once the achievement of some common end seems like a feasible possibility. The transformation that Gille reports in Garé is the nicest example. Freed from repressive central political control after 1989 and stimulated by the arrival of new leadership, a community that had appeared socially and politically dead began an active pursuit of its collective interests.

Just as these studies caution us against overemphasizing the extent to which the capacity for collective action is a historical endowment, they also underline inescapable differences across communities depending on the social and the human resources that they can command. Throughout these studies, the danger of talking about “communities” without specifying their socioeconomic status is clear. Urban middle-class communities are privileged—privileged in the human resources that they can draw on internally and privileged in their linkages to elites and elite

organizations. While all communities share place-based interests in preserving the city as habitat, poor communities have only a precarious claim on the right to livelihood, and this separates them from their more privileged middle-class counterparts.

The contrasting positions of poor and middle-class communities come through most clearly in Hsiao and Liu's analysis of Taipei. Here middle-class communities fight to maintain the quality of life in their neighborhoods, while the poor must struggle to maintain any foothold in the city at all. In the most vivid case—the eviction of the poor from the cemetery-slum in Kang-Le—the green space to improve quality of life comes directly out of the poor's living space. An analogous kind of conflict occurs in relation to pollution as illustrated by Gille's tale of how better-connected communities are likely to export degradation to sociopolitically isolated "wasteland" communities like Garé. Given the political advantages of more affluent, educated communities, conflicting community interests are likely to be resolved at the expense of poorer communities, exacerbating their marginalization.

Even when the interests of poor and middle-class communities are not so directly in conflict, poor communities have a harder time defending themselves against degradation. The problem is as much lack of linkages as a lack of economic resources per se. O'Rourke's contrast of the poor and slightly better-off communities affected by the pollution of the Lam Thao fertilizer plant illustrates the point nicely. The poorer, more distant community lacks the education and sophistication necessary to make its claim in a legally effective way and, more important, is bereft of effective ties to higher levels of the political apparatus.

While recognizing the magnitude of the obstacles that poor communities face in realizing their interests, it is important not to underestimate their political capacity. With little in the way of resources beyond determination and some prior organizing experience, the residents of Los Belvederes started from "homes" of rocks and cardboard, survived repeated evictions, created a community of permanent homes, and eventually secured schools, sewers, and a legally recognized right to their land. Poverty did not stop Wat Chonglom from remaking itself in a more livable vein. Even the persistently oppressed squatters of Wolgoksa-dong managed to defend themselves against eviction and force the delivery of a variety of city services.¹ Poor communities are political actors, and often very effective ones, despite the odds stacked against them.

The most complex and interesting consequences of the differences between poor and middle-class communities revolve around the rela-

tions of these communities to issues of environmental sustainability. Poor and middle-class communities both play important roles acting on behalf of sustainability, but poor communities relate to sustainability in particularly complex and ambivalent ways.

These studies provide a variety of compelling illustrations of how poverty puts poor communities on the front lines of battles for sustainability. Affluent communities don't live at the back walls of polluting factories; toxic wastes are not dumped in their backyards. Nor do affluent communities have to worry about forcing city administrations to provide them with water or to extend sewers into their neighborhoods. Being forced to confront degradation directly puts poor communities in the position of fighting battles that are essential to their immediate interests but simultaneously on behalf of the general interests of society in sustainability.

When the community next to Viet Tri Chemicals arrives at the factory gates to complain that the factory's effluents have killed their fish, they are protecting their immediate livelihood interests, but they are also creating pressure for the factory to reduce its emissions, and in that way they benefit the entire city and its hinterland. When the favelas of São Paulo fight to have SABESP extend water and sewer lines into their neighborhoods, they are fighting for their immediate interests, but they are also fighting to reduce the chance of cholera and other public health risks that affect the entire city. No less than rural communities defending forests and rivers, urban communities can be simultaneously self-interested political actors and agents of a universal interest in greater sustainability.

If the immediate interests of poor communities always paralleled universal interests in sustainability, the political analysis of urban livability would be more straightforward (and more optimistic). Unfortunately, the limited livelihood options available to poor communities often put them in the position of having to pursue interests that are in direct contradiction to larger interests in sustainability. Keck's story of the poor communities that have occupied the ecologically sensitive area surround São Paulo's Guarapiranga dam is a prime example. In this case, there is a clear contradiction between the only strategy left open to these communities to gain affordable housing and the ecological sustainability of the city's watershed. As members of the Paulista environmental movement put it trenchantly: "A small number of people can't be allowed to endanger the water supply of 12 million people" (chapter 6). The communities of Los Belvederes are part of a similar contradiction. As Pezzoli

explains, their successful efforts to carve out possibilities for livelihood in the face of the hostile socioeconomic environment of Mexico City also make them contributors to the potentially disastrous depletion of the aquifers on which the entire city depends for its water supply.

The relation of middle-class communities to sustainability issues is different. Middle-class residents pursuing their livelihoods as individuals may have equally (or greater) negative effects on sustainability—given their greater propensity to consume energy and generate waste, especially once they become enmeshed in “car culture.” Nonetheless, the collective mobilization of middle-class communities is rarely focused on anti-sustainability projects. To the contrary, when middle-class communities act collectively, it is more likely to be on the side of sustainability. As Hsiao and Liu point out, middle-class people may be attached to their cars, but they demonstrate against parking lots.

When sustainability issues do capture the attention of middle-class communities—which is generally when their accustomed “quality of life” is threatened—their privileged position gives them extra leverage. Keck’s description of the role of the community of Eldorado is an archetypal example. When São Paulo’s Billings reservoir began to smell, the well-to-do residents of Eldorado were in a good position to spearhead the campaign not just to clean up the reservoir but to reverse the approach to water management that sent the pollution to Billings in the first place. Their mobilization was less likely to evoke the wrath of the military regime’s security apparatus than similar activities on the part of a working-class community. Eldorado could draw on sophisticated community members such as Fernando Vitor, who understood the media and the legal system and were themselves part of the local political system. It could also count on a variety of useful linkages—as, for example, with engineers who provided free technical advice (chapter 6).

An important commonality cuts across poor and middle-class communities. In both, issues related to sustainability stimulate public, collective involvement. This is true of middle-class communities from Hungary (chapter 5) to Taiwan (chapter 3). It is also true of poor communities from Vietnam (chapter 4) to Mexico (chapter 7). This mutually reinforcing relation between collective action and sustainability is one of the hopeful threads that runs through all six studies. Sustainability issues lend themselves to collective action, and collective organization is likely to direct community attention toward sustainability issues.

Fully realizing the potential for mobilization around issues of sustainability is a greater challenge in the case of poor communities. Their

position on the front lines of struggles against degradation gives them special importance as agents of livability. At the same time, the frequency with which they are put in the position of sacrificing sustainability in order to secure livelihood undercuts this potential. Finding ways to resolve the latter contradiction is one of the principal challenges to the politics of livability. This is what makes Pezzoli’s study of Los Belvederes such a fascinating case. The vision of the *colonia ecológica productiva* (CEP) opened the possibility of resolving livelihood problems without threatening the ecological resources of the Ajusco preserve. Even though implementation proved inviable in the end, it remains one of the most imaginative attempts at reorienting a quest for livelihood in an ecological direction.

The example of Los Belvederes also demonstrates how politically powerful ecological claims can be for poor communities. The idea of the CEP enabled Los Belvederes to attract extralocal allies and project its demands onto a citywide political stage. If it had not so quickly proved infeasible, the CEP might have proved an urban analogy to the idea of rural “extractive reserves,” which enabled disempowered Brazilian peasants to build quite an effective set of transnational alliances with First World NGOs around the same time (see Keck 1995; Keck and Sikkink 1998a). When poor communities succeed in linking livelihood struggles to the universalistic goal of ecological sustainability, the political balance shifts in their favor.

Convincing connections between livelihood struggles and sustainability goals are a key to making poor communities effective agents of livability. The challenge of making such connections also underscores the implausibility of achieving livability on the basis of community empowerment alone. Communities supply the fundamental energy for change and hold environmental strategies to the fundamental test of improved well-being at the level of day-to-day experience, but their energy and experiential grounding must be complemented by broader sets of ideas and organization.

Intermediary Organizations: NGOs and Political Parties

Many kinds of intermediaries serve to connect the struggles of individual communities with the surrounding political and social milieu in these studies: universities, churches, social movement organizations,² NGOs (in the strict sense of formal, translocal organizations with some professional staff and independent fund-raising capabilities), and political

parties. All of them are important, but two will be the principal focus of the analysis here: NGOs and political parties.

Formally organized, translocal NGOs are not nearly as ubiquitous in these studies as one might expect from their salience in the general literature on environmental activism. In some cases, such as Vietnam, Korea, and Hungary pre-1989, the relative absence of NGOs reflects effective state efforts to restrict their activities. In other contexts, such as Bangkok and São Paulo, NGOs are widely active, but for some reason they don't emerge as central actors in our cases. When they do appear, however, they play a crucial role in magnifying the ability of communities to realize livelihood goals and, even more important, in connecting livelihood and sustainability issues.

Pezzoli's analysis of Los Belvederes again provides the most striking example. Without the local NGO, Grupo de Tecnología Alternativa (GTA), community activists in Los Belvederes would never have been able to credibly project the conceptualization of the CEP. Once formulated, the CEP idea drew Los Belvederes to the attention of Austrian environmentalists and gave the community the political clout that goes with access to the media. This combination of providing access to a broader range of ideas and supplying connections to a network of other potentially supportive organizations is the archetypal NGO contribution.

O'Rourke's Tae Kwang shoe factory provided an even more powerful "NGO effect." In this case, the community of workers was completely outmatched in its local environment by the power of the Nike subcontractor that employed them. Once their situation came to the attention of a transnational network of NGOs, one of the key sources of the local company's power—its ties to transnational capital—became an Achilles' heel. Once transnational connections were made, the core of Nike's economic power—its universally known brand name—could be leveraged against it. As in the case of Los Belvederes, NGOs were able to transform immediate local struggles over the working environment into a specific instance of universal issues, in this case human rights and social justice.

Environmental NGOs were also central to the quest for livability in Taiwan, but in this case, Hsiao and Liu's analysis reveals weaknesses as well as strengths. Unlike the NGOs involved with Los Belvederes or in the Nike case, environmental NGOs in Taiwan have, according to Hsiao and Liu, "remained silent on issues relating to the urban poor." Middle-class concerns with quality of life are extended to the countryside, but Taiwanese NGOs seem blind to the idea that livelihood and sustaina-

bility issues must be joined together in order to generate a viable politics of livability. The Taipei case implies that if overcoming the potential contradictions between livelihood struggles and sustainability issues is a central problem in making poor communities better agents of livability, then overcoming the tendency to privilege sustainability issues at the expense of questions of the livelihood and the well-being of poor communities is the central issue for environmental NGOs.

The role of political parties is both more ubiquitous and more complex than that of NGOs. These six studies contain examples of all of the negative effects on independent community mobilization traditionally attributed to political parties—co-opting community leaders, constructing "clientelistic" networks that demobilize both leaders and their constituents, dividing and distracting communities by involving them in self-interested partisan conflicts, and so on. At the same time, there are a significant number of instances in which political parties, especially opposition parties, support communities' pursuit of greater livability.

Dominant parties are more likely to be part of the problem than part of the solution. In Korea and Hungary, for example, the positive functions of dominant parties for communities in pursuit of livability are hard to find. In at least one surprising case, however, the dominant party seems to provide useful alternative ways of getting to state agencies. In O'Rourke's description, certain local organizations of the Vietnamese Communist Party deliver community grievances upward in an unexpectedly capillary fashion. Obviously, representation is combined with control, with the balance depending on particular local circumstances, but the possibility of positive linkages via even a dominant party cannot be dismissed out of hand.

One important traditional role for party politicians is to act as intermediary between communities and the state agencies that supply infrastructure and services to communities. This relationship can bring with it the divisive and demobilizing side effects (as Pezzoli argues in relation to the PRI's "Community Development Program" for Ajusco), but the negative political effects must be balanced against the positive effects of the infrastructure itself. In both the Mexico City and São Paulo cases, the extent to which even "illegal" communities were able to negotiate the provision of services from the state is impressive. Political parties played a central role in these negotiations.

Opposition parties may be less effective at providing traditional services, but they deliver more positive political side effects. When opposition parties become strong enough to win local or state-level elections,

they do two important things. First, when they grow out of a base in social and community movements, opposition parties support increased participation by communities and social movement groups. Second, they challenge the exclusive emphasis on accumulation that generally characterizes the discourse of dominant parties (and the economic elites that support them). These effects can be seen both in Asia (Taiwan) and in Latin America (Mexico and Brazil).

In Taipei, the emergence of political competition and opposition parties made challenging the degrading strategies of economic accumulation politically feasible. Given the KMT's unremitting pursuit of accumulation at any cost and its tightly constructed alliances with dominant economic elites, the opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) really had little choice other than to include more emphasis on livability in its definition of development. The DPP's historic ties to the environmental movement made it a natural to bring environmental politics more to the fore, giving community groups and social movements a powerful ally in their fights for parks and preservation. (Of course, as more DPP leaders got into office, their ties with the environmental movement sometimes had the negative effect of dampening the movement's enthusiasm for protesting these officials' own infringements on sustainability.)

Despite the PRI's traditional rhetorical emphasis on welfare, the PRD (Partido Revolucionario Democrático) in Mexico City found itself in a position not unlike the DPP's: the party had to find an alternative base to counter the formidable alliance of ruling party and private capital. Greater openness to unaffiliated community and social movement groups made political sense. In São Paulo, although there was no real dominant party to contend with at the end of military rule, the election of an opposition governor in 1982 had a similarly invigorating effect on the politics of livability. The new Montoro government was willing to think about new forms of watershed management. In addition, according to Keck, "environmental organizations credit Montoro with providing space in which they could organize."

This is not to say that the rise of opposition parties is inevitably linked to greater ideological emphasis on livability. Despite the high hopes surrounding the return to civilian rule in Korea in 1987, the politicians of the former opposition have proved almost as thoroughly (if less repressively) attached to the old politics of accumulation as their military predecessors were. Likewise, despite the important role played by the environmental movement in undermining the Communist Party's

hegemony in Hungary, the new parties that emerged after the transition seem to have little interest in an agenda of livability. Even in the case of Taiwan's DPP, as Hsiao and Liu point out, opposition politicians have proved themselves far from immune to the lure of overdevelopment in pursuit of world city status.

Likewise, even when opposition parties are willing to raise the banner of livability, their sponsorship may be flawed by their political roots. The DPP in Taipei and the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, or PT) in São Paulo illustrate contrasting ways in which parties can go astray. In the case of the DPP, Hsiao and Liu make it clear that the party carries with it the flaws of the environmentalist NGOs that were its early allies. Like them, the party is strong on parks and preservation but relatively indifferent to the livelihood of poor communities. Similarly, the PT ended up mirroring the contradictions of the working-class communities that are its principal base. In theory, the PT should have been exceptionally effective in helping community groups to find strategies that would integrate livelihood struggles with sustainability issues. The PT has a much longer history of working with the poor and marginalized communities than the DPP and PRD. In addition, the PT could count a number of activists from the environmental movement among its membership. In practice, however, the PT was unable to formulate a strategy that would reconcile these two constituencies. While its environmentalist constituency was condemning the invasions of reservoir areas, its community-based militants were prominent among the leadership of the invaders (chapter 6). Rather than the party becoming a vehicle for resolution of the contradictions between livelihood and sustainability issues, the contradictions became an organizational problem for the party itself.

If parties are not the uniformly nefarious actors that they were sometimes portrayed to be in the literature on urban community struggles, they are, even under the best of circumstances, imperfect intermediaries, certainly not solutions in themselves. Parties (particularly opposition parties) can, however, provide two kinds of support. At the macro level, they can open political space for communities and other social movement groups to participate in debates over rules and policies. They also create discursive space enabling imaginaries to extend beyond the standard monolithic emphasis on development and accumulation. At the micro level, they can provide organizational niches that give innovative community leaders extra leverage. In São Paulo, Virgílio Farias used his

position in the environment department of the local PT administration to organize one of the *Movimento de Defesa da Vida*'s important early campaigns. The PRD victory in Mexico City gave Ajusco's Hipólito Bravo López a chance to develop his leadership skills and experiment with new ways of building his community's external linkages.

Suggesting that parties are the solution to communities' needs for external linkages would be foolish. Control, clientelism and co-optation, and the quest for partisan advantage play much too large a role in the repertoires of even progressive parties. Nonetheless, it would be equally foolish for activists and community leaders to ignore the possibilities that party structures afford and the ways that oppositional parties can open up the larger political environment for new discourses and new forms of participation.

Overall, the external connections that intermediaries provide play an essential role in enabling communities to become effective agents of livability. Romantic visions in which individual communities can somehow resolve problems of livelihood and sustainability on their own are analytically misguided and a political disservice.

Douglass's analysis of the case of Wat Chonglom and its implications for other slum communities in Bangkok makes the point best. Wat Chonglom is the best example among all of the six studies of the successful self-reliant pursuit of livability. Yet Douglass and his collaborators are clear that external connections—primarily in the form of two university professors and the outside loan that they helped the community arrange—played a catalytic role in moving the community onto a trajectory of enhanced livability. Furthermore, they are equally clear that even in Bangkok, where the state encourages self-reliance, Wat Chonglom is the exception that proves the rule, and “attempts to follow the self-reliant model in other slum communities revealed the model's limitations.”

Self-reliant internal organization gives poor communities the capacity to make effective use of external linkages, but intermediary organizations still have an essential role to play. They bring new ideas and strategic inputs that magnify the returns of internal efforts. They help communities find ways to reconcile their limited livelihood options with sustainability. They improve the odds in uneven conflicts between urban communities and those who see the city as a place to accumulate money and power rather than as a place to live. They are likely to be a crucial component in any assemblage of actors capable of producing greater livability.

Allies and Enemies in the State

Even in a globalized world, the predilections and capacities of states have a powerful effect on the prospects of communities looking for livability. Yet if political parties are ambiguous organizations, states are ambiguous actors in even more complicated ways. These six studies reveal states as congregations of agencies, filled with both opponents and allies of projects of livability. The internal mix of agencies varies across states and over time.

While there is much variation among these states, there is also an important commonality. The one thing that this variegated set of developing and transitional states—capitalist and state socialist, democratic and authoritarian—shares most clearly is an “accumulationist” bias. From pretransition state socialist Hungary to transitional Vietnam to developmentalist Taiwan to corporatist Mexico to “savage capitalist” Brazil, all of these states appear to be dominated by a surprisingly similar focus on the accumulation of wealth and productive capacity within their borders. The KMT happily allies with developers destroying Taipei's hillsides in hopes that new luxury housing will help turn the city into a world city. Potential damage to industrial production is the only viable “environmentalist” argument in Budapest. The core of São Paulo's water policy from the 1940s to the 1960s was trying to ensure that utility companies could generate enough power to fuel industrial growth, even if it meant pumping sewage into the city's reservoir. The domination of the state's imaginary by this “accumulationist” project makes it that much clearer why communities must be the driving forces behind livability goals.

In other dimensions, variation outweighs commonality. In Douglass's portrayal the Korean and Thai states have contrasting defects. The Korean state is oppressive to an extent that makes it next to impossible for self-initiated community-level organizations to thrive. Communities rise in self-defense—as for example under the threat of eviction—but the kind of rich associational life that would foster capacity for collective action on behalf of livability is stifled. At the same time, the Korean state is quite efficient in delivering public infrastructure and even amenities to poor communities like Wolgoksa-dong. The Thai state, while allowing local initiatives to flourish where they can (as in Wat Chonglom), is ineffectual in providing the kind of support and infrastructure that poor communities need to transform local living situations.

Gille replicates a similar contrast in her comparison of the Hungarian

state during the state socialist period with the state in its post-1989 incarnation. By eliminating all possibilities for voice on the part of disadvantaged local communities in the pre-1989 period, the state paved the way for ecological disasters like the toxic waste dump in Garé. By withdrawing from active participation in livability issues in the post-1989 period, the state left these same communities without the organizational, political, and material resources that they needed to resolve their problems.

Communities can't do without states. There is no dearth of examples in these studies of how the power of the state is used to impose degradation on communities and to smother community-based projects of livability. Yet communities suffer as much from the incapacity of the state to implement its own projects of livability as they do from its excessive capacity to facilitate projects of accumulation at the expense of livelihood and sustainability.

Communities need capable public institutions desperately, but, unfortunately, they need states quite different from the ones that currently confront them. The question is how that difference might be reduced. The apparent inability of existing states to combine capacity for effective public action with openness to grassroots initiatives and responsiveness to community needs defines what is lacking in existing public institutions. Political efforts to restructure existing state apparatuses at the national level are admirable endeavors, worth pursuing but unlikely to produce the desired combination of capacity and openness in the foreseeable future. Efforts to transform city administrations are more promising, but local governments will still sit in the shadow of national rules and power. Less ambitious, but more likely to produce concrete results, are what might be called "jujitsu tactics"—efforts to leverage the conflicts and contradictions that already exist within state apparatuses to shift the balance of state action toward livability.

Jujitsu tactics are based on the premise that most public institutions are both collections of organizations, some of which actually have a vested interest in promoting livability, and aggregations of individual incumbents, some of whom are potential allies. Even state apparatuses with relatively effective forms of hierarchical coordination are fraught with conflicts among competing projects and organizations. The balance of power among these competing interests within the state depends in part on the effectiveness of their allies in society. If communities, NGOs, and other institutions can make more effective use of potential allies and

find ways to strengthen the position of these allies in their conflicts within the state, prospects for livability increase substantially.

As would be expected, those parts of the state apparatus that have the most direct relations to the task of accumulation tend to be the best developed and most powerful. Those concerned with livability are weaker and less developed. O'Rourke characterizes Vietnam's environmental agencies as "very young and very weak," "underfunded and understaffed." He observes, not surprisingly, that "in internal government battles, environmental agencies generally lose." He illustrates the point by noting the consistent inability of the Hanoi Department of Science, Technology, and Environment (DOSTE) to make any headway against the power of the Department of Industry (DOI), having failed to shut down a single one of the DOI's two hundred factories, despite clear environmental violations (as in the case of Ba Nhat). Hsiao and Liu paint a similar picture of the Taiwanese Environmental Protection Agency's unequal battle against the accumulationist thrust of the mainstream ministries. Any effort to boost the state's contribution to livability must start by recognizing this discouraging differential.

Despite their relative weakness, allies within the state are still crucial resources for communities and other social groups working to secure livelihood and sustainability. This is especially the case when communities mobilize against powerful private interests. Their success ultimately depends on their ability to gain allies within the state. Again this is laid out most clearly in O'Rourke's cases. None of his communities can win by simply confronting the polluting firms themselves. Only when direct community pressure is combined with some kind of support from the state does victory become a possibility.

State agencies vary by level as well as by function. Confronted with an accumulationist government at the national level, communities are often able to find allies at the local level. In Taiwan, when alliance with the national KMT regime was hopeless, the municipal-level DPP government of Taipei was an ally on at least some issues. In Vietnam, communities' environmental concerns are a nuisance from the point of view of the national Ministry of Industry but a priority for local officials in Viet Tri City. The point is not that all local administrations are arrayed on the side of livability; they may well turn out to be the creatures of local contractors and developers. The point is that splits between the interests of local and central administrations are another point of potential leverage for communities.

The contribution of allies within the state apparatus may not be in terms of the direct exercise of political power. State agencies, or networks of individuals within state agencies, may, like NGOs, become sources of new ideas or imaginaries. The best example is the *Solução Integrada*, which plays a role in Keck's story of São Paulo's watershed almost as important as the role of the CEP in Pezzoli's account of Los Belvederes. The *Solução Integrada*, devised in the mid-1970s by a state technocrat who saw himself as a nationalist working in the service of society rather than as a technician, was still invoked by community activists fifteen years later as proof that the pollution of Billings reservoir was not an inevitable consequence of the city's growth.

The middle-level "whistle-blowers" in Gille's description of Hungary are a different sort of example of how individuals and networks within the state apparatus can offer intangible resources in livability struggles. Gille points out that when the Hungarian state did allow environmental considerations to deflect its accumulationist agenda, it was because middle-level technocrats with sustainability concerns managed to get the ear of officials in more powerful parts of the state apparatus. Likewise, in the rare cases when community mobilization around environmental issues emerged in pre-1989 Hungary, information from allies working within local government played a crucial role in getting things started.

Those inside the state who are trying to make cities more livable depend on the existence of mobilized communities just as much as communities and social movements depend on allies within the state. As O'Rourke points out, the ability of environmental agencies to overcome the resistance of their opponents within the state depends on the political vitality of community demands. Without active communities, agencies and individuals within the state have no political case to counter the primacy of accumulation.

Keck's analysis of the *Solução Integrada* is a nice illustration of how much generators of ideas within the state apparatus need mobilized communities if they hope to turn their ideas into realities. However technically compelling and compatible with the long-run general interests of the city Rodolfo Costa e Silva's plan might have been, the interests of the electrical utilities and the governor's relatives easily checkmated it in the absence of community pressure. Even during the Montoro administration in São Paulo, when, according to Keck, technocrats favorable to the *Solução Integrada* were hegemonic within the bureaucracy, they were unable to prevail.

The complementarity between what is possible from within the state

apparatus and what can be done from outside is evident. Those working inside the state apparatus command technical expertise and the legitimacy that goes with it. They lack the political legitimacy that communities can command, as well as the determination that comes from being forced to endure the day-to-day effects of degradation.

"State-society synergy" is not just an abstract concept. It is shorthand for the myriad concrete relationships of mutual support that connect communities, NGOs, and social movements with individuals and organizations inside the state who put a priority on livelihood and sustainability. Keck's description of São Paulo's "water networks" offers a vivid picture of state-society synergy made concrete: "Activists within and outside the state have formed ties and shared ideas in community groups, environmental organizations, universities, and technical agencies, their loose linkages sustaining a vision of water policy centered on preserving the quality of the water supply and the contribution of local water sources to the metropolitan area's quality of life."

State-society synergy does not, however, mean an absence of conflict between communities and state agencies. Paradoxically, conflict is likely to be first and foremost with agencies that are supposed to be part of the solutions. Communities and NGOs are more likely to find themselves attacking environmental agencies and social service organizations for "not doing their jobs" than they are to try to mobilize against the Ministry of Industry for doing its job in an effective but tunnel-vision way. This makes good political sense. Potential allies are both more vulnerable and more likely to change their ways than agencies with opposing agendas and constituencies. Dramatic and aggressive actions to force environmental or state sanitation agencies to do their job—actions such as dumping dead fish on the agencies' front steps—may not seem "synergistic" on the surface, but they are as important to the process as quieter, more obviously collaborative relations.

Unlike markets, states—even relatively undemocratic states—can be held accountable. You can fight with them. Having somewhere to direct demands, someone to hold responsible who is supposed to be able to deliver redress, is a key ingredient in making mobilization seem worthwhile. Thus, even when they play an adversarial role, states can be important catalysts to the mobilization of communities. For Vietnamese communities fighting against industrial pollution, the passage of the 1994 environmental law and the creation of state agencies with environmental responsibilities was important, not so much because the agencies were able to enforce the regulations but because the communities

now had a legitimate target at which to direct their grievances. For Garé, in would-be neoliberal Hungary, the withdrawal of the state left them with no one against whom their claims could be pressed.

Once the evolution of people's living circumstances appears to depend only on "market forces," no one is responsible and collective mobilization seems nonsensical. Los Belvederes illustrates the point. As long as the community's demands were directed primarily against the state, collective mobilization made sense. Solidarity was essential to the struggle for legalization. Mobilization also made sense as a means of securing collective goods from the state, such as the materials to build milk stores and schools. Once legalization was achieved, the residents began to relate to the housing market as individuals, and internal conflicts dissipated the social capital built up over years of collective action.

The web of relations that tie state and society together around issues of livability is intricate and convoluted. Livability depends on the extent to which communities and other groups in civil society that are trying to make cities livable can build ties with people and agencies within the state who share the same agenda. How likely this is to occur depends, in turn, on the effects of the shifting global context, more specifically on the consequences of the twin transitions to market orientation and electoral democracy.

Effects of the Twin Transitions

The introductory chapter to this volume juxtaposed two pictures of the changing global context. On the one hand, there was the triumphalist vision in which the twin transitions were in themselves the solution. On the other, there was Castells's daunting vision of the global networks that compose the "space of flows" and seem to ensure the dominance of interests inimical to livability. Both visions agreed on the increasing structural dominance of global markets. Neither left much room for agency on the part of groups fighting for urban livability. After looking at these six studies, a different picture emerges.

Nothing in these studies negates the idea that global markets are having a fundamental impact on how Third World cities work, but they hardly support that triumphalist view that markets are in themselves answers to problems of livelihood and sustainability. Certainly the two cases that witnessed the most dramatic moves in the direction of market orientation—Vietnam and Hungary—offer little in support of the triumphalists. In Hungary, where hopes were highest that market orientation

would bring reductions in degradation, Gille shows that degradation was intimately connected to market-conforming economic strategies; she suggests that it was a lack of political accountability more than a lack of market orientation that led to communist degradation. Nor does O'Rourke find evidence that increased market orientation is driving "ecological modernization" in Vietnam.

None of this is to say that the contemporary mode of accumulation is qualitatively more threatening to sustainability than its predecessors were. The current quest for world-city status is no more environmentally destructive than the strategies of import-substituting industrialization that were in vogue a half century ago, or the reliance on extractive exports that dominated Third World economic strategies in the nineteenth century. If current economic expansion is more ecologically threatening than past growth, it is because populations several times as dense and cities hundreds of times larger make the achievement of ecological sustainability correspondingly more pressing, but there is no evidence in these studies that current accumulation strategies themselves are inherently more degrading.

The negative impact of the global economy in these studies is more political than it is economic. The desire to construct policies that will advantage cities in global markets leads those in power to ignore problems of livability and sustainability. This is most obvious in the case of Taiwan's desire to make Taipei a regional winner in the contest for global city status. Hungarian officials' failure to anticipate the toxic by-products of the Budapest Chemical Works' economic success represents an earlier version of the same problem. Because BCW was singularly effective (relative to other local firms) in relating to global markets, the toxic impact of its strategy was ignored.

After looking at these studies, the paramount question is not whether global markets are the solution. They are not. The question is whether the second of the twin transitions—electoral democracy—can compensate for the tendency of global markets to divert policy makers from questions of livability. The immediate answer is probably not, but the evolution of the political context does seem to be moving in a positive direction.

The institutionalization of electoral politics as the dominant mode of determining political succession has expanded the space for political mobilization at the community level in almost all of the countries examined here. Even though party competition and the leaders it produces do not usually focus on livability, they are less likely to disrupt and

repress self-initiated local efforts at making cities more livable. The space for community-level mobilization created by democratization is made easier to use by other, complementary institutional changes.

Complementing new space for mobilization, there have been important additions to the state-level institutional instruments available to those interested in sustainability. We can lament the relative weakness of environmental agencies, but it is important to remember that most of these agencies didn't exist at all two or three decades ago. The same is true of laws constraining accumulation in the name of sustainability. The authors of these studies comment on the panoply of sweeping new laws that have been put in place from Brazil to Taiwan to Vietnam. If these laws were actually enforced, there would be a monumental improvement on the sustainability front. Of course, they are not, and outrage is an appropriate response. Yet, as in the case of the still ineffectual state agencies, these legal rules must be seen as potentially powerful tools, whose utilization depends on building the political foundations that will make them real.

There is also one less tangible but unquestionably positive change in the global context. The ubiquity with which environmental discourse has become part of politics, even in cities where degradation continues apace, is impressive. The political efficacy of the CEP idea in Mexico City, the popularity of the campaign to clean up the Tietê in São Paulo, and the convictions of Vietnamese peasants that they have a right to a cleaner environment all reflect a positive change in the global ideological context.

Two cautionary notes should be raised before coming to positive conclusions. First, it is important to note what might be called the "transition effect." These cases suggest an association between transitions to electoral democracy and the effervescence of environmental organizations. Authoritarian regimes under fire seemed to find environmental movements the least threatening among the possible oppositional movements and therefore allowed them to gain a vanguard position during the transition. Hungary and Taiwan are the best examples.

Hsiao and Liu underline the fact that environmental movements played an important pioneering role in providing opportunities for civic mobilization during Taiwan's transition to electoral democracy. Gille observes that in Hungary, "from about 1987 to 1990, the state showed an unprecedented openness to environmental initiatives," and because of that, more general democratic demands were expressed indirectly, through environmental protests. What is disturbing about the "transi-

tion effect," especially in the Hungarian case, is that once environmentalism "lost its potential for filling in for other political issues," activists and their technocratic allies abandoned the movement, in some cases disavowing sustainability concerns altogether.

The fact that sustainability retains its political charisma in cases where the transition to elections is well past (Brazil) and where the transitions to electoral rule is not yet in sight (Vietnam) is reassuring. Nonetheless, it is important not to confuse a temporary transition effect with a long-term, secular trend in the direction of increasing the political impact for movements focused on environmental issues.

The second cautionary note involves a problem that transcends transitional regimes and is therefore more serious. If the openness of otherwise authoritarian regimes to environmental demands is striking, middle-class indifference to social justice arguments as a basis for livelihood demands is equally so. The Taiwanese case has already been underlined as a prime example. Hsiao and Liu see middle-class movements focused on "quality of life" kinds of sustainability demands as likely to treat the livelihood demands of poorer communities with callous disregard rather than as part of a general movement for more livable cities.

If the global ideological context has become more favorable to the introduction of sustainability issues, it may well have become less permeable to the interjection of the social justice concerns that are essential to the pursuit of livability. It is hard to find evidence for a burgeoning of social movements and NGOs on the livelihood side comparable to their blossoming on the environmental side. This is a serious problem and underlines again the potential benefits of uniting immediate livelihood struggles with broader sustainability issues. Demonstrating that local fights to improve living conditions are simultaneously in service of universal sustainability goals is the best way to endow them with ideological clout.

Despite these two cautionary notes, there is no overall evidence that states are becoming more rapaciously committed to accumulation than they have been in the past, or that the political-legal matrices within which struggles over livability must be fought are less favorable today than they were a generation ago. If neither the macrolevel political-legal context nor the general thrust of economic policies has regressed, and if space for political action on behalf of livability has, if anything, expanded in recent decades, the question must be: How can this space best be exploited?

Ecologies of Actors and the Pursuit of Livability

The persistent resilience of community efforts to make their own corners of the city more livable is as impressive as the obstacles they confront. It is impossible to read the stories of Los Belvederes, Wat Chonglom, Dona Bochang, or even the thoroughly oppressed Wolgoksa-dong and the “wasteland” Garé, and conclude that the political battle for livability is over. Place-based agency turns out to be hard to kill. At the same time, it is clear from these studies that calls for community empowerment will not, in themselves, produce the kind of progress toward livability that is needed. Mobilized communities are not enough.

The concept of an “ecology of agents” that was put forward in the introductory chapter can now be given more content. Like Castells’s vision of the “network society,” the idea of ecologies of local political agents focuses on the power of connections rather than the capacities of individual actors. Though it does not negate the existence of Castells’s space of flows, this imagery focuses on a more modest set of networks, with very different aims, rooted in the “space of places.” While more modest, the constellations of actors that are the focus of these studies still have the potential to collectively effect change, if only they can figure out how to better exploit the social and ideological resources at their disposal.

Each type of actor—communities, intermediary organizations, and state agencies—has a complementary contribution to make to the fight for livability. The capacity of each depends on its internal coherence as well as the aggregated experience and ability of its individual members, but the power of each to effect change also depends fundamentally on its relations to the others. State agencies depend on political pressure from communities. NGOs without a community base lack legitimacy. Communities without external ties are politically weak and parochial. Only when this constellation of actors functions in an interconnected, complementary way does it have a chance of making cities more livable.

Interconnection can take two forms. Formal linkages and alliances officially connect groups, organizations, agencies, or other social entities. Networks of individuals operate within organizations and agencies and, more important, trespass the boundaries of groups and formal organizations and thereby make it easier to bring disparate entities together. The key is nurturing those networks and alliances that are particularly oriented toward pursuing livability.

The process of building these networks and alliances is already under way, as these six studies make clear. But too many opportunities for building ties, making connections, and exploiting potential synergies are being overlooked. They are overlooked because categorical divisions and lack of a shared cultural framework blind actors to complementary possibilities. Technocrats underestimate the extent to which they need communities; community leaders dismiss those working in the state as bureaucrats; NGOs dismiss both ordinary citizens and technocrats as pedestrian and shortsighted. Communities and NGOs are suspicious of supporting plans to increase the capacity of state agencies as long as construction firms and real estate developers appear to be the state’s dominant interlocutors. Those working in state agencies are reluctant to jeopardize the privileged status of technocratic qualification by granting legitimacy to community inputs.

For cities to become more livable, groups and individuals inside and outside of the state must become more conscious of the necessity of looking for complementarities, forging alliances, and bridging differences that separate the multiple agendas that are part of livability. Bureaucrats must be open to direct democratic demands, regardless of how inconvenient and unreasonable they might be. Communities must be willing to provide political backing for increasing the capacity of state agencies, despite the risk that the capacity might be misused or captured. NGOs must use their greater political and institutional flexibility to build ties in both directions. Perhaps most important, actors both inside and outside of the state must be on the lookout for new institutional forms—such as Keck’s basin committees—that hold the promise of transcending old impasses.

The vision of agency that emerges here is not revolutionary. It is built on the accretion of small changes—filling a gap in a network so that it becomes more robust; using a network to give activists a head start on a contested issue by sharing crucial information; discovering which public agency is likely to be vulnerable to pressure and taking advantage of that vulnerability; finding new ways to think about the governance of key collective goods, such as drinking water. The battles won through this kind of accretive process are important not just because of their contribution to livability but also because winning them simultaneously builds both institutional infrastructure and capacity for collective action.

Is this strategic vision of communities, organizations, and individuals, interconnected in synergistic ways, playing complementary roles that

cumulate, sufficient to trump the admittedly weighty forces undermining the quest for livability? Perhaps not, but they are certainly strategies worth exploring, especially for those with a "passion for the possible."³

Notes

The acknowledgment in the introductory chapter applies even more thoroughly to this one. The ideas presented in this chapter are derived from those developed by my collaborators in the previous chapters, as well as from our discussions, both in person and in countless e-mails over the course of three years.

1. Conversely, it is important not to exaggerate the extent of middle-class privilege. The educated middle-class community around Ba Nhat Chemicals was less successful in securing redress than the poor agriculturalists around the Lam Thao plant (although not less successful than the agriculturalists' even poorer cousins across the river).

2. Social movement organizations (sometimes referred to as SMOs) are more local and less professionalized than NGOs. They may expand out from a base in particular communities to make connections to other communities, or they may start as issue-based groups. The Billings Defense Committee and the Movimento de Defesa da Vida (chapter 6) are good examples of social movement organizations.

3. See the discussion of Hirschman's "possibilism" at the end of chapter 1.

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