

PART I

SETTING THE COMPARISON

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Excerpt  
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## I

## Introduction

In 2006, a group of residents in Yungay, a working-class neighborhood of low-rises in the center of Santiago, attended a public hearing organized by city officials. The neighbors had expected a perfunctory event, and attended somewhat by chance. Instead, to their surprise, officials informed participants of a plan to change zoning laws that would have dramatically augmented the construction of high-rises in their neighborhood. Residents knew that the threat was real. They had already observed waves of high-rises being built throughout the city, as the mayor pursued flagship projects and infrastructure modernization to position Santiago as a competitive center for international investment. This was taking place in the heart of a country considered the historical hotbed of neoliberalism: unions were weak, and the fiscal, planning, and taxation environments had traditionally and strongly favored developers.

Defying the odds, these neighbors, organized as *Vecinos por la Defensa del Barrio Yungay* (Neighbors for the Defense of the Barrio Yungay), mobilized a broad and diverse set of residents in protest. Their organization pursued a complex and multipronged strategy that relied on extensive citywide networking and lobbying. But, above all, it relied on experiential tools: it offered transformative experiences designed to attract supporters. The organization generated a full calendar of cultural activities to convene residents from different ages, economic statuses, and sexual orientations. These activities were not explicitly framed as political mobilization, and even less as protest. Residents joined tours of their neighborhood that elicited their pride in living in a unique place and alerted them to the risks of losing their quiet,

tree-lined village-within-the-metropolis. The organization also led “memory workshops” and a “heritage registry” to construct the history of the barrio and elaborate its cultural significance.

This indefatigable effort to bring together diverse residents resulted in an extraordinary mobilization, and the accumulation of significant political clout. The group was able to halt new high-rises in the neighborhood through the achievement of landmark status in 2009 for 113 hectares, at the time by far the largest heritage area ever registered in Chile. The organization also achieved several institutional victories. It gained seats on the municipal council and the national civil-society council. It even managed to change the decision-making process itself by advocating for popular elections for a key municipal institution. It then began to scale up: It instituted a national league of neighborhood associations and deployed its strategies to other areas, which reshaped barrio policy at the national level. The group has continued with the same leadership, and in 2018 it extended the original heritage area by an additional 117 hectares, for a total of 230 hectares.

How was it possible that a group of residents with no prior background in activism, in a city with unsympathetic political institutions and leadership, organized and achieved such remarkable and sustained policy impact, in such a short time? Experiential tools were critical to this outcome. The group has grown in influence, and has institutionalized, yet it still relies on the original strategy of cross-cleavage mobilization, with a calendar of experiences that help construct and remind resident-participants of their ties to the neighborhood. Careful political messaging is communicated amid joyful dances, communal meals, movie screenings, and storytelling. *Vecinos por la Defensa del Barrio Yungay* primed neighbors for action by making the protection of their neighborhood a defining personal moment.

This book seeks to answer two key questions, implicit in the unlikely story of Yungay: How have citizens adapted resistance against urban redevelopment to profound political, social, and technological changes? And under what conditions do they reach their goals? It analyses the kind of experiential tools evident in the Yungay campaign, and many others, and the conditions under which they have an impact against urban redevelopment. The central argument made in this book is that experiential tools contribute heavily to social mobilization, especially when combined with protest legacies and broad networks. However, protests drawing on experiential strategies are most likely to have strong impacts under certain conditions: When protesters possess political allies in city

government, and there is a lack of right-wing partisan alignment between their mayors and executives at higher tiers of government.

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Government-led redevelopment is an enduring feature of local politics. Yet scholarly consensus holds that over the past two decades, city governments worldwide have shifted from facilitators to initiators of systematic redevelopment (see, for example, N. Smith, 2002; Uitermark, Duyvendak, & Kleinhans, 2007), to the extent that much scholarship considers “contemporary urban policy to be a form of state-led gentrification” (Lees, 2003, p. 62).<sup>1</sup> Political-science scholars have also emphasized the role of urban redevelopment, arguing that urban politics is above all the politics of land use for cities that compete in order to maximize their economic standing (Logan & Molotch, 1987; Peterson, 1981; Stone, 1989). These policies have been consequential and controversial. They are tied not only to development and prosperity but also to displacement and social injustice.

The impetus behind urban redevelopment observed in the past twenty years can be explained as a strategic response to new political economic contexts at the local level. Governments embraced fiscal austerity (Blyth, 2013), the pursuit of global status (Pasotti, 2009), and neoliberal policies (Brenner & Theodore, 2002) following the Thatcher and Reagan administrations, thereafter consolidated by Third Way and Washington Consensus approaches. This wave of urban redevelopment started in high-income countries but took hold even more dramatically and consequentially in many middle- and lower-income countries, especially in the aftermath of currency and real-estate crises, the weakening of organized labor, the privatization of public goods, and the ideology of holding the poor accountable (Peck, 2011; Wacquant, 2010). Urban redevelopment has benefited city coffers in both advanced and developing economies. With a neighborhood upgrade, municipalities can receive funds from a variety of sources: permits, fees, and taxes from developers; increased real-estate taxes from the overall increase in property prices; tourism; direct and indirect taxes from new high-income residents; and from

<sup>1</sup> Gentrification involves at least four key elements: (1) reinvestment of capital; (2) local social upgrading by incoming high-income groups; (3) landscape change; and (4) direct or indirect displacement of low-income groups (Lees et al., 2008).

investors, more likely to target in cities where their mobile, highly skilled workforce would want to live.

Regime and growth-machine theories have identified political patterns that lead to displacement and dispossession for disadvantaged groups in this urban-development process. Regime theory (Stone, 1989) identifies four regime types. “Development” regimes focus on the expansion and development of the city. To secure resources to accomplish this goal, governments rely on the local business sector, endowed with systemic power that emerges from wealth and landownership. Growth-machine theorists (Logan & Molotch, 1987) argue that in these settings land-use officials and local executives use zoning and other land-use regulations so that development benefits elite coalitions. Logan and Molotch describe how urban politics and policy-making are dominated by a coalition of “place entrepreneurs” composed of business, cultural, and government elites united by their shared interest in economic growth. This coalition maximizes rents and land values to capture the benefits of growth, as government adapts to the pressures of international competition. As a result, local growth elites emerge as hegemonic figures in political, economic, and cultural institutions (Logan & Molotch, 1987). In these cities, there is little difference between regime theory and growth-machine theory as to who governs and why.

Stone’s other three regime types are all rare and fragile. The first is “middle-class progressive regimes” (identified as “progressive regimes” by Dreier, Mollenkopf, & Swanstrom, 2001), which seek neighborhood and environmental protections, and favor investment in affordable housing and urban amenities. But these regimes require particularly effective leftist political actors and are limited to small and medium cities.<sup>2</sup> The next type, “lower-class opportunity expansion regimes,” require such considerable mass mobilization that they are not only rare but even “largely hypothetical” (Stone, 1989, p. 20). The final type is “maintenance regimes,” in which local-governance coalitions act as caretaker regimes, and such regimes are both rare and short-lived.

Among the possible regimes, development regimes emerge as empirically pervasive (Altshuler & Luberoff, 2004; Domhoff, 2006; Jeong & Feiock, 2006; Logan & Crowder, 2002), and nearly all of the cases

<sup>2</sup> The most notable exception in the literature is San Francisco, in the US context, and a few other cities such as Amsterdam, which Fainstein (2010) identifies as (historically) relatively equitable, thanks to the rare combination of centralized revenue provision and decentralized decision-making.

examined in this book take this form. As they pursue growth at all costs, development regimes emphasize their attractiveness as investment hubs – often exemplified by how close they come to achieving global city status.

In the early 1990s, Saskia Sassen popularized the concept of the global city, by which she meant primary nodes in the world’s economic network and hubs of international financial services. But even before that time, urban governments were pursuing the status of global city. These “aspiring global cities” prioritized the attraction of business investment to pursue growth and to move up in globalization indices, which in turn would attract more international investment (Gotham, 2006; Harvey, 1989; Sassen, 1994; Sirmans & Worzala, 2003).<sup>3</sup> Yet pro-growth coalitions in local governing regimes have also deepened inequalities and thwarted alternative governing regimes (Logan, Whaley, & Crowder, 1997). These factors invite conflict over growth. Often, however, communities facing redevelopment are too disadvantaged to mount much protest and opt instead to attract investors and align themselves with business interests, hoping thereby to obtain desperately needed infrastructural investments.

This book describes cases, in contrast, where residents threatened with displacement have engaged in resistance against redevelopment. These cases of resistance are important to study because their success is both rare and unexpected under dominant regimes and pro-growth coalitions.

While most cities continue to operate as growth machines, over recent decades urban redevelopment has tilted toward cultural-economic and consumption-based strategies. Governments shifted their focus from suburban to downtown recreation as the core of urban growth and pursued this new vision with megaprojects that included stadiums (Altshuler & Luberoff, 2004) but also extensive cultural facilities. Sharon Zukin, one of the first scholars to identify the trend, writes of the “artistic mode of production.” This approach seeks economic growth by revalorizing the built environment for cultural consumption and historic preservation; promoting cultural industries to address youth unemployment; and deploying cultural meanings that value urban space and labor for their aesthetic rather than productive contributions (Zukin, 1987, p. 260; see also Hutton, 2015). Taking this a step further, the shift to cultural industries embeds a new concept of “productivity.” Indeed, the activists interviewed for this project see the city as “the new factory”: a site of

<sup>3</sup> Scholars have also referred to them as “wannabe” world cities (Lehrer 2017; Short et al., 2000).

production no longer of industrial goods but of desire, which is materialized through consumption and lifestyle (Schäfer, 2010). The shift reaffirms Castell's seminal argument that the arena of history has moved from the factory floor to the neighborhood, where people seek control not of the means of production but of collective consumption (Castells, 1983). In this "factory without walls," the entire urban fabric is the terrain of capitalist accumulation but at the same time also a stage for resistance (Negri, 1989, p. 97). The cultural consumption approach to the city sets up both an urban growth strategy and the experiential tools deployed by those who resist it.

The debate over cultural-economic urban redevelopment was sensitive to consumption-side theories that explained gentrification and redevelopment as answers to middle-class demands for downtown amenities (see, for example, Ley, 1997). But the conversation was deeply reframed by Richard Florida's intervention. According to Florida, the knowledge economy has become the main site of competition for global cities, and governments' priority should move from simply attracting investment to focusing on attracting and retaining a mobile population of highly skilled knowledge workers with amenities that this "creative class" prizes (Florida, 2002; see also Landry, 2012). This prescription puts social diversity, artistic production, and creativity at the forefront of mayors' growth agendas.

But who exactly belongs to the creative class that cities must lure by all means possible? According to Florida, the creative class includes those involved with traditional cultural management (museums, libraries, festivals, crafts, and so on), contemporary cultural art management (arts and entertainment activities, exhibition spaces, and production), media (audiovisual products, books, magazines), and design (software, digital content, advertising, architecture, and so on), as well as scientific research. Florida was criticized for his overly broad definition of creatives, and I therefore follow other scholars' preference for "cultural producers," i.e. contributors to the cultural industries who "combine cultural expression and creativity with material production, tradable goods and, to a greater or lesser extent, market-based consumption" (Montgomery, 2005, p. 340; see also Krätke, 2010; Novy & Colomb, 2012).

However the creatives are defined, governments of aspiring global cities around the world quickly embraced Florida's revolutionary growth prescription. This changed urban capitalism and, with it, urban redevelopment. It catalyzed urban redevelopment because the promotion of creative industries required a specific kind of infrastructure and to fully

*Introduction*

9

embrace Florida's recipe, city governments in the early 2000s vigorously appealed to creatives' consumer and cultural demands.

In this way, contemporary capitalism forges links between consumption, culture, and urban redevelopment. Socio-spatial transformations provide experiences and leisure facilities that a city can market as hip, culturally vibrant, and socially diverse. These links are so strong that the study of urban redevelopment protests yields important insights about aspects of contemporary capitalism.

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The present emphasis on culture-led regeneration and redevelopment in cities also has redistributive political consequences that extend well beyond the development of physical infrastructure (Porter & Shaw, 2013).

Through redevelopment, city governments shift resources to new sectors (such as biotech, high-tech, and design) but also privilege the marketing of specific neighborhoods and the creation of cultural content for tourists (Judd & Fainstein, 1999). Municipal policies have territorial impact, not least on a neighborhood's residents (Colomb & Novy, 2016; Chetty & Hendren, 2018; Sampson, 2012). For example, creative city agendas tend to shift resources to "marketable" diversity (Boudreau, Keil, & Young, 2009), which entrenches racial and class inequalities (Atkinson & Easthope, 2009; Catungal, Leslie, & Hii, 2009; Grundy & Boudreau, 2008; Parker, 2008; Peck, 2011). Often, marketable diversity means the fetishization of ethnic diversity through the "spectacular commodification of difference" (Goonewardena & Kipfer, 2005, p. 672), primarily with events and spaces that appeal to middle-class professional tastes and their perceptions of diversity in a way that privileges some immigrant groups over others depending on their marketability (Ahmadi, 2016; Hackworth & Rekers, 2005; Kipfer & Keil, 2002). This dynamic builds on a notion that the creative class seeks out urban locations that are "authentic" and "diverse" (Peck, 2005, p. 745).

Such culture-led regenerations and redevelopment tend to promote or accompany gentrification and produce spatial inequalities; in other words, inequalities in access to urban space (Brenner, 2014). Gentrification can have positive effects, such as enhancing city centers, promoting urban densification, diluting poverty, addressing disinvestment, and increasing the local tax base. For this reason, some scholars and policy-makers in the 1990s, especially, promoted gentrification as a "rising tide

that lifts all boats” (Duany, 2001, p. 36; see also Musterd, De Vos, Das, & Latten, 2012). But evidence for the lifting effect of that rising tide has been thin. Instead, the overwhelming majority of scholars assess gentrification as harmful, largely because of household displacement and community conflict (Betancur, 2002). Gentrification-induced displacement can take several forms. The signal work by Peter Marcuse identified four manifestations. The two most visible types are “direct chain displacement,” which refers to dislocation due to deterioration of a building or rent increase, and “direct last-resident displacement,” which refers to dislocation due to physical or economic actions by landlords (such as harassment or rent increase). Important but harder to detect are two additional types of gentrification-induced displacement: “exclusionary displacement,” which occurs when households lose previously available housing because it has been gentrified or abandoned, and “displacement pressure,” which afflicts current residents during the gentrification of their own neighborhood and takes a few forms, including harassment, decline in access to services, and alienation (Marcuse, 1985; Zhang & He, 2018). Increased rents can lead to involuntary immobility (Newman & Wyly, 2006), when residents who want to stay put in the neighborhood are forced into overcrowded or substandard living conditions. This displacement typology applies both to residential and commercial sites (Zukin, 2008; Zukin et al., 2009).

It is difficult to quantify displacement as a consequence of gentrification, or even to define displacement consistently across scholarship (Zuk et al., 2015, p. 46; to illustrate the controversy, see, for example, Atkinson, 2002; Freeman, 2005; Newman & Wyly, 2006; Vigdor, Massey, & Rivlin, 2002). Scholars increasingly recommend a more fine-tuned understanding of mobility that considers *types* of mobility rather than simply mobility rates – that is, why people move rather than simply how much they move – to capture gentrification-led displacement (Ding, Hwang, & Divringi, 2016).

Despite these definitional and quantification challenges, most studies agree that gentrification at a minimum leads to exclusionary displacement because of a reduced pool of affordable housing, and that it can also include the direct displacement of renters (see, for example, Atkinson, 2002; Bridge, Butler, & Lees, 2012; Chaskin & Joseph, 2013; Lees, 2008; Shaw & Hagemans, 2015; Slater, 2006; Zuk et al., 2015). And, across time and space, local governments have often aided, and even led, in the systematic and institutionalized racist and classist management of housing values, as Trounstine has shown in the US case. Such government