

A GROWTH MACHINE'S PLAN B: LEGITIMATING DEVELOPMENT WHEN THE VALUE-FREE GROWTH IDEOLOGY IS UNDER FIRE

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ABSTRACT: *Growth machine theory portrays the promotion and legitimation of urban development strictly in terms of the value-free growth ideology—the claim that growth benefits everyone, that it is a collective good. Based on an analysis of planning documents, newspapers, interviews, and public meetings in San Diego, California, this research argues that the persuasiveness of the value-free growth ideology is highly variable. Pro-growth elites bolster the ideology with a range of secondary arguments when the costs of growth are rising. The way growth is both supported and criticized by the same people suggests that they have more fluid and contradictory relationships to urban growth than machine theory's dichotomy of “the machine versus residents” implies. This inconsistency can work to the advantage of pro-growth elites.*

Promoters of growth, according to growth machine theory, legitimate their actions with an ideology of value-free growth, the claim that development is a universal good. According to this perspective, growth increases cultural opportunities for residents, expands the tax base, and creates jobs. Logan and Molotch (1987) counter these arguments easily: only select residents enjoy the cultural benefits, the cost of new infrastructure often exceeds the additions to the tax base, and the new jobs frequently go to outsiders (Molotch & Logan, 1984). Growth looks good only if the benefits are considered and questions about the distribution of costs are steadfastly ignored.

Logan and Molotch describe the ideology and then criticize its factual errors. They outline conditions under which the ideology may be strained, thus weakening machines, and describe policies like developing low-polluting industries, which elites adopt to reduce the negative consequences of growth. In this portrayal, the ideology of growth is little more than a small set of logically connected static propositions that in some unidentified way reduce opposition to development.

Unfortunately, save for a few intriguing comments, Logan and Molotch's subsequent work has not elaborated on the study of ideology. One of the most interesting pieces is Warner and Molotch (2000), which mentions a rhetorical trick of growth machines,

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namely the “job/housing balance” (p. 61, see also Molotch, 1993). When the number and location of jobs are in equilibrium with the available housing, a jurisdiction has enough housing for everyone and low unemployment. This situation is as elusive as it is ideal: often, there are not enough jobs, necessitating the spurring of business, or there is not enough housing for the workers, requiring residential construction. Either way, growth is the solution to local problems.

Other researchers have followed Molotch and Logan in placing little weight on ideology, except to debate the relative merits of claims and counterclaims about growth’s impacts (e.g., Freudenburg, 1990; Hill & Durand, 1988; and not directly connected to growth machine theory but answering the same question in the planning field, Burchell, 1997). How growth advocates actively perpetuate their credibility or how anyone reconciles the value-free ideology with other beliefs has not been seen as a significant research question. In recent years, this has begun to change.

Cox (1999) offers a useful distinction between two kinds of growth ideologies. One links growth to a positive symbol to which all residents can relate, such as a professional sports team. The other kind of ideology encourages a geographically specific “us versus them” mentality, blaming outsiders for the costs of growth or equally important, the costs of decline. Both types of ideologies foster images of communities in which the internal distribution of the costs and benefits of growth are not problematic.

Cox’s typology provides a route to numerous refinements in growth machine theory. It links growth to different ways of thinking about community (e.g., identification with a hometown); it makes it easier to identify a range of machine rhetorical strategies; and most important, it highlights the need to focus on urban decline, a counterpoint situation that raises intriguing questions about what precisely is so troublesome about growth.

Wilson’s work goes further. Wilson (1996) examines how downtown boosters in Indianapolis use a set of metaphors like the “city as a diseased body” to shape how redevelopment is understood. These metaphors even seep into the language of the area’s black residents who had the most to lose in the revitalization effort. Wilson argues that “in cities . . . where the contradictory drives to enhance use values and exchange values of land blatantly conflict, metaphors lodged in growth discourses become an instrument for mitigating this tension at least momentarily” (pp. 72–73). Wilson and Jonas (1999) argue that

Molotch’s discussion of discourse and ideology can be seen as superficial insofar as it ignores a much deeper process: the power of machine language to shape everyday social life that enables growth discourses to gain normalcy. [L]anguage, [they continue], is not an unproblematic ideologizing element. It is a contested terrain, a set of conceptual spaces for the taking, whose struggle for and control by interest groups is always unstable and transforming (p. 8).

This observation, however, has not been taken to heart in growth machine research.

Instead, it remains unquestioned that machines always use the value-free ideology to legitimate growth. Even in Wilson (1996), the argument that growth is good is the only string on the machine’s guitar. This lacks *prima facie* plausibility, however, given the wide array of explanations that elites created to explain post-World War Two urban decline, their views on growth are apt to be equally complex. In fact, the elite emphasis on the benefits of growth is at most half of the story. While the value-free ideology is likely to resonate in times of high concern about the economy, it can be a sour note during economic booms when the costs of growth are most obvious.

What happens when growth is unwanted? When the benefits of growth are abstract and dubious but the longer commutes, destroyed open space, and overtaxed infrastructure are daily experiences? The situation is potentially destabilizing: the fates of the players in the machine are still linked to growth, yet growth's alleged benefits no longer act as a shield.

How members of the growth coalition continue to pursue their goals can be seen in how growth was legitimated in San Diego at the turn of the twenty-first century. As part of an ongoing project on land use planning in the region involving to date 29 interviews, attendance at over 120 planning meetings, and examination of over 1,000 newspaper articles and government documents, this research tracked the creation of and response to the growth rhetoric of the local Council of Governments, San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG). The way growth was presented demonstrates both the resilience and weakness of machine rhetoric in a changing environment. It also helps situate value-free growth ideology in a historically and geographically specific context, which has only been done previously by Fulton (2001) who argued that the Los Angeles growth machine was fracturing as its middle-class foot soldiers had nothing more to gain from growth.

While the value-free ideology still played a role in justifying growth in the region, many conditions lessened its persuasiveness. Elites shored it up with a variety of other arguments, but the frailty of their innovations suggests a possible long-term change in machine rhetoric. The behavior of politicians and planning professionals, however, stands as a tribute to growth's seductive pull.

THE SAN DIEGO CONTEXT

The pro-growth coalition in the San Diego region attempted to legitimate itself to a diverse population. According to the 2000 census, the county's population of 2.8 million was 55% non-Hispanic white, 27% Hispanic, 9% Asian, 5% African American, and 4% multi-race, Native American or other (local census information available at <http://cart.sandag.org/dw/>). This diversity, however, only mattered during political electoral calculations. Outside of the areas with the heaviest concentrations of minorities, the players in the day-to-day game of land use politics were overwhelmingly middle-aged white property owners. This cohort generated, and was also the target of, the bulk of the ideological persuasion and opposition towards growth. This group and its demographically similar predecessors have long displayed a strong ambivalence towards growth.

Since its Anglo founding in the middle of the nineteenth century, San Diego has grown in boom-and-not-quite-bust cycles (Bunnell, 2002; Shrage, 1998). This economic roller coaster has had an overwhelming impact on the fortunes of land use planning. The negative consequences of rapid growth leads to calls for more planning and slower growth. As the boom collapses, efforts to slow or manage growth are overshadowed by efforts to stimulate the economy. This process has repeated itself in approximately 10-year intervals.

The most notable response to the 1970s boom was a general plan for the city of San Diego, the most populous jurisdiction in the region. The plan encouraged development in existing communities and controlled the timing of growth on vacant land through a system of tiers (Calavita, 1997). Efforts to manage the 1980s boom culminated in a flurry of growth management initiatives in 1988. Only the weakest one, which required a regional general plan, passed (Calavita, 1992; Caves, 1992). As that boom gave way to the deep recession at the end of the Cold War, planning was aggressively attacked by conservatives for inhibiting growth. In this business friendly environment, the city of San Diego eliminated its independent planning department and the parallel department at the county suffered massive cuts.

The Internet and bio-tech boom that followed led to renewed concerns about the costs of growth. In the late 1990s, widely publicized reports by SANDAG (the local Council of Governments) estimated that the population of the entire county would grow by another million by 2020, a 36% increase (San Diego Association of Governments, 1998). In light of the rapid growth experienced at the time, the specter of even more crowded roads and more expensive housing seemed all too real. The idea of another million people in the region was widely seen not as an opportunity but as a cross to bear.

This was not a situation in which the value-free growth ideology had much traction. At an April 2001 SANDAG board meeting, a former suburban mayor nicely summed up the shift away from the growth ideology:

Thirty years ago when I was first elected, I was told that one shouldn't attempt the subject of growth because we'd have the same conversation thirty years later that we're having today and sure enough, they were right. But I was also told that growth pays for itself; it doesn't cost money. In fact, the more growth a city or region enjoys, the better off everyone will be. Therefore we should do everything we can to stimulate growth. Over the past 30 years, I think that argument has gone away. I don't see anyone sitting around this table [elected officials from all the cities in the region plus the county of San Diego] that says that growth doesn't cost money.

At another meeting, inner-city San Diego council members had similar assessments. One observed:

Let me say and I've continued to maintain this position since I've been on the council, new development, new growth must pay for itself. It has not been doing that. Yet the former city manager always contended that growth paid for itself. That has not been true. Park and recreations, libraries, and schools . . . I think they've been doing a good job in paying for those facilities when they would do . . . build the new development. However, that did not include staffing; it did not include street sweepers; it did not include continued maintenance of those same libraries and continued staffing for books etc., etc., for the parks. So all of us shared that and paying for that together with the growth (December 13, 2000).

Another council member, in the same meeting, speculated whether it was possible to quantify the burden each new house represented and noted that when it came to infrastructure,

What's going to happen as we go down this path [of continued growth is]. . . . like peanut butter; we're going to spread it out on the bread and at some point the peanut butter sandwich isn't going to taste like much.

The above comments are a far cry from the value-free growth ideology that Logan and Molotch describe. And yet, neither city council member, nor others on the city council who expressed similar concerns, rejected growth or attempted to slow it. How then was growth promoted when its ill effects were recognized?

When Growth Doesn't Pay for Itself

The first approach to maintaining a positive attitude about growth was to bolster the value-free growth ideology directly. Externally imposed distortions were blamed for

artificially preventing growth from being an economic boon. Most commonly heard in the city of San Diego were complaints that the unfair distribution of state funds cheated the jurisdiction of tens of millions of dollars each year and that Proposition 13 limited the tax revenues necessary to pay for infrastructure. These attempts to deflect criticism from growth were weak, however, because shifting responsibility did not make the problems go away.

Much more successful than the reinforcements of the value-free growth ideology were a cluster of substitutes. They tended to be complementary and sometimes were linked together as steps in a grander argument for growth. The first substitute was the claim that growth was inevitable. This is a claim that has been used elsewhere in the Sunbelt: Florida (Vogel & Swanson, 1989), New Mexico and Arizona (Logan, 1995), Petaluma, (northern) California (Green, 1977). (Wilson and Wouters, 2003, make no reference to inevitability in their analysis of three Midwestern cities' growth rhetoric.)

SANDAG's analysis of the general plans of region's cities showed that they lacked the housing for all of the additional million people expected by 2020. SANDAG planners campaigned hard to publicize their findings. They tried to persuade the cities to embrace smart growth and build at higher densities while conserving open space. If they had succeeded, the region would have begun to prepare a framework, both legally (i.e., zoning) and practically (i.e., infrastructure) to substantially expand its population even more than already planned—an approach that was common sense to the growth machine. SANDAG, however, encountered skepticism about the need to accept so many more people.

In response, SANDAG commissioned a study of the feasibility of limiting growth. The report, aired for public comment in 2001, was, in fact, the fifth such study since the mid-1970s but the first since 1987, the height of the last economic boom. The new report reached the same conclusions as all its predecessors, but its tone was more emphatic. It bluntly stated growth could not be appreciably slowed by local policies. This finding was lauded by advocates of growth like the Economic Development Corporation and the Building Industry Association but eviscerated by environmentalists who criticized in great detail the demographic assumptions and calculations.

The study reached its conclusion by simulating: (1) restrictions on housing, (2) restrictions on the economy and (3) changes in public expenditures. In the first two scenarios, the damage in terms of increased housing prices and economic decline vastly outweighed the minimal reductions in population growth. The modified public funding simulation looked at a host of policies from raising taxes to reducing pregnancies through additional sex education. The report concluded that the only change in public expenditures that would have a positive impact was one that SANDAG already promoted, namely encouraging high-tech industries.

These ways to slow growth were in part undermined by unique features of the region. Located where the Pacific Rim, the Mexican border, and the Sunbelt converged, San Diego was and was likely to remain a gateway for immigrants. Although domestic immigrants were discouraged by recessions, San Diego was always doing better than somewhere else in the world, making, according to SANDAG, the inflow of international immigrants impervious to local conditions. And while the economy was always better than somewhere else, the weather in coastal San Diego was, on any given day, likely to be better than almost everywhere else on the planet—as a steady stream of tourists and military personnel through the region discovered. This point was not stressed in the report itself but often made in discussions about it.

The researchers who did the analysis distanced themselves from growth. The project manager took great pains to make it clear that the report was not pro-growth. The outside experts brought in to review the research had a similar attitude:

I still say population growth stinks. And I think if SANDAG will . . . say that also, then the citizens will be happier if you acknowledge that. Not everyone agrees with that, I know. I think that the report here shows that it's hard to stop it. It doesn't say that we love it (April 30, 2001).

At the same time the value-free growth ideology was losing credibility, it was becoming irrelevant. It no longer mattered whether growth raised all boats; the region was stuck with it and had to plan accordingly. This was a powerful claim: it got reluctant citizens to acquiesce to growth and professionals and activists skeptical of its benefits to participate in laying its foundations. Inevitability acted like Cox's "us versus them" variant of growth ideology: it projected the costs of growth onto an outside force—demographic trends, which neutralized questions about the distribution of benefits and costs in the *us*. In other words, disillusionment with the value-free growth ideology did not necessarily change policy.

A Moral Appeal

The inevitability argument usually went hand-in-hand with another argument noted in Logan and Molotch (1987) but relatively unseen in San Diego: that the growth would be "our children" (p. 96). Historically, growth in the San Diego region had been the result of massive influxes of immigrants (domestic and international). The 2020 forecast predicted a change: 65% of the additional population would be the result of local births.

This argument masked what would have been an uncomfortable situation if it were given more attention: the children who represented the growth by and large were not the children of the politically active residents who were the major consumers of growth rhetoric. Whites were reproducing near, if not a little below, replacement rates and were disproportionately older. According to the 2000 census, the median age was 39.2 years for non-Hispanic whites versus 24.7 years for all Hispanics and 33.2 for Asians. Much of the internal growth appeared to be from Latinas (although the census revealed that estimates had significantly overestimated birth rates), and the international immigration was only 18% white (SANDAG, 1999, p. 12). Furthermore, the often cited figure of 65% of growth from local births included the children of immigrants. The population growth strictly from those already in the region was 53% (San Diego Association of Governments, 2001, p. 81). When doing its next set of population estimates, for the year 2030, SANDAG stopped publicizing internal/external growth percentages as they were prone to misinterpretation.

Although there were a few bursts of anti-immigrant rhetoric, a link between the racial composition of the growth and anti-growth arguments was not a part of the public discourse on SANDAG's projections. Instead those critical of growth used deracialized (and dehumanized) language, relying on metaphors of growth as cancer and concentrating on the physical manifestations of growth (i.e., growth as cars and houses).

Highlighting the racial composition of the growth would have had high costs for both its advocates and critics. Those in favor of additional growth (or at least of preparing for it) risked a white backlash (not unusual in California) if the new residents were seen as different. Those critical of growth likewise risked being tarnished with the brush of racism if they went into detail about the demographic shifts. The discourse about growth also

ignored the significant growth associated with the new Indian casinos in the backcountry (except for the rural communities adjacent to the reservations).

SMART GROWTH, DUMB GROWTH: DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN TYPES OF DEVELOPMENT

Distinguishing between our children and strangers was one form of a common tactic to legitimate growth in the face of opposition, namely separating the types of growth and attaching different value judgments to them. Molotch and Logan noted that advocates of growth try to maintain the appeal of growth by avoiding its onerous forms (e.g., heavy factories, prisons, toxic dumps). In the 1990s, however, a vastly more ambitious project, smart growth, was underway. Instead of picking and choosing kinds of growth, smart growth was an attempt to reduce the costs of growth by dramatically changing the patterns of development, especially residential (see Burchell, Listokin, & Galley, 2000).

The rhetorical strategy of smart growth was two-fold. First, advocates sharply criticized suburban development over the last 50 years, calling it unsustainable for its dependence on the automobile and its wasteful use of land. Then the smart growth advocates marketed their own ideas, which were a mixture of new technologies, especially in transportation, and traditional ideas about compact neighborhood design.

While the growth management of the 1970s and 1980s proposed to slow development through a variety of building permit caps and moratoria, smart growth discourse in San Diego eschewed such limits as clumsy and ineffective. It gave little consideration to the possibility that the smartest policy was to stabilize the population and aim to make the economy sustainable. Advocacy of stopping growth was seen as a fringe environmental position.

Smart growth reduced the problems of growth to one question: where to put it. Urbanized communities were good; greenfields were bad. Or, as a member of SANDAG's Board of Director's claimed, "Development is not the problem; the pattern of development is the problem" (March 8, 2002). Any other question about growth, like the availability of water for a million more people, drifted to the periphery. By claiming that the problem of growth had been its distribution (a technical problem that could be adjusted) Smart growth encouraged a political climate in which the failures of past growth could be distanced from the promises of future growth.

Growth and the Quality of Life

The argument that smart growth would not replicate the problems of the past growth was sometimes carried further. Smart growth promised not only to avoid repeating the failures of past growth but also to correct them. The Sprawl Watch (n.d.) website neatly condensed this into a suggested sound bite that went a step beyond the SANDAG board member: "Development is not the problem; it is really the solution." If low housing densities caused traffic congestion by making every trip require a car, then more density and mixed uses would encourage walking and increase the viability of mass transit, thus reducing the demand for cars.

The most heavy-handed linkage between positive externalities and growth was a kind of a value-free growth ideology for the jaded: growth was not linked to the promise of jobs or to civic pride but to specific amenities. Communities that were willing to accept growth would find money flowing towards them. To return to one of the earlier quoted San Diego City Council members:

those cities or planning areas or whatever willing to take those additional units are going to get a bigger slice of the transportation pie than those that aren't The other problem we have is that we have to go backwards because we have some areas in Mid-city . . . that really lack the facilities—parks and schools. In order to get those folks to accept those additional numbers [of housing units above current zoning], we're going to have to say, "Okay, not only do you get new streets or transportation system or whatever, we're gonna maybe build your library for you or give you some other amenities and get you caught up with the newer areas in the northern part of the city (Dec. 13, 2000).

This is extortion to grow: neglected communities, which in San Diego tended to already be the densest, would not receive what was recognized as their due unless they were willing to accept even more growth.

The End of Value-Free Growth Ideology?

One of the most striking features about these ways of legitimating growth was, taken individually, their potential weakness. Whereas the pure form of value-free growth ideology promised good things coming spontaneously from growth, the alternatives and modifications to it worked to gain grudging acceptance. That acceptance, however, only came at the cost of resentment. The positive benefits associated with growth in these situations had a coercive streak. The weakness of having to fall back on these arguments was most apparent at a key point: if growth was not a universal good, then the basis for asking people to make sacrifices was undermined.

Indeed, SANDAG's efforts to get the local cities to increase the housing densities in preparation for the additional million by 2020 failed, though how badly depended in each jurisdiction largely on the strength of the institutional support for growth. At one extreme, the city of San Diego, whose land use planning staff and planning commission embraced SANDAG's rhetoric, and, which had a number of developer friendly officials, would have increased its residential capacity for its share of future growth had it not been for political missteps in the last months of its general plan update. At the other extreme were the wealthy enclave suburbs that considered SANDAG population forecasts irrelevant because they were out of vacant buildable land. In the middle were approximately a dozen suburbs that had a range of generally negative reactions (though several of the poorer, more diverse suburban cities were, as a practical matter, geared toward extensive growth). Rather than accept the demographic figures as a mandate to increase their residential zoning, a number of suburban elected officials were dismayed to discover how much building was implicit in their general plans and considered decreasing the residential densities.

It was not only elected officials who were uneasy about the growth. At the same time that SANDAG was promoting fairly modest density increases, grassroots efforts in several suburbs passed ballot initiatives requiring voter approval for any residential construction above what their general plans already specified, effectively banning upzones.

Did the need to use alternate justifications for accepting growth mean that the value-free growth ideology was dead or dying? Simply put, no. During the time period covered in this research, the notion that growth, in the abstract, was a good thing was often mentioned or assumed in the media and at planning meetings. Jobs were, as one developer put it, the sacred cow. Any attempt to slow or stop growth was instantly measured against a yardstick of its impact on the economy. Concern about slowing growth was a

pre-emptive argument against new taxes (even to cover infrastructure deficits) and an obstacle to the implementation of adequate development impact fees. Local jurisdictions assisted growth in numerous ways, including funding the Economic Development Corporation, proactively working with developers and keeping taxes low.

The Meaning of the Growth Rhetoric

Three conclusions can be drawn from persistence of pro-growth views and actions. First, it reinforces a point from Wilson's work: machine rhetoric is more complex than the main corpus of growth machine theory recognizes. Specifically, the value-free ideology is the default, recessionary argument for growth. Growth is the recognized solution to unemployment. It loses its luster in times of low unemployment, but its shine is restored by economic troubles.

The contextual nature of responses to growth can be seen in how the SANDAG Board of Directors responded to the report on the feasibility of slowing growth. The board did not formally discuss it until after the ripples of September 11 hit the local economy, especially the tourism industry. This muted the concern for putting the brakes on the growth that seemed so unstoppable when the report was requested months earlier. An exchange between the new San Diego mayor, who claimed, as a broad principle, that growth should only be encouraged if it falls below an optimal rate, and a suburban mayor, who doubted the sincerity of his willingness to separate himself from growth when it came on too fast, epitomizes this:

Suburban mayor: I think if IBM came to the city of San Diego on September 5th and said, "We're moving our corporate headquarters here; can you help us?" I think you would have—The mayor of San Diego (jokingly interrupting): The economy was down on September 5th (October 12, 2001).

This was not economics robotically determining the rhetoric of growth proponents and critics. Instead, it reveals a more complex relationship to growth than what growth machine theory, and urban political economy more generally, allows.

The Incoherence of Growth Attitudes

The San Diego City Council members quoted earlier for their skepticism of growth were in fact very visible supporters of controversial developments. The one who was so concerned about street sweepers and library staffing problems made support for a downtown ballpark (with \$20 million a year in bond payments for 30 years) the center piece of a failed mayoral bid. He claimed it would create jobs and eradicate blight, even though unemployment was at record lows and the ballpark would remove thousands of residential units from the general plan, despite the acute housing shortage (Huard, 1999). The council member who called each new housing unit a burden supported minimum densities for the zoning code and was closely associated with a massive military base reuse project that critics considered a developer give away.

Warner and Molotch (2000) noted that one of the ways in which development continued despite opposition is that jurisdictions acted incoherently, putting on the brakes with one policy while hitting the accelerator with another. Governments do not have a monopoly on this, however. It has long been claimed that public opinion is either random or too diffuse to be meaningful (e.g., Converse, 1964; Domhoff, 2002; but see also

Page & Shapiro, 1992). But seeing only chaos in politics (or seeing certain players or levels of analysis as irrelevant because they are chaotic) is a dead end.

Fragmented Cognition

Strauss's research on fragmented cognition suggests a way to make sense of inconsistency. During lengthy interviews, working-class men claimed, depending on the context, both that "you can't fight the system" and that "you can achieve anything you want" (Strauss, 1990, p. 313; Strauss, 1997, see also Czarniawska, 1997). These contradictory ideas were not randomly jostling about in the interviewees' minds but rather were internalized (and sometimes rationalized) in patterned ways connected to personal histories. Strauss recognizes that cognitive conflicts may be affected by broad economic conditions but also slight changes in cues (and recognition of contradiction), even leading to switching gears in mid-sentence.

This, of course, does not mean that people respond to cues like automatons. The outer bounds of such inconsistencies are constrained by institutions that establish norms and police them. Elected officials who must balance competing interests and members of the public who are bombarded by conflicting views likely display the most variability, while those who promote a particular viewpoint as a full-time job display the least.

Contradictions as a Growth Machine Advantage

Highlighting cognitive slippage in local politics leads to suggestive conclusions. If people involved in local growth politics do not necessarily act with consistency, then their attitudes and actions about particular projects or policies are, in a sense, up for grabs. Their responses are not foreordained and cannot be read off the objective situation (as understood by the nearest urban researcher). The mantra "growth is good" appeals to a broad spectrum of people at least part of the time, especially as growth is so closely associated with community well-being. On the other hand, fears about the neighborhood changing, accusations that developers are the puppet masters of local government, and environmental concerns are also widespread.

Whether advocates of growth are able to legitimate their plans depends in part on how successful their critics are in bringing to bear equally, if not more powerful, rhetorical strategies (Roe, 1993). Opponents of riverboat gambling in Missouri, for example, were able to generate considerable opposition based on framing casinos as a moral, not job, issue (Louishomme, 2003). And in neighborhood after neighborhood, those opposed to more intense development can draw on deep-rooted ideas of the single-family detached house as the embodiment of the American Dream, galvanizing supporters with a widely resonating message.

While people's responses are partially unpredictable, this linguistic instability is likely to work to the advantage of pro-growth elites. Unlike the working class attitudes towards capital that Strauss observes in which workers can feel exploited either during a boom or a recession, the appeal of slowing growth can quickly waver in the face of economy uncertainty. This wavering gives the machine a systematic advantage, per Warner and Molotch's point that growth elites have the resources to continually push for their position until they win. Once a building project has begun in earnest, the battlefield is won and the open space is irreversibly destroyed. As one San Diego community leader put it, "the last crop you'll ever plant on a piece of land is asphalt."

CONCLUSION

Urban political economy must pay more attention to ideology and not simply as abstract worldviews that can be studied in isolation in specimen jars, but as conflicting rhetorics that people use in contradictory ways. These contradictions must not be seen as epiphenomenal but as having real effects.

Continued attention to ideology would likely reveal even more complexity. Despite the demographic diversity of San Diego, the SANDAG growth rhetoric has been mainly focused on a homogenous group: a politically active, disproportionately Republican, white, middle-class core. In regions where a wider range of interests are well organized, or where growth is not seen as inevitable (e.g., Midwestern industrial towns), the dynamics of legitimating growth are likely to be even more complex. Further research could provide a link between growth machine theory and other urban research, like regime theory, which sees power as creating organization out of a “society [that] is incohesive to begin with,” a task whose enormity is all the more apparent when the inconsistency of ideology on the day-to-day level is considered (Stone, 1989, p. 227; Stoker, 1995).

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