

Each of the readings for this paper in some way informed my perspective on planning in developing countries. What I most enjoyed about the readings as a whole is the way that they all in some way challenge the prevailing development or theoretical paradigm by exposing some previously misunderstood concept.

I found the Chang (2002) reading particularly interesting because I had not previously considered policies targeting developing countries today in the context of the development of currently industrialized countries. In particular, the article changed the way I saw the issue of prerequisites for aid. Previously, although these prerequisites seemed to give donor countries a great deal of power to say which countries deserved money and which countries did not, the requirements themselves seemed reasonable to me – minimal government corruption, recognition of property rights, democracy, etc. After reading Chang, however, the requirements no longer seem as reasonable in light of the evidence that governments of developed countries were not meeting the same standards until a much later point in their development.

Teaford (1984) supports Chang's theory when he discusses the difficulties U.S. city governments faced near the end of the 19th century. I was surprised that U.S. city governments took a great deal of criticism while in fact they were performing relatively well. I had never thought about the fact that some of the United States' most impressive city public works – Central Park, the Boston Public Library, Golden Gate Park – came out of the era when cities were most being denigrated for poor service and corrupt actions. Perhaps this

suggests that developing country cities today deserve a bit more leeway in how they handle their affairs, if these cities too are being heavily criticized when they are actually making some impressive strides.

The imbalance within U.S. cities that Teaford discusses, in which impressive projects and infrastructure provision was undertaken while city governments struggled to keep pace with problems of population growth, etc., seems similar Hirschman's (1958) theory of "unbalanced" growth. I was unfamiliar with economic growth theories prior to reading this article, and I was surprised because Hirschman's point about unbalanced growth seems intuitive, and yet he was challenging a commonly held development belief that growth should be balanced. Booms and busts seem to be a fact of life in modern capitalist societies. It seems natural that one booming industry would fuel other, seemingly unrelated industries. This happened in the San Francisco Bay area with the dot-com boom. Demand for computers, office space, furniture, restaurants, housing, gasoline, and many other commodities rose. The housing market overshot the industry boom, as housing price continued to rise well after most of the start-ups had closed their doors. Although it seemed Hirschman was less concerned with the busts than the booms, the dot-com case seems to support his theory.

I particularly enjoyed reading the point in the Tandler (1997) chapter suggesting that the development community has ignored the literature on "industrial performance and workplace transformation." It is important to understand the optimal situation in a workplace in order to increase productivity

– whether in a developing country or an industrialized country. Michael Woolcock, who taught a course on social institutions at the Kennedy School last year, mentioned the importance of the cross-fertilization of information across seemingly disparate subjects. Although we did not look specifically at labor in that class, I think this reading makes a similar point. The reading demonstrated that the advice that industrialized nations give to developing countries can be quite contrary to the findings of careful research or to observations made about how things really work on the ground. For me, this point is one of the most important to the course thus far.

This point also reflects arguments made in the case study readings on “planning and technical choice.” These reading show that a careful consideration of the history behind certain development situations is imperative before it is possible to make an assumption as to why certain events occurred the way they did. I was surprised by the Berlan and Lewontin (1986) article on hybrid corn because of the evidence that hybrid corn caught on not because it increases crop yields, but because certain people were interested in making money off the sale of seeds. Knowledge like this is imperative to making a useful recommendation with regard to corn production or other industrial production that may be influenced in a similar manner.

McGuire and Granovetter’s (1996) discussion of the growth of the electric power industry in the U.S. is also revealing. While I have been introduced to the idea that social institutions are vital to economic development at a community level, I had not thought about the role that social constructions, such

as friendships and power dynamics, played in the development of industries. The little history I have read on the development of large businesses here in the U.S. left me with the impression that successful businessmen usually maximized their profits at the expense of personal relationships. It was very surprising to realize that this is not always the case, and instead that relationships and power dynamics play a central role in the success of businesses.

The reform readings helped me to think about the different ways that changes can occur at the national level. Hirschman's (1963) argument that decentralized violence over a long period of time may actually constitute a revolution broadened my conception of what should be considered a revolution. I also liked his description of the naïve reformer who learns by doing – I think it is important to give credit to those who work endlessly on smaller goals in order to eventually achieve something more substantial, and I had not thought about the distinction between a reformer and a revolutionary in that way before.

Houtzager's (2003) discussion of the importance of linkages between civil society and progressive governments to successful reforms added greater depth to my understanding of development theory. I have read about social networks being integral to economic development of impoverished communities, but I had not restricted my thoughts solely to the relation between civil society and government. I also had not heard the specific critique that civil society alone cannot create inclusion. The Houtzager article persuaded me that

the most compelling and powerful change agents may lie in the linkages between a strong civil society and a progressive government.

The discussions of the Mexican food subsidy program and the West Bengal forest programs solidified some of the concepts in Houtzager's article. The Mexico case reminds me of the SABAMAR program in the Dominican Republic, where the development strategy is to create networks of people prior to enacting infrastructure projects in communities. One of the positive aspects I see in this approach is the fact that there will be a new community network in place that could easily outlast the project itself. It was encouraging to read that these sorts of community networks actually have outlived the programs that formed them and were able to carry on a relationship between themselves and the state. It is also helpful to note the importance of a progressive and receptive government for these programs to work. (Fox, 1992)

The Joshi (2000) chapter was particularly informative because she showed that a responsive government agency and a responsive community are not the only factors that can affect program success. Political power and sway are also hugely important, as are the workers on the front line who interact directly with communities, again suggesting that the power may lie in the link between the government bureaucracy and the civil society rather than in either one alone.

Tendler (1968) also touches on the ways in which political power may interact with workers, particularly with respect to technological choices. I was surprised about the extent to which the particular context of a country can affect

the type of project a country will be most successful at. The evidence from Brazil suggests that the country should play to its strengths rather than attempt to diversify in order to develop all areas of the service. However, it seems like lack of control over the distribution of energy could have potentially backfired if the private company had not been amenable to the situation.

The idea of situational choice in development work also arises in the Hirschman (1967, 1995) reading. While I intuitively understand that development projects require latitude in making decisions and on how to deal with certain aspects of projects, it was helpful for me to place this understanding into specific contexts. For instance, with respect to quality versus quantity, it is helpful to note in what situations a substitution is appropriate and in which situations it may be less so.

One theme underlying all the readings seems to be how there is almost always another way to view a situation. While this is not surprising per se, it is always rewarding to read an article or a perspective that differs from the mainstream. These new perspectives seem particularly pertinent to the developing country context, where governments are often misinformed by donors and aid agencies claiming to be omniscient.