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Cultural Sincerity in Urban Development

The local development process does not take place in a vacuum. Like other socio-economic interaction, from gift-giving to hiring practices to market exchange, the politics of development are socially, culturally, and historically determined. Of course, commonly held assumptions about urban development are not without ample demonstration, whether through theoretical model, empirical study or everyday observation: property developers usually have their way, large corporations do homogenize the American landscape with identical retail outlets, and entrepreneurs, landowners, mainstream media, and local governments alike tend to support growth more often than not. In other words, what Logan and Molotch ([1987], 2007) famously termed the ‘growth machine’ model is, if perhaps simplistic, a fundamentally realistic way of understanding the urban development process. Nonetheless, it is a mistake to overlook the importance of local social norms and unique cultural context, which add, I argue, far more nuance and complexity than that model and others account for. As concerns with environmental sustainability and the preservation of local character become increasingly prominent in towns and neighborhoods across the United States, understanding these nuances is of great importance. Through a case study of recent development politics in the town of Davis, California, this paper explores role of local culture in the process, including its impact on development organizations themselves and on the relative ability of the growth machine to succeed even in an ‘anti-growth’ community.

In a suburban town in America today, it is not particularly noteworthy that a ‘big-box’ corporate retailer won public approval after a successful public relations campaign. That it happened where it did, and how it did, is considerably more so. The town in question, Davis, is a university-oriented city of 63,000 people known for its liberal

politics, high levels of community involvement, and quirky landmarks to environmentalism, bicycling, and an intentionally ‘unique’ small town character. The retailer, a Target store that many expected to have a scale, attitude and ‘feel’ quite foreign to Davis, was first presented to the City Council by corporate representatives in 2006, just months after a proposed housing subdivision had been overwhelmingly defeated at the ballot box. At first take, both projects sound like the type that any liberal, affluent, and growth-wary community would turn down given the opportunity. More particularly, an archetypical corporate retailer might seem among the least likely additions to this community to receive approval, while a new project from a local team with significant environmental credibility (the subdivision) sounds more like the kind an eco-image-conscious town might embrace.¹ Target Corporation’s ability to win over the community (not just city leaders) in this case invites questions about how development organizations and other components of the growth machine may adapt their own ‘cultures of production’ (Vaughan, 1998) to meet *community expectations* and what I call *cultural sincerity* – the degree of perceived adherence to these normative expectations.²

The proposition of shared cultural identity in shared urban space is nothing new: whether in the terms of Manuel Castells’ (1983) “collective consumption” or Small’s (2004) “neighborhood narrative frames,” people in the same community have similar histories and experiences. It is no surprise if they have shared expectations of how their communities (and thus, to some degree, they themselves) are defined, projected, and understood. Urban development projects matter because changes to a place’s built environment, consumption opportunities, or public persona can pose real challenges to existing cultural identity. In this context, cultural sincerity means that there may be socio-historically-determined (if also imprecise and evolving) criteria, outside of any written law, that new projects must meet in order to gain acceptance (and, in the case of a

politically-powerful citizenry, to win planning approval). One should expect these criteria to differ from one place to another (and across time and cohorts), and they will likely be difficult to precisely pin down in any case, but in Davis (as in many communities today), two dominant expectations for new development are environmental leadership and the preservation of local character. Rob Roy, a local activist and former Davis City Council candidate I interviewed, described it in his own words: “There are people that have a philosophy of Davis, want it to be progressive and have cutting edge, environmentally conscious things, and [developers] understand that they have to throw something their way.” In order to project cultural sincerity, a developer must speak to local expectations. The following analysis tests the assertion that culture – in this case local expectations of environmental leadership and the preservation of a quirky, small-town community character – can influence the actions of pro-growth organizations and how those actions are perceived in the politics of urban development.

The particular circumstances of Davis and the development projects in question also make for strong empirical study, in part because residents have an unusually powerful voice in community planning through increasingly common public referenda. Local cultural expectations are thus not only highly visible, but were in these cases *formally* enacted at the ballot box, following long and often heated periods of campaigning and public debate. Public records, attentive local and regional press, and preserved websites and other campaign materials offer a wealth of supporting data about these cases as well. Finally, I articulate specific understandings of cultural expectations with information and opinions from interviews that I conducted with developers, residents, community leaders and others. In the next sections, I review the details of the research site and the case in question, leaving further discussion of theoretical and scholarly context for the analysis that follows.

Davis, California

Davis is a town with a prominent sense of local identity. Adjectives like ‘progressive,’ ‘environmentally concerned,’ ‘intellectual,’ and ‘activist’ come up time and again when residents are asked to describe their community. Its logo, emblazoned on every trash and recycling can – a turn of the century penny-farthing ‘highwheel’ bicycle – is emblematic of a place that boasts of both its ‘historic’ downtown and pretension to be the ‘bicycle capital of the U.S.’ Other distinctions include civic ordinances protecting owls, toads and “historic potholes,” regulating smoking, snoring and light pollution, and declaring the city *officially* pro-choice and nuclear free (by vote of the City Council). In 1995, a Midwestern newspaper columnist bestowed upon Davis the title of “weirdness center of the world” (Hritz, 1995). At the time, residents declared they preferred to think of their town as ‘quirky.’

Davis’s character, shaped profoundly by the University of California campus that turned a sleepy, unincorporated railroad crossing into a relative oasis of academia and progressive culture in California’s rural Central Valley (Lofland & Haig, 2000), is well reflected in the local political activity of the past fifty years. By 1968, writes historian Mike Fitch (1998: ch. 1), “Davis already knew it was somehow special.” In 1970, a group of citizens initiated a citywide recycling program despite pressure from the beverage industry. In 1973, Davis became the second municipality in California to enact “radical” limits on growth (Lofland, 2004: 138). In 1975, the City Council also approved “the first energy conservation building code in the country” (qtd. in *ibid*: 140). That same year, idealist developers Mike and Judy Corbett began construction on Village Homes, a neighborhood of more than 200 fence-free solar residences (including several with sod and landscape-covered roofs), apartments, and a housing cooperative that was fully designed to allow natural living and energy-efficiency. Upon completion in 1981,

Village Homes quickly joined the likes of California's first certified farmers' market as one of Davis' defining landmarks, winning international accolades and drawing visits from celebrities, planning and architecture enthusiasts, ecotourists, and other curious passers by (Fitch, 1998; Francis, 2003). Over the rest of the decade, the city also created groundbreaking land-use initiatives for preventing sprawl, protecting farmland, and expanding the city's greenbelt of bike paths and wildlife preserves. In a sign of things to come, 1986 saw one of the first citizen-driven ballot initiatives to fight a proposed commercial development. The project, a two-level shopping center of chain retailers, was defeated in favor of expanding the city's Central Park (Lofland, 2004: 142).

The precise character of the community may fluctuate in response to growth and changing demographics (with more than eight percent population growth between 2000 and 2005, Davis is one of the fastest growing cities in California), yet the social norms represented by the above examples have largely remained a part of the town's culture. Even more than in the 1980s, booming income and property values in the 1990s heralded the arrival of families without ties to the university, moving to Davis for its public schools and commuting increasingly great distances to work. Yet the '90s also saw the election of a Green Party mayor and ushered in some of the 'quirkiest' moments yet for the city: a tunnel for frogs under a new overpass, an anti-'light pollution' ordinance, a noise violation for a snorer, and attempts to preserve "historic potholes." All in all, the ideals of environmental leadership and small town character are visible time and again.

Before turning to a more detailed look at the case of the controversial Target store, several additional events are worth discussion. The first is another attempt to bring big corporate retail to Davis. In this case, a Borders bookstore and several other major chain stores were proposed in the city's downtown. The entire development was vocally opposed by community members and small businesses who accused the corporate

retailers of unethical labor practices and feared they would steal customers, particularly from the city's cherished independent bookstores. Despite fervent protest and even lawsuits, the development went ahead (without public referendum) and opened in 1998. In the recent cases where growth issues *have* gone to referenda, however, the community has turned them down. (Even Councilman Don Saylor, now the city's mayor pro-tem, concedes that Davis has "had a reputation for being difficult to interact with for business and economic development.") A 1997 poll about widening the narrow vehicle underpass that serves as the principal traffic artery from a freeway into the downtown area was rejected, with opponents arguing that it would destroy the town's "old-fashioned, pedestrian-friendly [...] small town character" (qtd. in Fitch, 1998: ch. 8). In 2000, voters passed a powerful ordinance to require voter approval before the city would allow almost any development on open space at the edge the city limit (City of Davis, 2006). This, in turn, led to the defeat five years later of the proposed housing subdivision mentioned above, called Covell Village. Despite having Village Homes mastermind and former mayor Mike Corbett as its principle spokesman and its attempts to speak to local cultural expectations as a nominally sustainable, progressive and relatively 'landmark' development, the proposal was defeated by 59 percent of voters following a heated campaign. These anecdotes, representative of the conflict inspired in Davis by the arrival of corporate retail and of resistance to further growth, set the context for the heated campaign surrounding the Target proposal in 2006.

A 'Green' Target for Davis

In 2005, two members of the Davis City Council informally approached the Minneapolis-based Target Corporation with the prospect of the company bringing one of its department stores to the community. The initiative came out of the Business and

Economic Development Commission's 2003 community survey, which had found an interest in general merchandise and affordable shopping opportunities. According to Target Regional Development Manager John Dewes, the Fortune 500 Company had considered a Davis location in the past but had always opted for neighboring areas, thinking the city and its anti-corporate culture might be too much trouble:

“We understood that even though two council members had approached us, I don't think anybody here had any elusions that it was something that, compared to cities that we were interested in, that it was going to be an easy process, just based on what we know about Davis, just in terms of the development history in the town.”

Though there are several other Target stores within less than 30 miles of Davis – which records prove people from Davis were patronizing – a Target *in* the City would be the first 'big-box'-type store there, a prospect that Dewes and his team expected to raise more than a few eyebrows. They conducted a full year of research before submitting a preliminary proposal to the city, knowing even when they did they would need to “do more” to earn support from the community (St. John, 2006). Target's initial proposal for a 136,842-square foot store thus included registering as a 'green building' and applying for LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification, connecting it to the city's network of bike paths, supporting an extra bus line, and planting 250 trees.

City commissions were asked for input, and though Budget and Finance approved, Planning reported against the design and land-use, just as they had with the housing subdivision the year before. At this point the City Council, a majority of whom favored the project, elected to move forward and brace for the onslaught of public opinion. The Davis Chamber of Commerce came out in strong support, though some local businesses mobilized in opposition, including the owners of an independent nursery and the local Ace Hardware. A major concern on the part of many locals was that the proposed 19-acre development, anchored by the Target store but involving three other

retailers (to be selected by Target Corporation), would draw shoppers away from the city's downtown. Yet none of the existing stores downtown or elsewhere in Davis offered everything a Target could, and records produced by the corporation showed 276,000 non-cash purchases had been made by people from Davis at other area Target stores in 2004 alone (Saylor, 2006). Many also argued that affordable retail options were desperately needed to keep the city the economically inclusive (and student-friendly) place it maintained that it was; some people just did not like the *idea* of a Target store.

Although vague, a commonly voiced opposition to Target was the fear that it would bring to Davis the generic strip-mall landscape of 'Anytown, USA.' Ironically, a promotional line from Target's corporate website sums up exactly what the people of Davis feared most about having one of its stores in their town: "Step into any Target store in any city in the country, and you know exactly what to expect." As one Davis resident wrote on his weblog, "for me, what makes Davis special is that it is a small college town without a lot of the huge commercial enterprises that blight our countryside across this nation." And, despite having been invited to submit a proposal to the city as a result of perceived public demand, Target was widely painted by its opposition as an outside corporate giant looking to cover every patch of land with impersonal retail centers. "If we cannot keep a giant corporate conglomerate out of Davis," wrote the same blogger, "what hope do we have in the rest of the country?" (Davis, 2006)

Critics contended that allowing a Target store could set a dangerous precedent within town, opening the door to more 'big-box' stores. In response, the city and developers were careful to make the Target project appear an exception, creating an amendment to the General Plan specifically for the 19-acre site in question and nowhere else in town (Davis Enterprise, 2006). To some opponents this was not enough, however, as Davis was already exhibiting signs of counter-normative "trouble" right in the very

area where the Target was proposed. Adjacent to the relatively new Mace Ranch neighborhood in East Davis, the Target site is in line with a recently developed commercial strip just off of Interstate 80 known disparagingly to some long-time residents as “God and Gas” because its principal features include a gas station and what is for Davis an unusually large and visible church. In the words of one Davis resident, the site would become “God, gas and shop now. Of course this is a freeway mall.”

To mitigate opposition, Target and its backers worked to make further concessions to the community. According to a Davis city planner I interviewed, “through the public input and city review process, making the project ‘greener’ than the average Target was something they heard as a priority and responded to.” Among the additional proposals were more trees to shade the parking lot, a three-acre wooded greenbelt to provide a natural buffer around the project, recharge stations and preferred parking for electric vehicles, and “the use of wood, stone and other design features to make the store unique to Davis” – all at considerable costs to Target (Annon-Lovering et al, 2006). In addition to receiving the LEED certification, these eco-friendly compromises thus made the proposed Target more culturally sincere both in terms of the expectation of environmental sustainability and as a potentially very unique ‘Davis-y’ landmark. As the *Davis Enterprise* newspaper noted in an October 2006 endorsement, “Davis’ Target store will be an environmental showplace as well – one of only 10 retail stores worldwide [...] that have achieved LEED certification.”

Not everyone agreed however, and lobbying remained fierce on both sides. The prospect of a Target coming to Davis immediately presented the community with a cultural dilemma. Christina, a local attorney, remembers the contradiction:

“The whole theory of let’s save gas, let’s not drive anywhere, that get’s thrown out because, you know, ‘Davis can’t have a Target, that would just be embarrassing.’

Everybody let's face it goes to Target, but it didn't matter that we all have to drive all the way to [the neighboring city of] Woodland to go to Target, but it would have just been too humiliating to actually have a Target in town... 'Ok well wait a minute, this Target is really extra-special so OK maybe we'll consider it.'"

City Council meetings routinely lasted into the early morning hours as community members spoke, often loudly. Police were even called to one meeting that was brought to a halt by a group of protesters. The issue was contentious enough that the City Council moved to put the decision up to a city-wide referendum. "Some number of people clearly believed that this was anathema to the Davis identity, and there're lots of good reasons for that," explained Councilman Saylor, who supported the proposal. "It was clear that we were dealing with something that was close the core of what people believed the community should be, so we believed that it was a good idea for it to not be an edict from on high changing the culture of the community." The result, ballot Measure K, was the first time a Target store had ever appeared on a ballot (St. John, 2006). "Obviously we did not go in to the project with the idea that there was going to be a public referendum," Dewes explained, but they decided to wage a campaign. "I think that showed that management felt very strongly in conjunction with our supporters there in the city that we had a project that had come a long way and accommodated a lot of the concerns in the community," he said.

What followed was an extremely expensive political battle, in which the 'Yes on K' side alone spent hundreds of thousands of dollars. Target hired a local design firm to run their publicity campaign, which included neighborhood meetings and information sessions, booths at community events, teams of local supporters going door to door, and in-depth, information-heavy mailers (printed on recycled paper of course) sent to everyone in town and published in the local newspaper. Jen Baker, principal of the firm that Target hired, explained the campaign's strategy: "It's a green store, Davis gets to be

cutting edge, leading edge again, and it's convenient – use less gas, shop local.” In a final touch, revealing just how much Target was willing to change their image to appeal to community sensibilities, the corporation whose advertising strategy has long revolved entirely around the color red released a full arsenal of bright green campaign materials declaring “go green,” and featuring only a small target logo in white imprinted on a green leaf. In Baker's words, “the fact that their branding department let us do that is huge.”

Playing the growth machine role expected of the press, the *Davis Enterprise* newspaper endorsed the Target plan, as did the much larger *Sacramento Bee* and the university's *California Aggie*. The *Enterprise* (2006) even invoked the community's cultural identity, arguing that “Davis has a reputation for environmental leadership, and Target is stepping up to fit that reputation.” At the same time, however, an ‘anti-growth machine’ of sorts went into action as well – coalitions of alternative or ‘shadow’ institutions of their pro-growth parallels. For example, though the Chamber of Commerce was in favor of Target, many members of the distinct Davis Downtown Business Association were opposed (and the association itself remained neutral). Likewise, the local alternative press – particularly the quarterly *Flatlander* newspaper and numerous local blogs – editorialized against the measure.

Nonetheless, by October, at least according to a number of pro-Target community members writing in the *Enterprise*, there was “widespread community support” among Davisites for the Target: “We've heard from third-generation Davisites, long-time downtown business owners, seniors, teachers, students, moms, dads and kids who want to shop more in town” (Annon-Lovering et al, 2006). Though the *Enterprise* was considered a biased source on the subject by many of those opposed to Measure K, the summation proved accurate. Measure K won approval from voters in November 2006 by

a slim margin of 51.5 to 48.5 percent. Though the result was extremely close, with a high 66 percent voter turnout, we can say it was at least conclusive.

Analysis

In examining the case of the ‘green’ Target in Davis, this paper is interested in how local cultural expectations are manifested and how the components of the urban growth machine can be seen to be adapting to them. We must remember, of course, that nearly half of voters were unconvinced by Target’s campaign. Indeed, there is the argument to be made that Target essentially did what multinational corporations do best – outspend their opposition and ‘overcome resistance.’ It is thus important to emphasize that Target’s efforts at cultural sincerity cannot be said to explain the outcome; what is interesting is that the corporation made the effort.

The local growth machine did in fact – at least on the surface – act largely as the model would predict: a City Council majority came out in favor, as did the Chamber of Commerce and all mainstream local and regional media. In addition to the ‘anti-growth machine’ institutions described above, notable exceptions to this included a number of local business owners, older social and political elites, and some other traditional power brokers who were vocally opposed to Target, though their loss may be seen as a sign of their declining influence. “It’s no longer businesses in town that have a say in the Chamber of Commerce, it’s the real-estate community,” observed Eileen, the leader of an anti-corporate citizens’ group that opposed the development. This demonstrates a more complex sort of growth coalition than the basic theorizing in which the business community is paramount (Harding, 1995: 42), suggesting rather that local business owners are relatively powerless compared to major corporations, even though a local, community-friendly approach still seems instrumental to success. Also, with regard to

the City Council's endorsement (even though the final decision was left to the voters), a perspective among some of those interviewed was that their demand for a say in the matter should be viewed as a response to government's failure to adequately regulate growth on its own (a reality that would come as no surprise to Logan and Molotch but is perhaps more shocking in a community with such strong anti-growth norms). Nancy, another local organizer who opposed the project, contended that the City Council neglected its responsibility to be the voice of its constituents and challenge incompatible developments. By allowing a public referendum, the Council could claim they were letting democracy take its course when, in Nancy's view, at that point democracy became "a sham" anyway because of the huge amounts of money on the side of the developers.

Frankly, without the availability of contemporaneous exit polling or large-N public opinion research in Davis, one might offer any number of explanations for the outcome. A detailed comparative causal analysis (of the type suggested by Ragin, 1987) could help get at the answer, but certainly the direct relationship between the particular social norms described in this paper and the project's success should not be overemphasized. Again, the point here is simply that cultural sincerity played a role. What is undeniable is that, due in part perhaps to its strongly projected identity as a place ready to resist value-free development and growth, Davis has long been spared the scale of outside development many cities its size have seen, despite otherwise being a prime market for it (available land, educated and relatively wealthy residents). For Logan and Molotch (2007: 14), a community's avoidance of or resistance to value-free development is dependent on the strategic utility of the growth machine: "Neighborhoods whose obliteration would better serve growth goals are subject to the strongest pressure." Yet in this case, we might argue it is almost the opposite: through strong expectations of what acceptable development looks like, combined with the power to resist that comes with

relative affluence and involvement as discussed in existing growth machine literature³, the city and its residents may exert more pressure on development than vice versa.

Previous development proposals have clearly been hindered by a failure to meet certain cultural expectations or appear culturally sincere. For example, Covell Village, the nominally progressive subdivision defeated just a year before the Target store was approved, was tarnished almost from the outset by accusations of general insincerity and a lack of creative vision: “It was another suburban-type community and the average home was over 600,000 dollars,” said Eileen, “and yet they were advertising it as affordable housing.” To one young resident interviewed, “that is not what I would call an affordable house [...] it’s just going to be this gentrified, boring stucco thing out there.” And to Nancy, “all of the housing north of the little town common areas that they talked about, all of that mostly was McMansions.” The implications of these views are that the proposal would have been more palatable had it been more unique, something Target worked hard to achieve.

Likewise, there was a wide difference in perception of the subdivision’s environmental credentials. In the words of one member of the Covell Village partners, “it couldn’t have been any greener,” yet according to one-time City Council candidate Roy, who called the proposal “the first real attempt at greenwashing” in the city, the green components were insubstantial. The same would-be developer also conceded that his campaign had suffered from what he described as a general “ignorance” of the local political scene. Many other residents interviewed tended to concur that the campaign could have been run in a more Davis-friendly way. Most importantly it seems, the huge amount of money spent and the deluge of glossy campaign literature inundating everyone’s mailboxes did not endear the developers to the community as friendly, small-town locals (even though they were far more local than the Minneapolis-based Target

Corporation). As one local business owner put it, “it became known as a big corporate developer project,” and Corbett, the former mayor and developer of Village Homes, was widely viewed as a front, which people resented. In hindsight, hiring outside campaign ‘experts’ might have been a mistake, conceded the developer. If he did it again, he explained, “rather than hire somebody from Sacramento to go knocking on doors and saying vote for Covell Village or whatever it is, we’re gonna have Martha from down the street” appealing to the community as a neighbor. Nancy summed up her feelings about the project’s insincerity as follows: “Mike Corbett, known for Village Homes, became the front man shill for a project that they tried to sell as new urbanism, but was really just another suburban development.”

In contrast, a central component of Target’s campaign from the beginning was to appeal to Davis voters as a unique store that fit with local culture and identity. The company immediately hired a local design firm to manage essentially all of its publicity in town and even create its own campaign materials. The local firm, in turn, ran a totally different sort of campaign than that of previous proposals. As designer Jen Baker explained, “I looked at what happened with Covell Village and tried to do the opposite. [...] We really tried to just lay it out for people and let them make their own decisions, and we garnered as much grassroots support as possible.” While Covell Village never escaped the stigma of being ‘just another suburban development,’ Target made a concerted effort to present itself not only as a store that the people of Davis could use, but also as a unique landmark for the city as the ‘greenest Target ever built.’ Christina seemed to speak for many of those interviewed when she explained that “it appealed to me that it’s going to be special and different. I thought it would bring focus to Davis in that, ‘oh wow, Davis has this really cool Target that nobody else has.’” Or, at the very least, “Davis can tolerate a special Target,” she said.

It is also worth considering that Target may have in a sense *benefited* from being an outsider, at least in comparison with local developers. Though some land-use scholars expect local “farmer-developers” to take “advantage of their ‘old timer’ status and well-established political and social connections” to get their way (see Logan and Molotch, 2007: 118-119), Davisites may have had higher expectations of Corbett and his partners because of their roots (expectations that they could not meet, particularly once their neighborliness was seen as a front and their efforts as insincere), whereas Target’s perhaps unexpected display of local sensitivity may help explain its ability to win over some skeptical locals.

In a final – if perhaps initially unwitting – act of cultural sincerity, Target even had just the right location (with the help of the city, of course). My conversations with Davisites confirmed that proposals in the center of town or on long undeveloped areas with sentimental value to residents (such as open fields or agricultural land) were likely to be inherently controversial, but the proposed site of the Target development had far fewer such idiosyncrasies (despite the afore-mentioned ‘God and Gas’ concern). In a location along a freeway actually zoned for light industrial development in a much newer part of Davis, Target was dealing with a space that is not only ideal for ‘big box’ retail, but also guaranteed less nostalgia or sentimentality from the community. To illustrate, Anna Joy, a young resident who grew up in Davis, remarked of the fallow field surrounding an oak tree and an all-but-abandoned barn that Covell Village developers had hoped to build on, “we think of [that area] almost as off limits.” Of the Target location, she said bluntly, “we don’t care so much what our freeway space looks like.” In Nancy’s words, “The location was just ideal for Target,” or, to another resident, Clyde, “If you’re gonna do it in Davis, that’s the place to do it.”

Conclusions

Theories of urban development in economic sociology have paid surprisingly little attention to local culture. Structural or Marxist theories leave little room for individual agency, and more dominant growth coalition models still tend to undervalue the community social norms and expectations that in fact produce the unique cultural contexts in which development politics take place. Of course, it is difficult to say *how much* of a difference Target's eco-friendly concessions made to the voters, and anything from slick campaigning to favorable local circumstance may have contributed to Target's success. But in examining the processes through which the developers and the community negotiated this and other proposals, this paper has shown how cultural expectations are represented and enacted in relation to controversial urban development proposals. It has also shown how adapting to better fit community expectations may aid developers in their ability to win approval.

In spite of even the most engaged and powerful communities – of which this paper contends Davis is one – the growth machine is relentless. In any community, controversial developments will come along and opponents will, as the saying goes, win some and lose some. Schneider (1992) found that growth machine politics could be undermined by the practical economic rationales of businesses and residents when growth is not seen as a financial benefit. Others show how a community's social status or the activation of local organizations can impact its ability to wage resistance.⁴ This paper has shown how less tangible cultural considerations can impact growth decisions as well, adding the evidence of the importance of cultural sincerity to these other models.

In Davis, community expectations of cultural sincerity had a clear impact on the Target project not only in that it was voted on at all, but on how the proposed development actually looked. In other words, these expectations influenced what Diane

Vaughan (1998: 39) calls the ‘cultures of production’ of the developers. Local culture, seen here in expectations of culturally sincere development, casts a powerful shadow over decision making within its sphere of influence. The result is not unlike what Vaughan (1998) found in her landmark study, that organizational decision making was highly influenced by precedent, outside expectations, perceived pressures and individual personalities. Logan and Molotch’s (2007: 32) growth machines unite emphatically behind “the notion that free markets alone should determine land use,” yet in the case of Measure K, we have seen that profit-maximizing organizations *will* compromise with local culture, even at no small cost and when no law directly forces them to do so.

That this cultural rationality (and short-term economic ‘irrationality’) clearly operates in the politics of urban development in highly-involved communities like Davis has wide-reaching implications for development processes in other communities. While not all places share the same issues as dominant concerns (indeed, they are by definition culturally specific), in every community one would expect to find some form of cultural sincerity or other local expectations that would play a role in development if given the chance. And that Davis is probably ahead of the curve on the issues of environmentalism and the defense of local character makes the city all the more valuable a laboratory in which to conduct such research, as these concerns *are* of growing visibility in communities throughout the United States. It is reassuring then that local culture and identity can express themselves powerfully enough to affect the cultures of production of corporate developers and other components of the urban growth machine. Environmental ingenuity and the preservation of local character show no sign of disappearing as dearly held expectations in Davis and elsewhere; if corporate retail or other popularly resisted forms of growth are to continue to find success in communities like Davis, they will likely have to take cultural expectations sincerely into account.

Notes

¹ A local real-estate developer, expressing surprise at the outcome, described the Davis activist community in an interview: “If you look at their credo, which is kind of anti-big box, you know that gets much more to the base of who they are: anti-materialistic, anti-consumer [sic], all those kinds of things. It was a much more important issue for these people than really [the housing development] would be from any visceral or ideological sense.” And yet the opposite outcome occurred.

² The sociological writing on norms provides some useful language for our understanding. Scott (1971: 72) understands norms in terms of the “reinforcements” (rewards or punishments) of a given social environment. Gibbs (1965: 589), listing the explanations provided by nearly a dozen other scholars, concludes that the key definitional features of a norm are collective evaluation of what behavior should be, collective expectation of what it will be, and reactions to behavior “including attempts to apply sanctions or otherwise induce a particular kind of conduct.”

³ A comprehensive literature review is omitted for space considerations, but see also Molotch (1976), Logan (1978), Logan and Schneider (1981), and Schneider (1992), among others, for development of the growth machine thesis and discussion of stratification between communities of different statuses and their respective abilities to resist unfavorable development.

⁴ See the authors in note 3, particularly Logan (1978) and Logan and Schneider (1981), among others.

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